To the Readers:
Virginia Woolf and Spirituality

The relationship between Modernism and expressions of spirituality has long been a fraught one. Traditionally, the subject of religion has been considered incompatible with—if not antithetical to—Modernist values. The Modernist rejection of traditional forms of established authority—including the dismissal of an Almighty God ruling over the universe—has suggested to many critics a secular orientation devoid of religious impulse. Recently, this truism has been challenged and the exploration of the religious aspect of Modernism, refuting the now-teetering secularization thesis, has reached something of a renaissance. Thus, as Matei Călinescu remarked in 1987,

The association between modernity and a secular view of the world has become almost automatic. But as soon as we try to set modernity in an historical perspective, we realize that this association is not only relatively recent but also of minor significance when compared to the relationship between modernity and Christianity. (58-59)

Virginia Woolf’s relation to religion is an unusual case and contributes something unique to any emerging field of Modernist religious studies. In fact, because of the particularity of Woolf’s relation to the complexities of religion and spirituality, this issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany bears the moniker of “Virginia Woolf and Spirituality,” not of “Virginia Woolf and Religion.” Consideration of the exigencies and implications of such a choice, especially in light of the broad range of approaches to the topic in this issue, opens up interesting questions and avenues for scholarship. Clearly, a discussion of Virginia Woolf and spirituality or religion is both timely and always fraught with tension in a different way than examinations of other Modernist’s relation to religion might be.

Woolf’s relation to religion is different from that of other major Modernists like James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Marcel Proust in important ways—ways tied to her upbringing, gender, sexuality, feminist views, class position, Englishness and many other factors. Her biography as well as her political views and rejection of the patriarchal authority of the Church immediately suggest that her relation to religion will be troubled. Nigel Nicolson tells us that Woolf’s parents were both agnostic, that “none

1 See, for one example, J. Hillis Miller’s identification, in Poets of Reality (1965), of the death of God as the starting point for much of twentieth-century literature.

2 Consider, for instance, a seminar at the 2011 Modernist Studies Association on “Modernism and Religion.”
including Rhoda’s appropriation of God the Father’s creative power. Ultimately, Sullivan argues, Woolf’s relation to the foundational story of Western religions is far from straightforward, and Sullivan believes that this queering fails. As she puts it, “[t]he garden, as the original story of heterosexual desire, refuses to be appropriated by the non-normative sexual subject.” Sullivan’s reading of Woolf’s revision of Genesis is followed by Erik Fuhrer’s reading of the traces of biblical women—namely, Mary and Judith—and the possibilities of female prophecy in A Room of One’s Own. Fuhrer analyzes Woolf’s evocation, in A Room of One’s Own, of a feminine model of God and insists on the destruction of polarized gender binaries.

Other authors focus on theology and theological issues. Kristina Groover reads Mrs. Dalloway through the lens of feminist enactment theology, using that theoretical lens to illuminate the ways that the connections between characters—relationships—are a form of the sacred. Drawing on the work of Judith Plaskow, Carol Christ and Richard Griggs, and echoing Sullivan’s argument about Rhoda’s appropriation of the creative function of God the Father, Groover argues that Clarissa’s connection to Septimus is an act of creation. Benjamin D. Hagen elaborates on the relation between Clarissa and Septimus, arguing that the very impossibility of a “normative two-way connection between these characters” makes possible their strange kinship. In another echo of Sullivan, Hagen argues that the operation of the ghost and the double introduces a radical element into the encounter between Clarissa and Septimus, one that breaks the logic of binaries. Vicki Tromanhauser continues this focus on relationship, but in a different arena. Exploring the spiritual and ontological stakes of meat-eating in Woolf’s fiction and non-fiction, Tromanhauser argues that, for Woolf, the transcendental subject of Western metaphysics is always “predicated upon the continual sacrifice of women, children, servants, animals and other marginalized figures” in a kind of sacrificial economy.

Continuing the theological approach to Woolf is Martin Brick, whose essay focuses on the eschatological narrative style of Woolf’s fiction, in which readers are offered a way of contemplating death and are implicated in constructing meaning. Like Hagen, Brick argues that the spiritual potential of Woolf’s work lies in the obliqueness and openness of her narrative style, in prolonged mystery and the denial of certainty in favor of contemplation. Alison Heney continues this emphasis on the value of openness over certainty in her study of the parallels between Woolf’s aesthetic and Wassily Kandinsky. Heney argues that Woolf, like Kandinsky, “often insists upon the artist’s need to cultivate a portrait of ‘internal reality’ in spite of what they perceive as the limited nature of recognizable forms.” Echoing Brick’s emphasis on the importance of indeterminacy in Woolf’s aesthetic, Heney explores Woolf’s self-conscious representation of what Jack Stewart calls “a flexible form that ‘does not shut out’” both in Lily’s portrait of Mrs. Ramsay and in Septimus and Rezia’s hat-making.

Our issue ends with a biographical study of the influence of Woolf’s aunt, Caroline Stephen, on Woolf’s thought and art. Through careful textual analysis of works by the two women, combined with archival and historical research, Kathy Heininge demonstrates that, in contrast to the agnostic influence of Woolf’s parents, her aunt was a strong spiritual influence on young Virginia Stephen. Caroline Stephen was one of the foremost proponents of Quakerism in nineteenth-century Britain and her work and efforts to combine truth and mysticism modeled for Woolf a religious approach outside the traditional forms of Christianity centered on patriarchal authority.

Finally, this introduction would not be complete without warmly thanking Vara Neverow for her initiative to launch the present issue and for her continued kindness and support throughout. We also wish to thank the always lively and passionate Woolf community who so generously and enthusiastically contributed with their comments on the listserv to the birth of the present issue, as well as those who submitted their wonderful proposals for publication—among which it was so tremendously hard to make a selection of eight. Theresa Ener’s assistance was especially helpful in the final stages of copy-editing the essays. Finally, we want to thank our authors, for their fascinating and inspiring work and good spirits.

Amy C. Smith Lamar University
Isabel M’André Cuelvas University of Granada

Works Cited

MLA 2012 in Seattle, WA—Thursday, January 5—Sunday, January 8
IVWS-Sponsored Panels
147. Women of the Woolf: Influence, Affinity, Obscurity
Thursday, 5 January, 7:00–8:15 p.m., 310, WSCC
Program arranged by the IVWS
Presiding: Brenda S. helt, Metropolitan State Univ.
1. “Not Another Judith Shakespeare: The Real Matriarchal Lineage of Mary Colum,” Denise Ayo, Univ. of Notre Dame
305. Home and the Domestic: Virginia Woolf and Doris Lessing
Friday, 6 January, 10:15–11:30 a.m., 612, WSCC
Program arranged by the IVWS and the Doris Lessing Society
Presiding: Suzette Ann Henke, Univ. of Louisville
2. “Foreign Bodies’: Disparity at the Woolfian Domestic Dinner Party,” Lauren Rich, Univ. of Notre Dame
149. Institutional Woolf
Saturday, 7 January, 10:15–11:30 a.m., 617, WSCC
Program arranged by the IVWS—Presiding: Amanda Golden, Emory Univ.
1. “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,” Emily Kopley, Stanford Univ.
3. “Translation in and out of the University,” Emily Dalgarno, Boston Univ.

Other Papers and Panels
27. Literature and Photography
Thursday, 5 January, 12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., 303, WSCC
234. Nonfiction Prose Experiments
Friday, 6 January, 10:15–11:30 a.m., 305, WSCC
2. “In Contact: Reading Virginia Woolf and Eve Sedgwick Together,” Robin M. Hackett, Univ. of New Hampshire, Portsmouth
175. Queer Method
Friday, 6 January, 5:15–6:30 p.m., 306, WSCC
1. “Clearly Queer? Reading Virginia Woolf and Jeannette Winterson,” Laura Green, Northeastern Univ.
172. Eros, Empathy, and Sacrifice in T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf
Saturday, 7 January, 12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., 617, WSCC
Special session—Presiding: Gabrielle McIntire, Queen’s Univ.
1. “Empathy and Elegy in Eliot and Woolf,” Eve C. Sorum, Univ. of Massachusetts, Boston
3. “ ‘Other Echoes’: Sacrificial Narratives and the Problems of Reading Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot,” John Whittier-Ferguson, Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor
Many thanks to the International Virginia Woolf Society for its generous and continuing support of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany.
Virginia Woolf and the Common(wealth)Reader

The Twenty-Third Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf

hosted by

Simon Fraser University,
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
June 6-9, 2013

The topic encompasses Woolf’s interactions/influence on Commonwealth writers, the issues of “common” wealth, discussions of wealth and gender, colonialism and gender, imperialism, politics, and a host of other related topics such as reading Woolf as a member of the Commonwealth.

The venue will be the Coast Plaza Hotel and Suites at 1763 Comox Street in Vancouver, steps away from the Pacific Ocean and Vancouver's famed seawall, not to mention English Bay beach.

For more information contact Helen Wussow at hwussow@sfu.ca

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.

Louisville Conference
February 23-25, 2012
Panel Title:
International Virginia Woolf Society: Comparative Woolf

Paper 1:
Title: “The Criticism Is Complete”
Virginia Woolf’s Chaucerian Poetics
By: Holly Barbaccia, Georgetown College

Paper 2:
What Truth Compels: Redressing the Failures of History in Robert Browning and Virginia Woolf
By: Barbara Burch, Georgetown College

Paper 3
Performing Feminism, Transmitting Affect: Isadora Duncan, Virginia Woolf, and the Politics of Movement
By: Kim Coates, Bowling Green State University

Paper 4
Negotiating The City in Body and Mind: Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway and Toni Morrison’s Jazz
By: Kristin Czarnecki, Georgetown College

Louisville Conference 2013 Call for Papers

The International Virginia Woolf Society is pleased to host its twelfth consecutive panel at the University of Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900, scheduled for February 21-23, 2013. We invite proposals for critical papers on any topic concerning Woolf studies. A particular panel theme may be chosen depending on the proposals received.

Please submit by email a cover page with your name, email address, mailing address, phone number, professional affiliation (if any), and the title of your paper, and a second anonymous page containing a 250-word paper proposal to Kristin Czarnecki kristin_czarnecki@georgetowncollege.edu by Friday, September 14, 2012.

Panel Selection Committee:
Jeanne Dubino
Mark Hussey
Jane Lilienfeld
Vara Neverow

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 Charnleys Lane, Banks, SOUTHPORT PR9 8HJ, UK

For members paying in US dollars, please write to or email Lynn Todd-Crawford at lynn_todd@bellsouth.net 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>
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.

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

Miscellaneous Submissions
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 (rather than to the Guest Editor) at: neverovv1@southernct.edu

Guidelines for Submissions
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). For a copy of the current Miscellany style guide, please contact Vara Neverow at neverovv1@southernct.edu.

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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.

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Reimbursement for Permissions
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Publication Policies
Submissions accepted for publication may be published in both print format and electronic format.

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THE IVWS & VWS ARCHIVE INFORMATION

The archive of the VWS and the IVWS has a secure and permanent home at E. J. Pratt Library, Victoria University, University of Toronto. Below is the finding aid for the IVWS archival materials:

[As a lexical point of interest, professional archivists use the term “archival” to describe records that have been appraised as having enduring value or the storage facility where they are preserved. For example, when we call a record “archival,” we generally refer to where it is housed; depending on context, the term may be used to refer to the valuation ("enduring value") of such a record.]

With regard to such items as correspondence, memorabilia and photographs, contact the current Archival Liaison, Karen Levenback, either at ivwsarchive@att.net or by surface mail: Karen Levenback, Archival Liaison/IVWS Archive, 304 Philadelphia Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912.

VIRGINIA WOOLF: THE FLIGHT OF TIME
ON DISPLAY AT THE CARRÈRE GALLERY
NOVEMBER 21, 2011-JANUARY 14, 2012

THE EXHIBITION CATALOGUE IS ALSO AVAILABLE:

ISSUES OF THE VIRGINIA WOOLF MISCELLANY
FROM SPRING 2003 (ISSUE 62) TO THE PRESENT ARE CURRENTLY AVAILABLE ONLINE IN FULL TEXT PDF FORMAT AT:
http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverovv1/VWM_Online.html

PREVIOUS ISSUES (FALL 1973-FALL 2002) ARE AVAILABLE IN DIGITAL FORMAT THROUGH EBSCOHOST’S HUMANITIES INTERNATIONAL COMPLETE AND EBSCOHOST’S LITERARY REFERENCE CENTER.

MORE RECENT ISSUES ARE ALSO AVAILABLE THROUGH PROQUEST LITERATURE ONLINE (LION) AND GALE GROUP/CENGAGE.

AN INDEX OF THE VWM FROM 1973-2011 IS NOW AVAILABLE FROM SUSAN DEVOE AT vwmindex@gmail.com
TO THE READERS:

**Virginia Woolf and Spirituality**

Amy C. Smith and Isabel Mª Andrés Cuevas

**Events, CFPS and Information:**

CFPs for Future Issues of the Miscellany

MLA 2012 Panels for Seattle, WA

CFP Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf 2012 University of Saskatchewan, 2012

Thanking the IVWS for Supporting the *VWM*

Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf 2013 Simon Fraser University, 2013

IVWS Panel for Louisville 2012

CFP for IVWS Panel at Louisville 2013

How to Join the International Virginia Woolf Society

How to Join the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain

VWM Guidelines for Submissions and Editorial Policies

Virginia Woolf: The Flight of Time Exhibit

VWM Editorial Board

The IVWS Archive

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**IVWS the Society Column**

Georgia Johnston
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. Issues from Spring 2003 (issue 63) to the present are available in a PDF format at http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowl1/VWM_Online.html.

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 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.csuh.edu/woolf_center/. The website is moving to Southern Connecticut State University. (A subscription will be required to access the materials.) For information, contact Vara Neverow at neverowl1@southernct.edu.

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

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

Woolfian Resources Online

Virginia Woolf Miscellany:
Issues of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany from Spring 2003 (issue 63) to the present are available in a PDF format at http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowl1/VWM_Online.html.

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/1632070986

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.

Anne Fernald says she is “writing from a kitchen table of my own on the Jersey side of the Hudson. Contact: fernham [at] gmail [dot] com. The blog is located at http://fernham.blogspot.com/.

Ilana Simons has started a blog on painting and reading Woolf (go to her Barnes and Noble’s site for more information: <http://bookclubs.barnesandnoble.com/5/Unabashedly-Bookish-The-BN/Virginia-Woolf-and-A-Room-of-Your-Own/1632070986>.

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/virginia/.

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

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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 VWListserv 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 VWListserv.

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.
“Let There Be Rose Leaves”:
Lesbian Subjectivity and Religious Discourse in *The Waves*

This essay analyzes the religious argument that Virginia Woolf, through the paired characters of Rhoda and the lady at Elvedon, develops in *The Waves*. Specifically, I make a three-tiered claim. First, although both Rhoda and the lady are responses to a Judeo-Christian orthodoxy that, in *Three Guineas*, Woolf says quieted generations of prophetesses (146), the two differ in their relationship to one fundamental story: Genesis and the Garden of Eden. The lady is trapped in Elvedon, a quasi-Edenic space. Rhoda, on the other hand, lesbianizes the Garden, centering it around her beloved Miss Lambert. Second, Rhoda’s final soliloquy radically transforms her relationship to the Garden story, effectively articulating a religious narrative outside inherited, patrilineal constructs. “Let there be rose leaves; let there be vine leaves” (204), Rhoda says, explicitly appropriating the “authority” of God-the-Father’s creative voice. Third, when Rhoda dies after her God-like utterance, Woolf makes the point that challenges to the authority of the garden, to the first, foundational, hetero text, simply will not succeed. The garden, as the original story of heterosexual desire, refuses to be appropriated by the non-normative sexual subject. Eden, quite simply, cannot be queered. A fruitful starting place for an analysis of Woolf’s religious argument is the lady of Elvedon, a figure clearly connected to Judeo-Christian narrative tradition. As both Joseph Allen Boone and Louise A. Poresky demonstrate, Elvedon is marked by significant biblical inversions. Rather than the abundant foliage of Eden—“every plant yielding seed,” “every tree with seed in its fruit,” “(New Revised Standard Version [NRSV] Gen. 1:29)—Elvedon evidences degeneration: “some primeval fir cone falling to rot” (17). Additionally, both gardens contain apples, yet while Eden’s apples are “pleasant to the sight and good for food,” (Gen. 2:9), Elvedon’s are not as enticing: these apples are “rotten” and “age[d]” (17). The scriptural garden is a “good” and peaceful land, moreover, but Elvedon is marked by fear. Bernard and the others remark repeatedly on the danger in Elvedon: “Run! [. . . ] We shall be shot[. . . ] [. . . ] We are in a hostile country. We must escape to the beechn” (17).

The lady writing at Elvedon appears amid such scriptural distortions. Situated at the center of this inverted Eden—“over the wall [. . . ] between two long windows, writing”—the lady is an archetypal author, a creator. She “creates the very characters who are watching her” (245), as Briggs astutely puts it.1 As a creative force within a quasi-Edenic land, the lady continues Woolf’s refiguration of inherited religious texts. In particular, she reworks the Judeo-Christian creation story in which an implicitly male God-the-Father speaks the world into being. By substituting a woman who writes creation for the God who spoke it, Woolf installs the feminine in a story that was previously without female figuration.

Much about the lady, however, indicates that she is unable to recreate originating religious texts. The lady is unnamed, for instance, and receives virtually no physical description. With both of these rhetorical choices, Woolf indicates that the lady, if left in a patriarchal narrative structure, will be denied representation. Additionally, the lady’s activity of writing continues to mark her throughout the text. She reappears several times, yet subsequent designations repeat, almost verbatim, the original citation: “a woman sat at a table writing” (124), “the lady sat writing” (240). Thus there is a refusal of progress in the lady’s narrative. The effect is to suggest that she is engaged in a cultural struggle with foundational Judeo-Christian figurations. Unsuccessful in her attempt at inversion of the male-identified creator God, the lady is trapped in her Garden.

Only a few pages forward in the novel—when the characters first leave the lady’s garden—Woolf uses the lesbian, mystical Rhoda to move outside Eden as a structuring principle. Rhoda narrates a new “private” garden built around the object of her desire, Miss Lambert (45). Rhoda therefore shares with the lady the impulse to rewrite Eden. The two differ, however, in what generates their attempted restructurings: while the lady attempts to reverse the Garden’s gendered positionings, Rhoda, in contrast, challenges Eden’s implicitly heterosexual orientation: she sets herself to, as she puts it, “changing” the Eden that was humanity’s first, and foundational, hetero story (“male and female he created them,” as Genesis 1 puts it).

Rhoda’s narrative of the garden begins as she tells of her beloved Miss Lambert escorting “a clergyman” “through the wicket-gate” into a “private” garden (45). By substituting a porous gate for Elvedon’s impassable wall, Rhoda makes pointed reference to—but departs from—the lady’s garden. Additionally, a “luminous” coloring now replaces the light that was earlier “gloomy” and “fitful” (45, 14), and a “pond” takes the place of the dry land formerly “swept” by the gardeners (17). Even the amphibians of this second garden recall the first, yet with a difference: while at Elvedon “a giant toad [flopped] in the undergrowth” (16), with the resulting suggestion of heaviness, monstrosity, even a state near death, Rhoda’s new garden has a far less ominous “frog” gently perched on a leaf. Even Woolf’s rhetorical choices—specifically her repeated use of the above-referenced term “change”—further emphasize this garden’s purposive newness: by using the term five times in one paragraph, Woolf underscores the idea that Rhoda has tampered with Eden’s shaping story.

A closer look at Rhoda’s second garden demonstrates why it is a sexualized—indeed lesbianized—challenge to Eden as a shaping myth of hetero-normativity. Consider how Miss Lambert, in the phrases that foreground change, is consistently its agent: “everything changes and becomes luminous [. . . ] when Miss Lambert passes”; “suppose she saw that daisy, it would change”; “wherever she goes, things are changed under her eyes”; “she sees a frog on a leaf, and that will change”; and “she makes the daisy change” (45). Through such rhetorical formulations Woolf indicates that Rhoda’s garden, centered around the woman she desires, is a place where—because of its female-centered sexuality—there has been a “change” from the originating text. Here we are invited to read differently. This sacred garden, it seems, will not be defined by blissful heterosexual union.

What happens next is a startling development. Miss Lambert disappears from the text. Rhoda’s next soliloquy makes reference to “Miss Lambert, 1 See also Froula, Gilbert and Gubar, and Schwartz.
[ . . . ] vanishing down the corridor” (56), but after that she disappears from the direct action of the text. In a strange choice, then, Woolf installs a puzzling emptiness in what seemed to be shaping up as a woman’s paradise. If, as Suzanne Raitt argues, other queer modernist writing reconfigured Eden—“[writers] looked to the rural setting for images of an originary, Edenic relationship, [ . . . ] for a nostalgic golden world, pre-war, Edwardian” (13)—then Woolf’s decision to eliminate Miss Lambert complicates this paradigm. By creating a woman’s retreat, but then backing away from that space, Woolf highlights the impossibility of reshaping the universalizing heterosexism implicit in the garden’s ideology. Thus, the changed second garden’s textual effect is like the Elvedon that the lady could not escape: a figuration entrenched in a long narrative tradition, the garden—even if briefly reimagined—refuses to be appropriated for a non-normative position.

Rhoda’s second garden, like the lady’s failed rewriting of Eden, establishes that chipping away at tradition, if such efforts fail to displace an existing hierarchical framework, reinscribes the power of the originating story. Rhoda’s attempt to “change” the hierarchy in Eden is just reversal: she simply shifts the hetero “beginning” to the homo reconfiguration and thus still operates between two poles. The upshot of Rhoda’s garden, then, is that her operation of change, although admirable in its liberatory potential, does not locate the radically new. Implying consolidation rather than disruption, continuing the hetero paradigm that existed “in the beginning,” this garden is not, in contemporary terms, queer.

This failure to refigure Eden is the reason Rhoda’s soliloquy before her suicide is crucial to following her as a religious subject. This soliloquy, with its return to imagery of the garden and the creation myth, is full of disruptive potential. “Let there be rose leaves; let there be vine leaves,” Rhoda says, “I covered the whole street, Oxford Street and Piccadilly Circus, with the blaze and ripple of my mind, with rose leaves and vine leaves” (204), Rhoda’s utterance, tellingly, is a direct appropriation of God’s creative voice from Genesis 1. In the biblical creation myth, God creates by repeating, seven times, some version of the phrase “let there be.” “Let there be light,” God says (Gen. 1.3), as well as “let there be a dome in the midst of the waters” and “let there be lights in the dome of the sky” (Gen 1.3, 1.6, 1.14). The creative utterances continue until, finally, they culminate in the pinnacle of creation: God makes man and woman—Adam and Eve—the first, paradigmatic hetero couple, and one that Gaudium et Spes names as the “center and crown” of creation (12). God then tells them to produce children—“be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1.28)—and thus begins a long history of hetero church doctrine. By speaking into creation not the procreative couple man and woman, but rather the roses that, for centuries, have been evocative only of female sexual desire, Rhoda enunciates a lesbianized space shorn of hetero primacy (see Bennett). Finally speaking not from the perspective of a lesbian seeking to “change” (reverse) the hetero paradigm, Rhoda claims a linguistic position that radically displaces the primacy of one of scripture’s most hallowed hetero-narratives.

What, then, is Rhoda’s reward for this brave, creative act? Erasure. Removal. After the above utterance, after she has seized a powerfully creative voice, Rhoda commits suicide. While Rhoda’s rapid dismissal is troubling in itself, Woolf’s rhetorical choices make it even more disturbing. Quite simply, Woolf does not write the suicide; she forces the reader to discern it, and gives only Bernard’s later, offhand remark that “[Rhoda] had killed herself” (281). Rhoda, it seems, has chosen to end her life, and Woolf, her author, has erased even her erasure. This narrative trajectory creates what Annette Oxindine adeptly calls “one of the eeriest suicides in modern fiction” (203).

Rhoda’s suicide has prompted critics to call her mad, or a victim of patriarchy, or a foreshadowing of Woolf’s own suicide. M. Keith Booker, for instance, contends that “Rhoda is still partially determined by fixed stereotypical fantasies—of the mad or hysterical female” (165). Angela Hague uses the idea of madness to offer a biographical reading: “in Rhoda, Woolf faces the fears of personal dissolution and formlessness she associated with madness” (268), and Miranda B. Hickman argues that Rhoda, a victim of patriarchy, “internalizes misogynistic violence” and thus “self-destructs” (176). So far, however, no one has considered Rhoda’s suicide from a narratological perspective. What cannot be ignored about Rhoda’s demise is that it is not written. When Woolf, as Rhoda’s author, fails to convey the event that climaxes Rhoda’s entire narrative—her death itself—the effect is that the reader, at this juncture of The Waves, trusts its author slightly less than earlier. And that is Woolf’s point. When this significant narrative gap is conjointed with The Waves’ focus on the authority of inherited religious narratives (the story of Eden, Rhoda’s re-told garden, the story of creation, the lady who tries to rewrite it), then it seems that Woolf, herself the author of Rhoda’s story, is making a deliberate choice. By removing Rhoda immediately after she has displaced Scripture’s primary authorizing force—the paternal God—Woolf highlights the danger inherent in authorizing power. And, because that authorizing power, in terms of Rhoda’s story, is one of Western Christianity’s foundational texts, the result is that Rhoda’s silent erasure inds monolithic, “authorizing,” religion.

Thus, the point that finally emerges from Rhoda’s story is a cautionary one. Although Rhoda briefly seizes the authority of biblical heterotexts, she does not survive the experience. This is telling. Ultimately, Rhoda’s narrative demonstrates that Western Christianity’s originating stories refuse to be appropriated by the sexual other. Quite simply, Rhoda cannot get beyond the Garden as the normative text of heterosexual desire.

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2 See St. Augustine’s idea, in On the Good of Marriage, that procreation is the highest good in marriage. St. Augustine is also quoted in the Pope Pius XI’s papal encyclical, Casti Connubii (Cap. 24 n. 32). Also see St. Thomas Aquinas’s similar proclamation: “marriage has as its principal end the begetting and rearing of children” (Summa Theologica, Suppl. III, Q 65, Art. 1, Ad. 9. [330]).

3 It is puzzling that after her suicide Rhoda appears at Hampton Court. For commentary, see Lyndall Gordon (217n).
A Woolf in Priest's Clothing:
Female Prophecy in A Room of One's Own

In A Room of One's Own, the conglomerate Mary/every(wo)man narrator embodies a multiplicity of marginalized bodies and voices: “Here then was I (call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please—it is not a matter of any importance)” (5). Specifying the name Mary in this evocation of the plural self elicits memory of all the Marys who are eerily absent. The most critically noted of these ghostly presences is Mary Hamilton, who, along with the three Marys above, is the subject of “The Ballad of Mary Hamilton” (see Colburn, Hanley, Marcus, Tolman). However, as Jane Schaberg has argued, we can also see the trace of Mary Magdalene, the biblical prophet denied discipleship in the canonical gospels due to her sex.

Judith Shakespeare, Woolf’s imagined sister of William Shakespeare, is another metaphorical existent pregnant with the narratives of other possible women of genius, including Mary Magdalene and the apocryphal Judith (see also Marcus). The choice of Judith for the first name of Shakespeare’s sister suggests that Woolf drew inspiration from The Book of Judith, an apocryphal Old Testament tale about a heroic young woman who saves Israel from destruction by cutting off the head of Holofernes, the invading army’s commander. Judith is the female counterpart, and metaphorical sister, to the canonical male heroes of the Bible who led their people to safety. Like Judith Shakespeare, this Judith is relegated to the margins of history, banished as she is to the apocryphal books. The apocalyptic and gnostic texts themselves are Western culture’s forgotten “sister” texts of the masculine Bible, cast out by patriarchal discourse as spurious and often even heretical to the “true” spiritual canonical narratives.

In a catalogue of suppressed and forgotten female narratives, Woolf specifically identifies “a woman possessed by devils” as one probable candidate for “some mute and inglorious Jane Austen, some Emily Brontë who dashed her brains out on the moor” (AROO 57). In the Bible, Christ casts seven devils out of Mary Magdalene, who then begins to follow him. Despite the fact that Christ chose her as the one to whom he would first reveal his risen flesh, her story is just as soon swallowed up once she relays the message of resurrection to Christ’s official disciples. What happens to Mary Magdalene after this? There are many legends and narratives, including the Gnostic Gospel of Mary. Yet not one is related in the canonical biblical texts: there she simply fades, becomes a ghostly trace, another disembodied Mary floating in the ether, a lost voice howling in the wind. One can hear the whisper of these silenced women in the pages of A Room of One’s Own, in the textual figure of Shakespeare’s sister, the possible female poet neglected and forgotten by historical patriarchal discourse and therefore available to Woolf only as a rhetorical figure of speech, a liminal “what if” character, an echo chamber of all forgotten and prematurely departed souls who have been silenced and buried.

At the beginning of A Room of One’s Own, Woolf’s multiple Marys step as one into a priest’s clothes and are struck down into a pious and prayerful pose: “that collar I have spoken of, women and fiction, the need of coming to some conclusion on a subject that raises all sorts of prejudices and passions, bowed my head to the ground” (5). The phrase “owed my head” is the first indication that there is a religious element at play here. But, as Jane Marcus argues, the mention of a collar suggests multiple meanings. Marcus agrees that the collar might represent a “clerical collar” yet she extends the functional plurality of the collar even further, suggesting that it might also or instead be “a transvesting into the shirt-collar of the male professor,” “or even the collar of ‘collar and tie,’ a slang reference to lesbian dress” (171). Thus, Woolf’s description of putting on a collar details a transgressive performative act that disrupts gender orders and allows for more fluid bodily and social possibilities. Like Orlando, Woolf’s narrator is conscious of her ability to choose and perform her gender. However, this freedom carries invisibly within it the chains which once bound one. For example, Jane Goldman notes that the collar may also signify a dog collar, the tug of which “is here in danger of taking the canine narrator off her hind legs and forcing her back on to four, nose to the gravel. To speak of women and fiction is to acknowledge ‘prejudices and passions,’ including misogynist, canine epithets” (58). Similarly, to don male clothes in order to appropriate their function and subvert patriarchal hierarchies means to also confront the very histories and mythologies which once made, and still often make, these clothes oppressive to certain groups of people. Woolf reminds us that Samuel Johnson once said that a women preaching “put him in mind of a dog dancing” (AROO 63). Women who attempt to preach must remember that according to patriarchy the appropriate place for a woman’s dogma was, to use Goldman’s language, the doghouse. Preaching about women and fiction, therefore, carries with it the unfortunate consequence of slipping on the excrement of history and having one’s face shoved in it.

Appropriately, in the very next scene, Woolf’s narrator gets her face shoved in a vision:

To the right and left bushes of some sort, golden and crimson, glowed with the colour, even it seemed burnt with the heat, of fire. On the further bank the willows wept in perpetual lamentation, their hair about their shoulders. The river reflected whatever it chose of sky and bridge and burning tree. (5)

The burning tree suggests the biblical burning bush: “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed” (New Oxford Annotated Bible, Exod. 3.2)

Woolf uses similar imagery as this biblical scene but reorganizes the symbols: in the water’s reflection the feminine bush becomes the masculine tree. A tree is undoubtedly a much more accurate representation of the phallic “I” of the biblical God, who boldly commands that Moses refer to him as “I am” when addressing the people of Israel. For, while God appears in the Bible in the form of a feminine bush, the dominant “I” of his speech betrays his phallic nature, and like the “I” of Mr. A’s new novel in A Room of One’s Own, lies “like a straight dark bar” across the page beneath which “all is shapeless as mist” (115). Woolf’s narrator herself is shapeless here in this scene, her reflection, and that of the crimson bushes, blotted out by that of the flaming tree, the phallic remnant of the mythological God of Exodus.
Obliterated by the flaming “I,” she “has not a bone in her body” (115). Or that may be all she does have, her masquerade as a priest having assimilated her into the very patriarchy that she rebelled against and thus shaped her into one big erect masculine “I,” rendering her shapeless, as “‘I’ is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being” (AROO 4). Either way, Milton’s Bogey is destroying her. Perhaps she only has to turn her head, for at the edges are the feminine bushes and willows, which are too quickly wilting under the oppression of the “I,” degrading further into archetypal images of feminine frailty. To save them from this fate, Woolf’s narrator would have to break her body free of the “I,” and restore the flame to the willows: she would have to ignite the world.

The narrator clearly has the potential to do this, as we see in her construction of Mary Carmichael, who is designed as the potential savior figure, with the ability to resurrect Shakespeare’s sister right at the tip of her pen. This is because Mary Carmichael is not afraid to gather the fire of the flaming tree and use it to “light a torch in that vast chamber” which had been “all half lights and profound shadows like those serpentine caves where one goes with a candle peering up and down” (98). This dark curvature of the caves mimics and therefore resurrects the female body, restoring flesh to the page. Milton’s Bogey and God’s commanding “I am” are about rhetoric and power and silence. A big, flaming sword blotting out the sky. With a simple pen stroke, Mary Carmichael has the power to introduce fluidity into the divine: the pressing together of Chloe and Olivia’s bodies, Shakespeare’s sister re-emerging flesh, Mary Magdalene, fire on her tongue.

At the end of A Room of One’s Own, Woolf presents herself and her audience with the ultimate challenge: Shakespeare’s sister must cease to exist merely as a buried metaphorical possibility. She needs the “opportunity to walk among us in the flesh” (144). She must, like the mythological Christ, be bodily resurrected. Woolf seems to be asking a new question: What if Christ had a sister? The female divine, rising up from the depths to claim a place for herself in the world is the answer to Luce Irigaray’s lament that “there is no woman God, no female trinity: mother, daughter, spirit” (62). Woolf evokes this feminine model of God in order to insist for the destruction of polarized gender binaries. After all, she writes that Shakespeare’s sister will only resurrect once we cease pitting the sexes against one another and start to consider divinity as relating “to the world of reality and not only to the world of men” (AROO 132). Unstructured, fluid and multiple, “drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners,” Shakespeare’s sister is the risen body of all lost and forgotten souls, male and female (132).

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Enacting the Sacred in Mrs. Dalloway

“But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself.”
—Virginia Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past”

“. . . not for a moment did she believe in God . . . .”
—Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway

Despite the avowed atheism of both Virginia Woolf and Clarissa Dalloway, the numinous language and religious imagery of Mrs. Dalloway invite the reader’s consideration of spiritual themes. Even as Clarissa buys flowers and mends her dress on the day of her party, she experiences a sense of mystery: in her euphoric connection with the “swing, tramp, and trudge” of the London streets (4); in her “odd affinities,” not only “with people she had never spoken to,” but even with “trees, or barns” (153); in her identification with Septimus Smith on the day of his suicide. Clarissa’s ties to both people and her environment seem to transcend the boundaries of the material world. Even as she satirizes religious piety in the character of Miss Kilman, Woolf uses religious language and imagery to characterize Clarissa’s experiences. Woolf clearly rejects what theologian Richard Grigg terms “traditional theism,” which views God as “a supernatural personal agent, a transcendent consciousness who acts independently of human perceptions and projects” (29). Nonetheless, certain forms of feminist theology advance a view of the sacred that is useful in considering the spirituality of Woolf’s text. Grigg argues that, “there is an implicit motif in much feminist theology according to which God is a relation that human beings choose to enact” (55). Within this theological model, the sacred is enacted through forming connection between the self and either an immanent or transcendent other. Spirituality is thus located neither in an otherworldly realm nor within the individual, but in the act of relationship with someone or something outside the self. This theological view builds on the connections that a number of critics have made between Woolf’s work and phenomenology, examining her exploration of the boundaries between body and mind, self and other. My reading of Mrs. Dalloway extends these secular readings by arguing that, in forming connection with people and entities outside the self, Clarissa enacts relationships which are both immanent and transcendent—which are “the divine.”

Like all of Woolf’s texts, Mrs. Dalloway is fundamentally concerned with human connections and relationships. As Justine Dymond writes in her study of phenomenology in To the Lighthouse, Woolf’s fiction not only rejects the Cartesian notion of a mind-body split, but also questions “what constitutes the boundary between the subject and the other, and between the self and what we conventionally see as the world outside the self” (140-41). Throughout Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa evinces her theory that the self is comprised of connections to other people and even to
the surrounding universe: “she felt herself everywhere; not ‘here, here, here’; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere [. . . ] so that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places” (152-53).

clarissa’s sentiments and her language define this connection—this interstitial space between self and other—as sacred. The transfiguration of the self into a connective “mist,” an intrinsic part of “the ebb and flow of things” (MD 9), connotes a spiritual dimension that connects people to one another and to their environment. This spiritual self is inmanent as well as transcendent; it derives from ties to people and places, but also surpasses the limitations of bodily life. This is an understanding of divinity that arises out of embodiment—not out of the assumption, as feminist theologians judith plaskow and carol christ write, “that the self is essentially relational, inseparable from the limiting and enriching contexts of body, feeling, relationship, community, history, and the web of life” (173).

woolf is, of course, often disdainful in her depiction of religion, and never more so than in Mrs. Dalloway. If clarissa’s “spirituality” acts to form connection, miss kilman’s religion functions in precisely the opposite way: to erect barriers between herself, other people, and the surrounding world. Seizing on religion as both an outlet and a justification for her own repressed emotions and desires, Miss Kilman casts her enmity toward clarissa in religious terms: “but it was not the body; it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make feel her mastery. If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying, You are right! But this was God’s will, not Miss Kilman’s. It was to be a religious victory. So she glared; so she gloowered” (MD 125). Miss Kilman’s resentment of clarissa, her thwarted desire for Elizabeth’s affection, and her anger at having been “cheated” of happiness thus form the unspoken tenets of Miss Kilman’s religion. She prays to exorcise her human needs and emotions, “to aspire above the vanities, the desires, the commodities, to rid herself both of hatred and of love” (133-34).

Even as woolf delights in satirizing Miss Kilman’s piety, however, she also uses religious language and imagery to characterize clarissa throughout the text: clarissa enters her house “like a nun,” bowing her head and feeling “blessed and purified” (MD 29); she experiences a “religious feeling” following Sally’s kiss (36); she characterizes her parties as a “gift” and an “offering” (122). By juxtaposing these religious metaphors with Miss Kilman’s dogma, the novel seems not to dismiss religious considerations outright, but to adopt a posture of exploration and inquiry that is a hallmark of woolf’s writing. As lorraine sim points out, woolf frequently uses tentative, querying language to critique “positivist and common-sense epistemologies”: “Conditional and tentative terms and phrases, such as ‘perhaps,’ ‘if,’ ‘I wonder,’ ‘I suppose,’ ‘I cannot be sure,’ ‘suggesting,’ and ‘seems’ [. . . ] create a tone of uncertainty and openness” (42). What Peter dismissively terms clarissa’s “transcendental theory,” for example, reflects her exploration of life beyond death: “since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which of life beyond death: “since our apparitions, the part of us which appears,” and inquiry that is a hallmark of Woolf’s writing. As Lorraine Sim notes, Woolf’s heightened language and imagery thus establish Clarissa’s party as a potential scene for transformation.

clarissa’s party acts as an agent for forming connections that both emerge from and transcend the ordinary. In preparation for the party, the doors have been taken off their hinges—an evocative symbol of the party’s intention “to combine, to create” (MD 122). As Peter leaves his hotel, the party acts as a force drawing people toward itself, “as if the whole of London were embarking in little boats moored to the bank, tossing on the waters, as if the whole place were floating off in carnival [. . . ] cabs [. . . ] rushing round the corner, like water round the piers of a bridge, drawn together, it seemed to him because they bore people going to her party, Clarissa’s party” (164). The reference to “carnival” is suggestive here; Mircea Eliade identifies carnivals and festivals as liminal spaces that blur the boundary between sacred and ordinary and allow transformation to occur. Indeed, Clarissa’s party transcends ordinary time as it brings past and present into the same moment, reuniting the friends of Clarissa’s youth and even raising the dead in the figure of Miss Helena Parry; “Never had he had such a shock in his life! said Peter. He had been quite certain she was dead” (188). Mrs. Hilbery notes the transfiguration of Clarissa’s home into a magical place, an “enchanted garden,” and Clarissa herself into a “magician” (191). Woolf’s heightened language and imagery thus establish Clarissa’s party as a potential scene for transformation.

Clarissa’s party also sets the scene for her mysterious identification with Septimus, the suicidal young war veteran whom she has never met. In London society, Clarissa and Septimus are divided by geography, social class, gender. Throughout this day, they have inhabited the same London streets without ever encountering each other. Yet Clarissa’s dramatic response to news of his death suggests a sense of connection that transcends the ordinary. She initially experiences Septimus’s physical trauma in her own body: “Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it” (MD 184). She intuits the harm done to him by sir william Bradshaw, “a great doctor, yet to her obscurely evil [. . . ] capable of some indescribable outrage—forcing your soul, that was it [. . . ]” (184-85). In a revelatory moment, Clarissa understands Septimus’s death as “an attempt to communicate [. . . ] There was an embrace in death” (184). Clarissa’s “theories”—that people are “completed” by their relations with others; that she is “part of people she had never met”; that transcendence of death can be affected through an ongoing connection to the living world—are realized in this moment. In response, Clarissa embraces her own life anew: “But what an extraordinary night! [. . . ] He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter” (186).

The nature of Clarissa’s connection with Septimus is one of the most elusive aspects of the novel and has been the subject of much critical debate. I view this moment in light of the novel’s concern with relationships and the transcendent, even religious language woolf uses to characterize such encounters. Returning to the premises of enactment theology, grigg points out that “[t]he word ‘enact’ [. . . ] can also mean to put on a play, in which case the persons who ‘act’ are not acting as autonomous egos but are the vehicles for something else: the identities that they are representing on stage” (52). To enact the divine is, similarly, a creative act. I would suggest that Clarissa’s identification with Septimus, her mystical apprehension of the meaning of his death, is in the nature of a performance: not that it is false, but that it is an act of creation, and that what is created is, as Grigg says, “something more than the sum of its constituent elements” (52-53). Despite the many anti-religious sentiments in Woolf’s writing, a more expansive view of the sacred provided by feminist theologies allows a reading of Mrs.
Dalloway as an exploration not only of relationship, but of the nature of the sacred. Woolf uses religious language and imagery to signify that relationships define not only her characters, but the sacred itself.

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Radical Encounter:
The Ghost and The Double in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway

In her 1928 “An Introduction to Mrs. Dalloway” (1925), Virginia Woolf offers “a few scraps” of insight into the process of writing the novel (Essays 4 [E4]: 549). Of note among these scraps is the revelation “that in the first version Septimus [ . . . ] had no existence” (549). I find Woolf’s wording here—“had no existence”—fascinating because when Clarissa Dalloway encounters Septimus Smith it is as a felt non-existence, a ghost, what Jacques Derrida, in Specters of Marx, calls the “being-there of an absent or departed” (5). Septimus’s suicide does not hinder the actuality of his encounter with Clarissa; rather, his non-presence and the impossibility of a normative two-way connection between these characters (who occupy different spaces and different times) actually makes their strange kinship possible in the first place. In her introduction, Woolf describes this kinship in a dependent clause: “in the first version Septimus, who is later intended to be [Clarissa’s] double, had no existence” (E4 549; emphasis added). I would like to focus on these two literary conventions—the ghost and the double—the imbrication of which generates an encounter between characters, a moment of being, one in which the novel theorizes (and Clarissa glimpses) new modalities of or relations to thought, alterity, the unknown, and—ultimately—the self.

To suggest that the operation of the ghost and the double introduces a radical element into the encounter between Septimus and Clarissa is to suggest that something discontinuous occurs, something novel, new—an event that renders common boundaries and binaries supply. Derrida provocatively argues that, “the logic of ghosts [. . . ] exceeds [. . . ] the logic that opposes [. . . ] effectivity or actuality (either present, empirical, living—or not) and ideality (regulating or absolute non-presence)” (78). In other words, the figure of the ghost slips between or overlays the logical antimony between presence and absence, between the living and the dead. Derrida’s claim resonates with the logic of the sentences leading up to Clarissa’s encounter with Septimus, sentences that do not simply demarcate between “present, empirical, living” and “absolute non-presence.” Interestingly, the news of Septimus’s death comes by way of a double telling, one parenthetically inserted into another: “Lady Bradshaw [. . . ] murmured how [. . . ] a young man (that is what Sir William is telling Mr. Dalloway) had killed himself” (Mrs. Dalloway [MD] 183). This conversation here refers to an identical one over there (which, ironically, refers to an act of which Sir William only has secondhand knowledge). Septimus, then, is there and here, then and now, alive and dead; he haunts conversations “in the middle of [Clarissa’s] party” (183). The “and” connecting these common binaries is important, because it suggests that Septimus is not an absent-present mixture caught on a spectrum between polarities nor an alive-dead figure oscillating somewhere between two pure states. Rather, he embodies the “logic of ghosts”; he “inhabits without residing” (Derrida 21). Clarissa, who senses his (non-)presence, also senses the uncanniness and the impossibility of this “and.”

The play of the “and” continues to blur clear oppositions or oscillations between here/there or present/absent or alive/dead and moves Clarissa to seclude herself:

She went on, into the little room where the Prime Minister had gone with Lady Bruton. Perhaps there was somebody there. But there was nobody. The chairs still kept the impress of the Prime Minister and Lady Bruton[,] [. . . ] There was nobody. (MD 183-84; emphasis added)

Somebody. Nobody. An impress. A presence. Clarissa begins to conjure Septimus here through the imagining of the trace of others. A solitude both actual and ideal, “an extremely populous solitude,” as Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet would say (Dialogues 6), creates the possibility of a thought that Clarissa will attempt to sustain—although, as we will see, the character fails to sustain what the novel itself discloses. The repetition of bodies-become-specters-become-bodies in these sentences becomes dizzying, especially as Clarissa begins to feel the strangeness and the tactility of her solitude: “so strange it was to come in alone in her finery” (MD 184).

Clarissa continues the conjunction of Septimus: “the Bradshaws [. . . ] talk[ed] of death at her party? A young man had killed himself [. . . ] at her party—the Bradshaws talked of death. He had killed himself—but how?” (MD 184). This near-chiasmatic patterning of Clarissa’s thought produces the conditions for the emergence of her question “but how?” and turns the presence (or the felt non-presence) of death into a query of Septimus’s suicide. Rendered supple by way of this sudden encounter, Clarissa glimpses this new being-there of a possible world that is her double; somebody and nobody impress “her body,” which always and sensuously “went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident, her dress flamined, her body burnt” (MD 184). Her finery, her dress, her body. The odd physicality and sensuousness of Clarissa’s solitude suggests that the thinking that occurs in these closing pages differs greatly from the musings or associative wanderings of her party guests. In these sentences, the novel itself theorizes how sudden, accidental, and intense encounters actually engender, that is, create thought in an absolute, populous solitude.

In the case of Mrs. Dalloway, this creative thought resists the “power” of William Bradshaw (MD 147, 185), that is, a power that “force[es] your soul” and that “make[s] life intolerable” (MD 184-85). The thought, which Clarissa’s encounter with Septimus (his ghost, her double) engenders actually and ideally, introduces a discontinuity into her party, a gathering circumscribed by social convention and by what Michel Foucault might call “individualizing” power: That is, a field of forces that incites persons into certain kinds of individuals or subjects (333). Despite Clarissa’s (and the novel’s) dislike of Sir William, however, no one character can wield individualizing or normalizing power. Rather, a network circumscribes every one of the novel’s characters, including the “great doctor,” who is only “obscurely evil, without sex or lust, extremely polite to women” (MD 184). The emergence of Clarissa’s
thought disrupts the continuity of this inescapable network, as does (she thinks) Septimus’s suicide:

A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wrenched about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. (MD 184)

These remarkable sentences exemplify the very evasiveness of the “centre,” which Clarissa initially refers to indirectly as “it,” “(a) thing,” and “(this).” In fact, the pattern of these sentences performs the pattern of Clarissa’s thought as she learns not only of but also from Septimus’s defiance; she learns how to see “this young man who had killed himself” and to see him otherwise (MD 184). One needs to keep in mind, however, that Clarissa’s thinking here is not engendered by way of a will-to-think. She does not recognize Septimus; rather, she feels Septimus, senses him. As Deleuze writes, “Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition [. . .] it can only be sensed” (Difference 147). Rather than a “will-to-think,” the novel theorizes and Clarissa demonstrates that a thought that addresses power, that disrupts the circumscription of that power, occurs by way of a “fundamental encounter” (MD 139) that lights a fuse-to-think and that triggers a felt urgency to imagine the other otherwise (i.e., other than the Bradshaws and Holmases do, etc.).

To imagine the other is not to recognize, that is, not to know the other. The patterns of Clarissa’s thought do not settle on a single image; even her clearest expression of what Septimus communicates comes by way of a question: “had he plunged holding his treasure?” (MD 184). The logic of the double and the ghost, then, resists representational categorization. Although these conventions often work in other novels by way of resemblance, opposition, and/or analogy/allegory, through folding or layering them together in Mrs. Dalloway (and her introduction to the novel), Woolf demonstrates that these conventions actually flood representational thinking; they overload mimesis. The marked sensuousness of this encounter and the reference to heat—which alludes to Clarissa’s repetition “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun” (MD 9, 30, 186) as well as Septimus’s observation before plunging from the window’s ledge: “The sun was hot” (MD 149)—suggests that these conventions operate by way of the senses, that is, by way of feeling and/ or emotion: an affective (non)logic. If this is the case, Woolf’s use of the double does not resemble James Joyce’s pairing of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus in Ulysses (as many critics suggest); rather it shares an intimacy with the narrator of À la recherche du temps perdu, who tells us that access to the past, which is “outside the realm, beyond the reach of the intellect,” is “in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) of which we have no inkling” (59-60). That sensation, Marcel continues, brings with it an emotion, and in the case of the “spoonful of tea in which [he] had soaked a morsel of [madeleine] cake,” the narrator experiences an “exquisite pleasure” (60). It is worth setting Clarissa’s encounter with Septimus beside Proust’s madeleine passage, primarily because one observes the paradoxical relationship between the new and the double that then refigures the self. For Clarissa, after opening her curtains and being surprised by the image of the old innocent, its brevity illusory—this new sensation having had on me the effect, which love has, of filling me with a precious essence; or rather the essence was not in me [cette essence n’était pas en moi], it was me [elle était moi]. (60)

I mention above that Clarissa does not sustain the thought that the novel discloses. After all, “she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter” (MD 186). Although readers may hope that Septimus’s death has made some sort of lasting impression upon his double, the word “must” and its repetition draws attention to a question that Septimus poses his wife a few pages before his death:

Bradshaw said they must be separated.

‘Must,’ ‘must,’ why ‘must’? What power had Bradshaw over him? ‘What right has Bradshaw to say “must” to me?’ he demanded. (MD 147)

The “must” signifies heavily in Clarissa’s closing thoughts, for when Clarissa’s final thought juxtaposes beside some of Septimus’s final questions to his wife, one senses perhaps the most disturbing linkages of the double” kinship they share, a link disclosed by Septimus’s ghost. To return to the party, to an extent, is to enter back, to become circumscribed once again, into that which she was upon entering the room; continuity absorbs discontinuity. When Clarissa descends, does she hold her treasure? In order to maintain the radicality of this encounter, the novel does not let us know. We can only watch with Peter Walsh: “For there she was” (MD 194).

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Eating Well with the Ramsays:
The Spirituality of Meat in To the Lighthouse

“One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well,” Woolf admonishes us in A Room of One’s Own (18). More than just supplying food for thought, dining well sustains civilization itself, nourishing the higher faculties and fortifying the bonds of human
community. Eating delimits boundaries between oneself and another, and in the many scenes of eating in her fiction Woolf proves especially attentive to the ethics of consumption. The substance of the meal is itself significant, figuratively marking distinctions within a community and actively constituting human identity in all its imagined integrity. As many critics have noted, the sexual politics of hunger in Woolf’s writing travel in multiple directions. Elizabeth Abel, for instance, explores tropes of feeding in *A Room of One’s Own*, recognizing not only the way that the privilege of the cultural father has contributed to women’s intellectual starvation, but also the text’s disavowed anger at forerathers who withhold the food necessary to sustain and nurture their daughters (95-102). Woolf exposes the spiritual and ontological stakes of eating and of a twentieth-century cultural discourse on meat in one of the great carnivorous meals in her fiction: the dinner scene in *To the Lighthouse*, in which Mrs. Ramsay serves up her triumphant Boeuf en Daube as a culinary accompaniment to her husband’s philosophical meditation upon “[s]ubject and object and the nature of reality” (TTL 26). Mr. Ramsay’s kitchen table when no one is there provokes further thought about subjectivity, objects, and living beings treated as things.

Meat-eating paradoxically nourishes the spiritual project of Western metaphysics, symbolically separating the eating subject from objectified animal bodies even as the act incorporates them and their mortal limits. Alerting us to the metaphysical dimensions of subjectivity and their costs, Jacques Derrida describes the predication of the human subject upon the disavowal of the bodily, the irrational, the feminine, and the animal as a being without speech. In an interview with Jean-Luc Nancy, “‘Eating Well,’ Or the Calculation of the Subject,” Derrida coins the term “carno-phallogocentrism” to illuminate a network of exclusionary relations upon which the meaning of subjectivity in Western thought has traditionally been constructed: sacrificial (carno), masculine (phallo), and speaking (logo) (Derrida 113; see also Calarco 131). Thus, partaking in rituals of killing and eating animal flesh is prerequisite to being a subject. Since the Judeo-Christian tradition has never understood the ethical injunction “Thou shalt not kill” (113) to include the living in general, what Derrida identifies as the “sacrificial structure” of human cultural formation opens up a space of residual violence, sanctioning “a noncriminal putting to death” of the nonhuman animal, who can be killed but not murdered (112). Extending this carnivorous logic, Derrida elaborates an ontological hierarchy that underlies humanism’s logocentric distinctions: “Authority and autonomy [. . .] are, through this schema [of Western determinations of subjectivity and being], attributed to the man (*homo* and *vir*) rather than to the woman, and to the woman rather than to the animal” (114). Accordingly, the “virile strength of the adult male” defines itself against those others it compels forcefully and violently to dwell in the shadows of transcendence (114).

Woolf frequently associated carnivory and an abundance of meat with male privilege and imperial power, from the bounteous Oxbridge feast in *A Room of One’s Own* to the Victorian picknickers in Miss La Trobe’s pageant who interrupt their colonial evangelizing to gorge themselves on ham, chicken, and grouse, prompting the spectator Mrs. Lynn Jones to observe, “They did eat [. . .] More than was good for them, I dare say” (Between the Acts 115). Following this sumptuous gratification of “the inner man,” in the words of one of the performers, two gentlemen picknickers “gratify the desire of the spirit” with a rousing chorus of “Rule, Britannia” (BTA 115-116). An early childhood experience, which Woolf recalled as German warplanes ravaged the English countryside in the Second World War, linked virility and the consumption of flesh more traumatically. In “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf recounts the infamous scene in which her stepbrother Gerald lifted her onto a “slab” for setting dishes upon outside of the Stephen family dining room and explored her “private parts” (69). Placing her upon a surface that conjures images of both the carving of meat and the morgue, Gerald and his roving hands betray a cultural logic that, as Carol Adams has consistently shown, symbolically links animals’ edible bodies with women’s sexualized bodies through their shared vulnerability to objectification, violation and dismemberment, whether real or metaphoric (Adams 50-73). Like the “slab” outside the Victorian dining room, the violation of the female body and butchering of the animal carcasses were never far from the rituals that defined patriarchal culture.

Conversely, if the feminine community at Newnham College struggles under the comparative poverty of its modest culinary offerings, the dithyrambic spirit of vegetarian classicist Jane Ellen Harrison—and her elaboration of matriarchal cults that preceded the institution of blood sacrifice—suggests an alternative society that does not demand the consumption, assimilation, or appropriation of other species. In *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903), Harrison excavates an earlier, “primitive” stratum of female vegetal rites featuring fireless offerings of fruit and grain to the vegetative Great Mother, which was later superseded by the patriarchal Olympian cults and their introduction of burnt offerings and the slaughter of animal victims (the ceremony of the pharmakos or scapegoat) (87-88; 94-95). Although Demeter refuses animal sacrifice in earlier rites, later festivals often include some form of animal flesh. The three-day autumnal women’s festival of the Thesmophoria—suggestively evoked in the boar’s skull that Mrs. Ramsay drapes with her shawl—celebrated Demeter with a pig sacrifice (Harrison 120-4).

In the dinner party in “The Window,” Woolf shows how the languages of gastronomy, religious ritual, spiritual transcendence and cultural achievement provide an elaborate cover for the violent, animalistic and bodily aspects of human life. Charles Tansley prophesies the Great War that would annihilate the Ramsays and their company, “blown sky high, like bales of wool and barrels of apples” (TTL 94); Mr. Ramsay flirts with the attractive young Minta Doyle while ready to consume her with “fangs” (104); and Mrs. Ramsay adopts Paul Rayley as a kind of bovine pet for his loyal stupidity, then offers him up along with his fiancée for sacrifice.

The atmosphere of the early part of the dinner party has the suffocating intensity of the main dish, a Provençal stew that requires three days to prepare. This slow cooking, which Mrs. Ramsay doesn’t accomplish herself but by proxy through Mildred the cook, provides a fitting metaphor for the evening’s forced sociality over which the hostess can preside at a safe distance from its raw, fleshy realities. The young lovers arrive at the table right as the *Boeuf en Daube* is served. Peering into the great brown dish, Mrs. Ramsay reads into “its confusion of savoury brown and yellow meats” the essence of her feast, transubstantiated into an idealized marriage rite:

This will celebrate the occasion—a curious sense rising in her, at once freakish and tender, of celebrating a festival, as if two emotions were called up in her, one profound—for what could be more serious than the love of man for woman, what more commanding, more impressive, bearing in its bosom the seeds of death; at the same time these lovers, these people entering into illusion glittering eyed, must be danced round with mockery, decorated with garlands. (TTL 102)

Mrs. Ramsay plays Aphrodite, her divine counterpart in beauty, whose fatal pairing of Helen and Paris precipitated the Trojan War, the “archetypal parallel to World War I” that ensues in the novel’s next section (Neverow 207). In Woolf’s variation on Freud’s totem meal, the hostess ladies out in tender juices of olives, oil and bay leaves the canniblistic violence from which Freud argued civilization emerged. Witnessing her duplicity, Lily observes that Mrs. Ramsay talks “about the skins of vegetables” like a matriarchal Earth goddess, but like a patriarchal Olympian sacrifices “her victims,” both animal as beef and human as “garlanded lovers,” to a vision of culture founded upon imperial greatness, masculine intelligence, philosophical rationality, and, most troublingly for Lily, compulsory heterosexuality (TTL 103). Eddying around the newly engaged couple is the full force of Mrs. Ramsay’s matrimonial “illusion,” which, “bearing in its bosom the seeds of death,” anticipates a whole series of sacrificial substitutions that will
unfold in “Time Passes” from the stranglehold of the Ramsays’ familial and social ideal: beginning with Mrs. Ramsay’s sudden death, followed by that of Prue in childbirth and Andrew in combat.

Despite Mrs. Ramsay’s desire to feed the disparate diners into a unity, she remains aware that Tansley and Lily “were both out of things,” unassimilable into her social stew (TTL 105). As the dinner scene suggests, the idealized, purified, transcendental being of civilized society cannot show itself without the mutinous murmurs of its disavowed companions. Throughout the party, Mrs. Ramsay combats dissent on all sides, and the murmur grows more audible in the silence between dishes. When she turns to tell a servant to keep the dish hot, the interruption annoys William Bankes. With the food delayed and conversation suspended, the demands of the flesh reassert themselves, making him cognizant of what he normally suppresses in order to produce the metaphysical foundation of human subjectivity and the fantasy of a self that might, freed of its bodily limitations, “par[take] [. . .] of eternity”—itself a metaphor of eating and consumption (107). The disruption breeds treacherous thoughts not only about the hostess, but about the nature of the species and its claims to exceptionality: “What does one live for? Why [. . .] does one take all these pains for the human race to go on? Is it so very desirable? Are we attractive as a species? Not so very, he thought, looking at those rather untidy boys” (91).

Suspicious of the species’ transcendentalism, Woolf entreats us to take notice of the “orts, scraps and fragments” of civilization’s carnivorous meal (BTA 127), those indigestible elements beneath the surface of the social being: the boar’s skull hidden under Mrs. Ramsay’s shawl in the nursery, “the ribs and thigh bones” of Tansley’s vanity (TTL 93), and Lily’s refusal to submit to the sacrificial economy of Mrs. Ramsay’s marriage rites. In doing so, Woolf lays bare the mechanisms of a familial and social system predicated upon the continual sacrifice of women, children, servants, animals, and other marginalized figures—lives denied the possibility of transcendence in humanism’s metaphysical calculations.

Rose’s fruit centerpiece forms a closer culinary parallel to Lily’s aesthetic and what Harriet Blodgett identifies as the transfiguring properties of art in its “heightening of the ordinary” (52). Rose’s vegetarian dish has the power to bring Mrs. Ramsay into sympathy with the character most antipathetic toward her, as she and Augustus Carmichael feast their eyes on the fruit, taking in its colors and shapes. Such visual feasting suspends the appetite for animosity or prejudice and suggests a more amenable way of being in company with others, one that denies the possibility of transcendence in humanism’s metaphysical calculations.

Despite Bankes’s declared preference for dining alone, Derrida reminds us: “One never eats entirely on one’s own” (115). Suggesting an alternative way of conceiving of human-human and human-animal ethics, Derrida advances eating well as a maxim to be taken both literally and symbolically. Eating well is not only a matter of nourishing oneself, but of extending responsibility to the other that forms the basis for all ethical relations and in this sense is “a rule offering infinite hospitality” (115). By renegotiating the borders between subject and object, Woolf intimates, eating well becomes a way of discovering the most equitable and generous means of relating to others. Woolf’s admonition in A Room of One’s Own to “dine well” calls upon us to enlarge the scope of our obligations to others, even or especially those we would eat, assimilate, or incorporate.

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Woolf’s Eschatology: Death, Mourning, and Modernist Voice

Matei Călinescu notes in Five Faces of Modernity that religion and modernism may, at first sight, be regarded as “far removed” from each other (58). But Douglas Stewart, among other critics, finds it ironic that in the twentieth century, as the authority of organized religion wanes, novels increasingly express “man’s moral dilemma and spiritual anxiety” (9). As with many aspects of modernism, this spirituality often emerges not so significantly through what is expressed, but rather in how it is expressed. Through those qualities regarded as hallmarks of modernism, fragmentation and stream-of-consciousness, writers of the early twentieth century create fiction which places greater interpretive demands on readers, thus actually implicating them in outlining, even constructing, the meaning of the text. Ethical, moral, or spiritual engagement is heightened as readers must come to terms with the social concerns addressed in modernist writing on their own. Woolf’s writing creates special demands perhaps due to her peculiar situation as a post-WW1 female writer from a respected class that exposed her to English liberalism. According to Vincent B. Sherry, this position allows her to “offer the most extended demonstration [of the era’s] literary potential” (236).

This short essay responds to Sherry’s observations regarding Woolf by offering two extensions of his claim. First, that in her treatment of death and mourning, Woolf’s response to the Great War extends beyond the political and cultural, introducing a spiritual element as well. One may be tempted to label what I am calling the religious aspects of Woolf’s writing as nothing more than secular humanism, but I would like to shift the emphasis from Woolf to the reader who contemplates an uncertain message and constructs meaning. This shift leads to my second point: Woolf’s narrative style allows not only a realization of the period’s literary potential, but also a means of contemplating death that is relevant to contemporary readers. Both her short fiction and her novels use a narrative style that models Christian eschatology, a concept concerned not with the end of the world per se, but rather with the perspective that knowledge of an end brings to present understanding.

The eschatological narrative style is best understood by examining the term in two ways, both etymologically and theologically. Derived from the Greek word for “furthest” or “last,” it denotes a discourse on ending. Obviously all narratives end, as all books have final pages, but not all narratives engage their readers in contemplation of that ending. This
concept is more precisely understood when examined theologically. Theologian Paul Fiddes defines eschatology as “Christian hope” concerned not with terminology, but rather with “how consciousness of an ending affects individuals in the present” (5); further, “[T]he shock of the nothingness of death will alert us to God who is our final concern,” and this concern will bring “integration to a broken existence” (12). Thus, it is not so much that Woolf’s fiction offers an understanding of death, but rather that she allows the reader to contemplate death, often in scenes that do not directly address it, and further, that such thinking places upon readers, not narrators, the impetus to bring “integration to a broken existence.”

Fiddes appropriately looks to Frank Kermode’s narrative theories presented in Sense of an Ending. For Kermode, the denouement of a novel creates a pattern or a sense of working toward meaning; narrative plots turn simple passage of time into moments “filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation with the end” (47). To accomplish this, narratives must defy our expectations, as “only the most trivial work conform[s] to pre-existent types” (Kermode 24), a thought complemented by Vicki Mahaffey’s argument that the “challenging” aspects of modernism counteract passive reading (7). Modernist writing effectively circumvents the illusion of life as meaningfully sequential. Early forms of fiction promoted complacency in readers, as narrators were responsible for coherence. For Mahaffey, the inconclusive relationships between events presented in modernist literature promote “mystery” (21). In the process of making interpretative choices regarding the coherence of narratives, readers make ethical choices as well, thus “bear[ing] witness to the unspeakable incoherences and violent nonsense of the real” (14).

Foremost among these social concerns and pertinent to eschatology is Woolf’s treatment of death. A number of scholars have commented on the correspondence between death and interiors in Woolf’s fiction. Sherry, for example, notes Woolf’s personal experience of the loss of her brother, Thoby Stephen, in 1906. Thus, while other modernists reacted to “the failing strength of the intellectual and political institution,” Woolf offered a “concentrated and intensified” rendering of the war’s tolls (239-40). Ariela Friedman similarly examines the influence of World War I on modernist writing, observing that while dead males act as both symptom and symbol of failure in modernity, this loss is often accompanied by increased female subjectivity (15). She focuses on Clarissa Dalloway’s meditative state following Septimus Smith’s suicide as evidence of transfiguration rooted in the power of the uncanny, a force that inspires feelings of helplessness, denial, and loss of innocence.

There are moments in Mrs. Dalloway when these same feelings are introduced through more subtle reminders of death. On Bond Street, as citizens crane their necks to watch an airplane skywriting, Woolf’s language conjures still fresh memories of the Great War. The sound “bored ominously” into their ears, and the plane “dropped dead down” (MD 20). Fascination is tinged with death. But most significant to how this scene operates eschatologically is Woolf’s handling of point-of-view to model the way the meaning of the event is ever-present yet constantly deferred. Each spectator attempts to predict what will be written: “Glaxo,” “Kreemo,” and “It’s toffee” (MD 20-21). The ultimate message is never definitively revealed, thus imitating eschatology’s emphasis on the act of contemplation over a terminal understanding. Further, the message is simply a novel form of advertising—more important than what is being written is the fact that an airplane is writing it. Just as the characters on the street are drawn to the how of the advertisement rather than the what, the reader’s experience of spirituality here is tied to narrative styling rather than explicit religious content as Woolf uses rapid changes in point-of-view, and fragmented images of contrasting tone. The aeroplane is first seen as graceful like a skater or dancer, but later linked to a thrush killing a snail by smashing it against a stone (MD 21, 29). Religion is tangentially addressed, as the plane flies over St. Paul’s Cathedral where a “seedy-looking man” contemplates the tombs and martyrs inside (MD 29). Outside the Cathedral, Mr. Bentley sees the aircraft as a symbol of “man’s soul [. . .] determined [. . .] to get outside his body” (MD 29). Through this method of quick shifts, readers are given glimpses of death, trauma, nature and God, but nothing is explicit. Readers must contemplate a meaning that is deferred and difficult. Eschatology’s solitary nature is ironically highlighted as Smith has been advised to “take an interest in things outside himself,” while the aeroplane only leads to solitary contemplation (MD 23).

Woolf’s short fiction also displays the eschatological narrative style. “The Mark on the Wall” is an excellent example due to her stream-of-consciousness style and because its 1917 composition situates it during the First World War. Even before death becomes an issue in the story, the speaker’s lack of certitude establishes an eschatological perspective. She initially observes, “Perhaps it was the middle of January in the present year that I first looked up and saw the mark on the wall. In order to fix a date it is necessary to remember what one saw. So now I think of the fire; the steady film of yellow light up the page of my book,” and she goes on to delineate at some length the particular moment the mark first caught her attention (MW 83). Of interest here is the way in which the speaker recalls without certainty, but then commits to a given recollection. While her statement, “Yes it must have been the winter time . . .” can be read as a spark of clarity in her recollection, a sudden “aha” moment, it also indicates, through the insistence of “must,” a willful dedication to something uncertain (MW 83). Such thinking displays eschatological projection because we see the speaker laboring to make sense, make meaning, of her situation, which is revealed to be shadowed by the ongoing war.

“The Mark on the Wall” also displays eschatological features through the uncanny or unheimlich aspects of the narrative, a quality that is echoed in the story’s treatment of the speaker’s home. It possesses a history and presents unanswerable questions. Her first theory about the mark is that it is a nail hole from the previous occupants’ pictures. Those occupants are discussed in a curious, everlasting present tense: “I think of them so often in queer places, because one will never see them again, never know what happens next” (MW 83). It would be simple for the narrator to stand up and discern the mark’s true identity, but what is valuable is the speculative process. Relating to the theological sense of eschatology, the contemplation of this mark is more valuable than its actual identity—the end gives meaning to the present. Understanding is more process than product, or as theologian John Macquarrie explains, “Being, then, gets disclosed in existing” (87). Mystery allows a perspective by which she can attempt to come to terms with the war.

Of course, all of these treatments of death offer a rather open-ended spirituality without referencing particular faiths. But the issue in eschatological narratives is not how spirituality provides answers to crises, but rather how individuals can preserve their spirituality amid a world that threatens traditional sources of meaning. Randall Stevenson suggests that, “it may be that the most moral sort of text is one which leaves readers free to determine morality for themselves” (222). Morality and spirituality are not interchangeable terms, but Stevenson’s sentiments nevertheless suggest the peculiar role of religion in modernity and modernist literature. Freedom to participate in such determinations becomes increasingly important as human fears shift to increasingly interior matters. Indeed, theologian Paul Tillich contends that modern humans, more than in previous eras, find themselves ill-equipped to define a place among the external world, suffering a “spiritual anxiety,” or the fear of meaningfulness (57). People need “spiritual self-affirmation,” Tillich writes, something achieved through living creatively: “The creative transformation of a language by the interdependence of the creative poet or writer and the many who are influenced by him directly or indirectly and react spontaneously to him” (46). Prolonged mystery, the denial of certainty in favor of contemplation, as well as a narrative juxtaposition that refuses to clearly
ascribe meaning to connections of character, events, recollections and the like, may provide invitations to spiritual consideration, opportunity for readerly creativity and hence exactly the self-affirmation Tillich calls for. Through her oblique handling of death, trauma, God, and the Church, these works by Woolf encourage contemplation, and while not offering explicit answers, provide an opportunity for interaction, a venue for attempted re-integration of broken existence, and in that light, a greater present understanding.

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Kandinsky’s “On the Problem of Form” and the Fiction of Virginia Woolf

Although Wassily Kandinsky was arguably not the first painter to explore abstract or “non-objective art,” his influential doctrines concerning the artist’s rejection of material reality and his emphasis on artistic intuition and sense impression certainly helped form the groundwork for a later expressionist disregard of form in favor of the spiritual in art. As Peter Selz suggests, Kandinsky’s rejection of the representational aspect of art “cleared the way for new values [. . .] and cultivated” the possibility of an expressive—rather than a formalistic—art in the non-objective idiom” (135). This idea concerning the question of form in painting and the possibilities of expressing “the spiritual” in art—one that persists not only in Kandinsky’s artistic projects but also in his writings on art—is a theme that surfaces in various instances throughout the fiction of Virginia Woolf.2 Drawing briefly upon both Lily’s experience in *To the Lighthouse* and the struggles of Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*, I argue that Woolf, in a gesture similar to Kandinsky’s, often insists upon the artist’s need to cultivate a portrait of “internal reality” in spite of what they perceive as the limited nature of recognizable forms. For Kandinsky, such was the contradictory and ephemeral nature of the spiritual in art that in order for it to ring true the artist needed to allow it to operate according to its own internal set of aesthetic laws rather than those dictated by materialism, rationalism or tradition.

According to Kandinsky, the spiritual, though difficult to define, “causes a yearning, an inner urge” that, out of necessity, constantly searches for materialization (155). In this sense, the spiritual is both imminent and paradoxical and therefore gives the artist license to explore fragmented, absurd, borrowed, ambiguous and impermanent forms, indeed, even to pay heed to what might be akin to the viewer experiencing “the sound of yellow” as a means of attending to, and materializing, its vivacity and transformative agency.3 Abstraction, via Kandinsky, came to be identified as the outward form of an *internal* spiritual reality:

The form is always bound to its time, is relative, since it is nothing more than the means necessary today, in which today’s revelation manifests itself, and resounds. This resonance is then the soul of the form which only becomes alive in the act of resonating outwards and which works from within to without. *The form is the outer expression of the inner content.* Therefore one should not make a deity of form. And one should fight for the form only insofar as it can serve as a means of expression of the inner resonance. Ultimately one should not seek salvation in one form. Every creative artist’s own means of expression (that is, form) is the best for him, since it most appropriately embodies that which he feels compelled to proclaim. (157)

As the many studies on Woolf have pointed out, Woolf’s own engagement with conceptions of visual aesthetics can be traced back through her involvement with sister and painter Vanessa Bell and through a series of recorded dialogues held with Roger Fry. Likewise, Woolf’s admiration of Jane Harrison’s work on the image-language of Greek urns, in addition to her later fascination with cinema as recounted by Laura Marcus in her study *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period*, testify to Woolf’s involvement with critical discourse addressing the form and function of visual aesthetics in the modern period. However, even if one disregards these historical and autobiographical incidents, modern literature’s engagement with the theories of visual art is inescapable. As Woolf explains “we are under the dominion of painting” (157):

Were all modern paintings to be destroyed, a critic of the twenty-fifth century would be able to deduce from the works of Proust alone the existence of Matisse, Cézanne, Derain and Picasso; he would be able to say with those books before him that painters of the highest originality and power must be covering canvas after canvas[,] [. . . ] Every creative artist’s own means of expression (that is, form) is the best for him, since it most appropriately embodies that which he feels compelled to proclaim. (157)

With regard to the spiritual, it can be argued that Woolf also did not adhere to the value of formal properties in painting, or literature for that matter. Characterized by “stream-of-consciousness” and of shifting,

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1 As Peter Selz suggests, “It is possible that non-objective paintings may have been painted prior to Kandinsky’s first non-objective watercolor of 1910 and his more ambitious *Impressions, Improvisations, and Compositions* of 1911. There are abstractions by Arthur Dove, for example, which are dated 1910. Picabia and Kupka began working in a non-objective idiom not much later, and Delaunay painted his non-objective *Color Disks* in 1912. In Germany Adolf Hoelzel ventured into non-objective painting as early as 1910, but whereas for Hoelzel it was merely experiment in additional possibilities, Kandinsky made non-objectivity the very foundation of his pictorial imagery” (“Aesthetic Theories” 127).

2 As Nena Skrbic explains in her study on Woolf’s short fiction, that Woolf was familiar with Kandinsky and Der Blaue Reiter group “is beyond conjecture, given her intimate affinities with the post impressionist group and, more importantly perhaps, her deep understanding and empathy with the Russian culture from which Kandinsky sprung” (52).

3 First published in *Der Blaue Reiter Almanac* in 1909, “Der Gelbe Klang” (“The Yellow Sound”) was an experimental drama penned by Wassily Kandinsky as an attempt at a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (“total work of art”). Comprised of abstract variations in music, color, movement and dissonance, “Der Gelbe Klang” was part of Kandinsky’s revolutionary method to challenge the external forms of art inherited from the nineteenth century so as to encounter the spiritual impulse in art without recourse to recognizable (and thereby limiting) forms.
abstract impressions, Woolf’s fiction insists on bending the limits of poetic language often through cultivating moments that play on the mind like overlapping waves, thereby inviting her readers to contemplate what Eudora Welty called the very “shape of the human spirit” (xii). For example, Lily’s desire “to make no attempt at likeness’’ as she paints a portrait of Mrs. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse, is forged both through her perception of Mrs. Ramsay posing before her and through the haunting images that persist in her memory after Mrs. Ramsay’s sudden death. In many ways, this manipulation of the novel’s various aspects of reality into the abstract “purple shadow” of Lily’s single canvas echoes Kandinsky’s concern with form and what critics have recognized as Woolf’s own distaste of convention, offering another sense “in which one might reverence them” (To the Lighthouse [TTL] 52).

As Jack Stewart suggests, this aspect of Woolf’s fiction “goes beyond impressionism and symbolism toward a flexible form that ‘does not shut out’” (439). In this way, Kandinsky’s proposal that the art becomes “alive” and moves outward when it takes on properties of whatever is “necessary today” (be it irrational, absurd or spontaneous) resonates in Woolf’s attendance to perpetuating genuine “moments of being” by fusing the character’s thoughts and actions into a complex matrix of associations. As Stewart explains, Woolf, in her disregard of conventional narrative, composes works more akin to “expressionist” painting in which each character’s thoughts drift into another’s and the experiences of post-war London are forged through the juxtaposition of abstract notions be it through the “blue” of James’ memory, the “triangular purple shape” on Lily’s canvas, or the “yellow eye” of the lighthouse (441). “She urged novelists to ‘convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit’” (438, emphasis added).

Like Kandinsky’s work, Woolf’s rendering of such moments lends itself to a reexamination of the ways in which art functions and the form in which the spiritual may be given shape. In her fiction, we often discover that the spiritual force that would guide and connect her characters to the harmonious aspects of the world emerges not through the bankrupt forms of religion, or what Kandinsky might consider accepted “convention” and “tradition,” but through the mundane, unexpected and even ridiculous aspects of daily life. As Kandinsky himself reminds us in his writings on art, the human being constantly seeks to find a material form for the new value which lives in him in spiritual form thereby making matter merely “a storeroom and from it the spirit chooses what is specifically necessary for it—just as the cook would” (155). This idea is perhaps most clearly expressed toward the close of Mrs. Dalloway when Septimus sits beside his wife crafting a hat for Mrs. Peters. There it becomes apparent that the reader is encouraged to meditate for a moment on something that is taking place beyond the act of hat-making. As Septimus gazes at the figure of his wife, he begins to discard the language and constructs imposed upon him by religion, society and the materialistic Dr. Holmes, in favor of his capacity for sense.

Why then rage and prophesy? Why fly scourged and outcast? Why be made to tremble and sob by the clouds? Why seek truths and deliver messages when Rezia sat sticking pins into the front of her dress[,] [ . . . ] Miracles, revelations, agonies, loneliness, falling through the sea, down, down into the flames, all were burnt out, for he had a sense, as he watched Rezia trimming the straw hat for Mrs. Peters, of a coverlet of flowers. (MD 142-3, emphasis added)

Similar to Kandinsky’s “artist-cook,” Septimus finds himself, for a moment, to be unburdened by the prescriptive “musts” and “shoulds” of Dr. Bradshaw and his creative expression—in fact the first time he reports feeling anything towards his wife Rezia—comes in the form of spontaneity and absurdity. Taking the form of hat-making, Septimus’s art is unintelligible to the outside world (as Rezia explains, no one would understand what they were laughing at) and yet, for the first time in weeks, he is able to communicate with his estranged wife, now creating the “life” between them that had eluded them in their previously childless marriage. There, in the absence of the critical Dr. Holmes, the contents of Rezia’s work-box tumbles out before Septimus like Kandinsky’s pieces of material reality, ready to be arranged in whatever fashion he sees fit to express the absurdity and disconnection with the modern society that so vexes him:

What had she got in her work-box? She had ribbons and beads, tassels, artificial flowers. She tumbled them out on the table. He began putting odd colours together—for though he had no fingers, could not even do up a parcel, he had a wonderful eye, and often he has right, sometimes absurd, of course, but sometimes wonderfully right.[ . . . ] Never had he done anything which made him feel so proud. It was so real, it was so substantial, Mrs. Peters’ hat. “Just look at it,” he said. Yes, it would always make her happy to see that hat. He had become himself then, he had laughed then. (MD 143)

As Kandinsky suggests in “The Problem of Form,” what matters to Septimus in the passage above is not the hat itself—the hat-making is after all, a “spontaneous” form borrowed from his wife—but the sense of communal spirit that manifests in the process of crafting Mrs. Peters’ hat. In that moment of creative expression, and only in that moment, does Septimus again “become himself” and find a brief way of seeing into the world; a short respite before he is overcome by the “bleak eminence” of Mrs. Filmer’s sitting room and the “brute” Doctor as he marches up the stairs to ensure that Septimus persists in being “scientific, above all” (MD 22). For Septimus, who struggles to live while he is surrounded by haunting images of the dead, this moment of unconventional artistry reveals the paradoxical nature of the spiritual and the various forms it takes in addition to the horror and ease with which the modern mind can explain it away. As both Kandinsky’s perspectice suggests and Septimus’ final leap through the window indicates, “it is better to regard death as life than life as death. Even if only one single time [ . . . ] only in a place which has become free can something grow again” (Kandinsky 170).

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The Search for God: Virginia Woolf and Caroline Emelia Stephen

As a Modernist follower of radical individualism, Virginia Woolf is thought to be antipathetic to religious thought; Woolf’s own spirituality, however, is certainly more complicated than most critics have allowed, especially in light of the influence of her aunt, Caroline Emelia Stephen, a well-known Quaker mystic and writer who rejected the established church in favor of a less traditional version of Christianity. The intellectual relationship between niece and aunt has been little discussed; aside from Jane Marcus’s “The Niece of a Nun: Caroline Stephen and the Cloistered Imagination” and Alison Lewis’s “A Quaker Influence on Modern English Literature: Caroline Stephen and her Niece, Virginia Woolf,” few critics seem to have considered the implications of Stephen’s influence on Woolf’s works and ideas.

Any association with Christianity may seem to be negated by Woolf’s liberal sexuality, the atheism and agnosticism of her characters, and her association with the heterodox Bloomsbury Group, with its emphasis on materialism. Their sexual transgressiveness and relativist ideals seemingly place them outside religion, but “religion” here means the established church, little more than conventional morality. Certainly Modernism and Christianity appear to conflict in a consideration of absolute truth: where Christians generally believe there is only one road to truth, Modernists suggest there are many roads; they recognize in some of what has traditionally been considered “absolute truth” a truth of privilege. While some might consider such a paradigm shift to be relativistic, in that truth may shift depending on identity, Woolf’s aunt believed an honest effort to find truth is inclusive, not exclusive, of a search for God (Quaker Strongholds [QS] 134). Comprehending Woolf’s spirituality requires a more nuanced understanding of Christianity, one that looks beyond church attendance to a genuine, deep struggle for an articulation of God.

Caroline Emelia Stephen (1834-1909), the unmarried sister of Woolf’s father, was very close to Leslie Stephen’s family, as Quentin Bell and Hermione Lee note. Quaker Strongholds (1890) remains her best-known book, although she also published articles on women’s suffrage, fashion, and charity. Stephen’s struggle with her faith was largely a reaction against her patrilineage, leading to her Quaker conversion, and is strikingly similar to the religious dithering of which Woolf stands accused (QS 33-34). Stephen was attracted to the elements of Quakerism that allowed for tolerance, if not celebration, of those differences in people. Lest we think she was one of the liberal New Women, though, her history provides us with some complex paradoxes: she was firmly ensconced in her position as a member of the upper class and felt there were particular duties required of her class (“Mistress and Servant” 1051); she was fiercely anti-Roman Catholic (QS 137-138); she opposed women’s suffrage and women’s colleges (though she changed her mind about the education of women later in life) (see “The Representation of Women”). Still, in her way, she did much toward suggesting that understanding rather than condemnation is paramount to furthering God’s kingdom, and at the time she wrote, such tolerance was considered to be relativistic, undermining the truth of God in its unorthodoxy.

Caroline Emelia Stephen’s influence on Virginia Woolf is significant. Not only did she bequeath the bulk of her estate to Woolf (thus allowing Woolf a room of her own), but when Woolf’s father died in 1904, Stephen took her in and tended her after the first of several mental breakdowns. Woolf stayed with her for some months, recovering her health; they sometimes talked through the night (Bell 63; 90). Woolf read Quaker Strongholds, and at least owned a copy of another of Stephen’s books, Light Arising; both books are in the Woolf library collection at the University of Washington at Pullman. The notes she made in them confirm she had read passages which align with her own works, establishing connections that illuminate Woolf’s efforts to seek for greater meaning in life, even for the God she sometimes appears to deny. She may have read Quaker Strongholds together with her father. Leslie certainly derogated the book as that “little book” (Mausoleum 56) his sister wrote, ignoring its reputation as the single most important literary influence in the renaissance of Quakerism at the end of the nineteenth century. In Leslie’s copy of the book, there are some relatively disparaging comments next to Stephen’s text, and a number of pages remain uncut, suggesting he never got around to finishing the book. In Woolf’s copy, the notes end approximately halfway through the book as well. Of course this is speculation on small evidence, but the textual evidence and an understanding of the tremendous influence that Leslie wielded upon Woolf seem to support the likelihood that Leslie and Virginia read Caroline’s books together.

Thematic connections between the two women abound. For both, truth-telling is crucially important: it is behind the innovation of literary topics, styles and forms for which Woolf is known, and is the motivation for Stephen’s conversion. In rejecting the traditional patriarchal authority over a polyglot world (one too often inaccurately represented as merely the voice of the individual), Woolf continues the same rejection of form rather than substance which Stephen herself chose. Textual evidence and the notations in Woolf’s copy of Stephen’s books suggest that a number of Stephen’s other themes interest Woolf as well, including her aunt’s awakening to God through the Quaker tradition, her theology, her struggle to reconcile her position as a thinking woman to the position accorded her in Victorian society, and her engagement with silence as a means of hearing God’s message. Stephen’s treatment of God as light or as voice is especially telling when compared to Woolf’s similar treatments in her work. Stephen’s portrayal of God’s truth as an intermittent light, showing the way (The Vision of Faith 49), is echoed in Woolf’s own use of the lighthouse as authority figure in To the Lighthouse; it is a figure to which the family, especially the men, are problematically drawn.

Likewise, when Woolf states, in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” that “on or about December 1910 human character changed” (96), she argues that character has become more important than plot or externals, and that truth can only be discovered through individuals and their “relative” position in the world. Woolf’s novels, especially The Voyage Out and Mrs. Dalloway, delve into characters, into their motivations, their obsessions, their search for connectedness. Stephen considers such truth seeking as part of the mystical impulse:

Mystics, as I understand the matter, are those whose minds, to their own consciousness, are lighted from within; who feel themselves to be in immediate communication with the central Fountain of light and life. They have naturally a vivid sense both of the distinction and of the harmony between the inward and the outward — a sense so vivid that it is impossible for them to believe it to be unshared by others. A true mystic believes that all men have, as he himself is conscious of having, an inward life, into which, as into a secret chamber, he can retreat at will. (QS 14-15)

Clarissa Dalloway, in her effort to find the harmony between the inward and the outward, becomes a true mystic, seeking connection with other characters. While some scholars argue that Clarissa, in both Mrs. Dalloway and The Voyage Out, is meant to at least partially speak for Woolf (see Bonnie Kime Scott’s Introduction to Mrs. Dalloway), there is more evidence to support an autobiographical reading of Woolf in other characters than in Clarissa Dalloway. Rachel, in The Voyage Out, for example, has far more in common with Woolf, in her haphazard education, her relationship with her father and other academics, her efforts to connect with a mother figure in the absence of her own mother. Rachel, amazed to find a society of people who do not freely own to being Christian, has her own “conversion” moment when she sees a church service as painfully irrelevant, not because there is no God but
because people have failed to feel God: she is “enraged by the clumsy insensitivity of the conductor” of the service, and “the atmosphere of enforced solemnity increased her anger” (228).

All round her were people pretending to feel what they did not feel, while somewhere above her floated the idea which they could none of them grasp, which they pretended to grasp, always escaping out of reach, a beautiful idea, an idea like a butterfly. One after another, vast and hard and cold, appeared to her the churches all over the world where this blundering effort and misunderstanding were perpetually going on, great buildings, filled with innumerable men and women, not seeing clearly, who finally gave up the effort to see, and relapsed tamely into praise and acquiescence, half-shutting their eyes and pursing up their lips [. . .]. With the violence that now marked her feelings, she rejected all that she had before implicitly believed. (228-29)

Rachel does not reject God so much as she does empty and false religious practice. Her position is very like that of Caroline Emelia Stephen, whose shift away from her evangelical Clapham upbringing and towards the Quaker tradition is strongly evoked here. Stephen recalls going to Anglican services, and finding herself alienated from the language itself:

The more vividly one feels the force of its eloquence, the more, it seems to me, one must hesitate to adopt it as the language of one’s own soul, and the more unlikely is it that such heights and depths of feeling as it demands should be ready to fill its magnificent channels every Sunday morning at a given hour. (QS 11)

Woolf’s search for the individual, for the private, for the character who is truly and fully human, as made by God and not by culture’s assumptions about class, gender, or society (see, especially, Woolf’s exploration of gender identity in Orlando), also finds its heritage in Stephen’s inclusive idea of Quakerism:

The perennial justification of Quakerism lies in its energetic assertion that the kingdom of heaven is within us; that we are not made dependent upon any outward organization for our spiritual welfare. Its perennial difficulty lies in the inveterate disposition of human beings to look to each other for the Divine Voice which speaks to each one in a language no other can hear, and in the apathy which is content to go through life without the attempt at any true individual communion with God. (QS 8)

While this exploration of the connections remains cursory, assuredly, the family alignments and influences, the biographical details, the works of both women, and the similarities in their ideas are too striking to ignore.

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Compiled by Amy C. Smith and Isabel M. Andrés Cuevas


TRULY MISCELLANEOUS

"But at second sight the words seemed not so simple" (Woolf 1929): Thickening and Rotting Hysteria in the Writing of Hilary Mantel and Virginia Woolf

What I do with words is to make them explode so that the nonverbal appears in the verbal [. . .] I treat them as bodies that contain their own perversity (Derrida xvii)

This paper articulates the dis-ease of the endometriotic body in Hilary Mantel’s Giving Up the Ghost: A Memoir (2003) both in terms of Jacques Derrida’s statement and as characterising a specifically invaginal textual practice. Through analysing the allegory of the hysterical woman writer it aims to present Mantel’s memoir as eliding while also alluding to the mythology/hauntology of Virginia’s Woolf’s own biography. This will initiate a re-reading of how the “not so simple” (Woolf 3) words in A Room of One’s Own (1929) wax and wane to produce similar menstrual excess.

Revisiting the apparent synchronicity of words and “bodies”, this paper will expose Mantel’s words as “worried” in order to extend the Derridean practice of “troubling” (Derrida 2008). Worry suggests both a womb-like container and a provocation to explosion, which parallels what is “natural” to the endometrium cells that first thicken then rot. Mantel plays with the Greek root of hysteria as ironically appropriate to her estranging illness; moreover, the medical censorship of her writing also conjures spectres of Woolf. This apparition of cyclical madness traces the framing texts of the diaries creating a peripheral “Virginia.” Using Mantel’s memoir, this paper explores the excess in A Room as a product of the contradiction of its “seeming” words while also highlighting the contradictory power of Woolf’s insanity when read as spectacle.

But, you may say, Hilary Mantel is not a Woolfian, though her writing does constitute an interruption to the discipline. Most controversially, in Mantel’s recent eBook In the Blood: A Hospital Diary (2010) she described Virginia Woolf’s essay “On Being Ill” (1930) as “schoolgirl piffle” (Mantel 173). Later in the same book Mantel questions the facts: “When Virginia Woolf’s doctors forbade her to write, she obeyed them. Which makes me ask, what kind of wuss was Woolf?” (231).

Mantel, a contemporary British author, was born in 1952 and has authored ten novels, one memoir and a collection of short stories. She recently achieved popular recognition by winning the 2009 Man Booker Prize for her historical novel Wolf Hall, but there is as yet little critical material available on Mantel’s corpus within the academy. Though Mantel’s comments open the discussion here, it was Jane Goldman’s recent paper “Consider the dogs”: Englishness, Breeding and Canine Aesthetics in Between the Acts” (2011) that prompted this more explicit comparison across the writings of Mantel and Woolf; specifically, in terms of Goldman’s exploration of invaginal textual practice in Woolf’s final novel (1941). Invagination, meaning to fold inward or sheath, was applied by Goldman in the wake of Jacques Derrida to account for a “thickening” (2011) within the punctuation of Woolf’s descriptions of dogs. According to Goldman, this provokes an excess of meaning that bursts out of the full stop alongside an evasiveness within the text perhaps best characterised by the word ellipsis. Such a combination of thickening and rotting within Woolf’s sentences will be returned to towards the end of this paper via specific textual examples from A Room of One’s Own (1929). Meanwhile, similar contradictions within Mantel’s writing will be informed by and unpacked through Goldman’s use of invagination, thickening within punctuation and ellipsis, as appropriate deconstructive tools.

The “vagina” sheathed within the word invagination is explicitly realised within the descriptions of the dis-eased endometriotic body in Mantel’s Giving Up the Ghost: A Memoir (2003). Her account of the condition that has left the “Hilary” of the text childless and its two-fold significance in terms of invaginal textuality is illustrated by the following quotation:

The endometrium is the lining of the womb. It is made of special cells which shed each month by bleeding. In endometriosis, these cells are found in other parts of the body [. . .] Wherever they are found, they obey their essential nature and bleed. Scar tissue is formed, in the body’s inner spaces and small cavities [. . .] The scar tissue forms an evil stitching which attaches one organ to another [. . .] Endometriosis in the intestines make you vomit and gives you pains in the gut. Pressure in the pelvis makes your back ache, your legs ache. You are too tired to move. The pain, which in the early

1 The textual construction of ‘Hilary’ in Giving Up the Ghost is reminiscent of the gap Woolf creates in A Room: ‘I need not say that what I am about to describe has no existence[,] [. . .] “I” is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being” (4).
The displaced bleeding cells of this body characterise a thickening that also invests the narrative, for example, Mantel writes: “I have to read my pain backwards, to know what was happening inside me” (Giving Up 225). Consequently, the folding inwards of the doubled up body coupled with the scar tissue sheathing the organs with an “evil stitching” mirrors the invaginal narrative, which, as memoir, always already signifies retrospect. Positioned as reader, this “I” is established as secondary—“I have to read my pain”—and this “backwards” movement is emphasised by not only being dictated internally and from the past, but also because inside is an amalgamation of layering, folding and sheathing.

It is possible to provoke this tension between the endometriotic body and the characteristics of narrative further through analysing a quotation from “The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida” recently cited in Copy, Archive, Signature: A Conversation on Photography (2010). Derrida suggests:

What I do with words is to make them explode so that the nonverbal appears in the verbal. That is to say that I make words function in such a way that at a certain moment they no longer belong to discourse, to what regulates discourse [. . .] And if I love words it is also because of their ability to escape their proper form [. . .] That is to say, I am also interested in words, paradoxically, to the extent that they are nondiscursive, for that’s how they can be used to explode discourse [. . .] So I am very much in love with words, and as someone who is in love with words I treat them as bodies that contain their own perversity [. . .] It’s when words start to go crazy . . . and no longer behave properly in regard to discourse that they have more rapport with the other arts [. . .] [artists] are in the process of letting themselves be constructed by words. (qtd. in Richter xvii)

In terms of Mantel’s memoir, Derrida’s suggestion here that words are analogous with “bodies that contain their own perversity” provides an interesting means of exploring the problematic relationship between language and the body. This paper will move to clarify these ideas through close re-reading of several extracts from A Room. First though, other aspects to this approach require introduction.

*Giving Up the Ghost* evokes an allegory of the hysterical women writer; moreover, by reducing the narrative to familiar allegorical elements, such as, hysteria, madness and self-diagnosis, the text masks the complexity of what Woolf might call its “seeming” (3) words. This textual operation is traceable in the following example from the memoir, which details Hilary’s encounter with a psychiatrist while studying law as an undergraduate.

Dr G came to see me. Well, and what was I doing with myself now that I was free from my struggles with my textbooks? I have written a story, I offered brightly [. . .] And what was it about? A changeling, I said. A woman who believes her baby has been taken away, and a story, I offered brightly [. . .] and when I did I sent it to Punch and what I got back was not a malediction but a cheque. The changeling too paid off, in time, in a novel published in 1985 [. . .] The novel contained mad people, but no one suggested its author was mad. It’s different, somehow, when you’ve received money for your efforts; once you’ve got an agent, and professionalised the whole thing. (Mantel, Giving Up 179-81)

Woolf was infamously forbidden to write during periods of illness because it was thought to “excite her” (Bell, “1917” D1: 39)—a fragment of her biography that this extract from Giving Up the Ghost cannot avoid alluding to. Moreover, the reduced initial of “Dr G” conveys the anonymity necessary for him to become an “everydoctor,” i.e. every male medical professional who has ever ordered a female patient not to write. “He put more energy into this statement than any I had heard him make” knowingly personalises this decision and undermines his professionalism. The connection to Woolf is also strengthened by the word “forbade,” which recurs in *In the Blood* when Mantel chastises Woolf’s obedience: “When Virginia Woolf’s doctors forbade her to write, she obeyed them.” Then there is the allusion to *A Room*, which concludes the quotation; the facetiousness of the professionalising of writing and the sanity implied “once you’ve got an agent” parallels Woolf’s line—“Money dignifies what is frivolous if unpaid for” (Woolf 60). Both *A Room* and *Giving Up the Ghost* explore the relationship between frivolity and excitement in writing and as writing in order to “explode” the madness diagnosis.

Thus, Mantel’s autobiographical projects both allude to and elide the mythology of Woolf’s biography; eliding her by dismissing Woolf personally as a “wuss” and thereby elevating Hilary as opposite and successor. Yet necessarily alluding to her as well through the suppressed Dr G character and across both *Giving Up the Ghost* and *In the Blood* via the preventative “forbade.” These contemporary examples of the autobiographical mode alongside the italicised framing texts of Woolf’s own published diaries illustrate the necessarily contradictory foundation of life writing and the “idiosyncrasies of the speaker” (4) as highlighted in *A Room*. Moreover, as Goldman emphasised in terms of *Between the Acts*, Woolf’s writing points rather than tells (2011) which is a characteristic of Mantel’s work too as the allusions of the previous quotation indicate. And this connection assists the introduction of ellipsis as potentially enabling such textual evasiveness in the writing of both these women.

*The ellipsis, as a gap representative of unknown excess, is unsettling and decentring.* In order to push the potential of this discomfort it is worth considering the ellipsis in relation to worry, a site of interest within the work of several contemporary women writers. This is most apparent in *Giving Up the Ghost* juxtaposed with recent memoirs of motherhood, which provide stark points of difference and surprising similarity to Mantel’s account of childlessness. In particular, Anne Enright’s *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood* (2004) marks worry as analogous to pregnancy:

To worry is to possess, contain, hold. It is the most tenacious of emotions. A worry—and a worryer—never lets go [. . .] Because worry has no narrative, it does not shift, or change. It has no resolution. That is what it is for—not ending, holding on. (Enright 178)

Worry here is suggestive of Derrida’s practice of troubling words or an aggressiveness that reads and re-reads the sentence until the nonverbal appears in the verbal. In homage to Goldman’s canine aesthetics, worrying a thing like a dog would until it releases something unexpected, or surprising. Prior to this quotation, Enright considers that the worried words (language) actually physically bolster the inside of the pregnant women (body)—“I think mothers worry more than fathers because worry keeps them pregnant” (178). The worry is also womb-like in that worry works “to possess, contain, hold” and the womb evokes the figure of the ellipse, the intersection of a cone by a plane, or the imperfect circle. This connection is further strengthened in terms of the elliptical patterns of menstruation (popularly accepted as cyclical yet

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2 Derrida’s essay “Ellipsis” plays with ellipsis as a symbol and ellipse as a mathematical figure. The plural of ellipse is a homophone with ellipsis. This paper endorses such play by refusing to clearly distinguish between the two terms.

3 Specifically, Rachel Cusk’s memoir of motherhood *A Life’s Work: On Becoming a Mother* (2001) and the fiction of Nicola Barker including *Wide Open* (1998), an exploration of paedophilia, and *Darkmans* (2007) the story of the haunting of a contemporary man by a medieval ghost; all examples of ‘worried’ texts.
defying the exactness this word implies) and necessarily the changing shape of the endometrium too. Although narrative for Enright constitutes a linearity that means narrative without resolution cannot be narrative, the line she evokes of “not ending, holding on” realises the imperfection of the ellipse, which does not follow the expected path yet can narrate. 

This combination of Derrida’s words “as bodies that contain their own perversity” alongside the allegory of the hysterical women writer in Mantel’s memoir and Enright’s worried words— together suggest an *invaginal* textual practice characterised as ellipsis. And this allows an interesting point of access to A Room, which re-reading this first extract will initiate:

But at second sight the words seemed not so simple. The title women and fiction might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, women and what they are like, or it might mean women and the fiction they write; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them, or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together and you want me to consider them in that light. But when I began to consider the subject in this last way, which seemed the most interesting, I soon saw that it had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to come to a conclusion. (AROO 3)

Woolf’s sentences here push “women” and “fiction” so hard that the meanings spiral, and, as is Derrida’s intention, the “words start to go crazy.” Moreover, as the second sentence lengthens and the punctuation changes, the meaning thickens and builds until the implications of “or it might mean [. . . ]” is so excessive that, as Goldman has argued, it bursts the full stop. The word “mean” occurs five times in this sentence alone, yet the word “meant” only once. Finally, not only does the dot, dot, dot figuratively represent this suggestion of the burst full stop (as will be explored shortly) but also the non-conclusive “I should never be able to come to a conclusion” is both an evasion that signifies more and an imperfect circle. These ideas crystallise through introducing the next extract:

Down comes her book upon our heads. There was a flaw in the centre of it. And I thought of all the women’s novels that lie scattered, like small pock-marked apples in an orchard, about the second-hand book shops of London. It was the flaw in the centre that had rotted them. (AROO 69)

Woolf is here criticising the distracted narrative of *Jane Eyre* in terms of Charlotte Brontë’s anger. However, the “pock-marked apples” also evoke the imagery of the ellipse or, more specifically, the displaced centre. Although “rotted” in this instance, as opposed to the thickening already explored, like the unexpected path of the ellipse or the [. . . ], it is “the flaw in the centre” that signifies possibility. In his essay entitled “Ellipsis” in *Writing and Difference*, Derrida writes: “Something is missing that would make the circle perfect” (373). It is this imperfection—the displaced rather than absent centre, the rottenness, or presence in absence, and the excised words removed yet alluded to—that facilitates play.

This thickening and bursting of meaning in the texts discussed, presented as a potentially *menstrual* waxing and waning in the abstract, have proved more indicative of elliptical excess in the paper. Importantly, A Room highlights the significance of the ellipse as both a textual symbol and a key: “For truth . . . those dots mark the spot where, in search of truth, I missed the turning up to Fernham” (AROO 14). This is revealing since the implied writer can only follow the ambitious opening words “For truth” with a hiatus. Moreover, in enacting the search for truth this fictional “I” is lost, and lost on route to a fictional place.

In conclusion, Mantel’s writing alludes to the hysterical woman writer as Woolf though in both *Giving Up the Ghost* and *Ink in the Blood* the texts also operate to displace her, so that her biography is folded back, or sheathed. Again in “Ellipsis,” Derrida writes: “Repeated, the same line is no longer exactly the same, the ring no longer has exactly the same center, the origin has played” (373). Woolf has been played, in every sense of the word, and, ironically though Woolf is known as a “setter of traps” (Goldman 2011) she has herself been set as trap in Mantel’s writing, a spectre for the reader to negotiate.

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**Works Cited**


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**FROM THE BOOK REVIEW EDITOR**

All publishers, authors and scholars should direct inquiries regarding books to Karen Levenback, the Book Review Editor, as should anyone interested in reviewing books for the *Miscellany*. Please direct queries to Karen Levenback at eilevenback@att.net.

**REVIEW**

*THE ESSAYS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF.*  
**VOLUME VI: 1933-1941, AND ADDITIONAL ESSAYS, 1906-1924**  

With this sixth and final volume, _The Essays of Virginia Woolf_, edited by Andrew McNeillie (volumes 1-4) and Stuart N. Clarke (volumes 5-6), rests complete. Gathering all known essays published by Woolf during her lifetime and by Leonard Woolf and others after her death, it is a landmark event in Woolf’s reception and cause for celebration by lovers of Woolf, the English essay, twentieth-century literature, and indeed literature. Gracing the Hogarth dust jackets, variously tinted adaptations of Vanessa Bell’s design for _The Second Common Reader_ lend a striking visual signature. We seem to see Virginia, featureless yet herself, reading in a wing chair, and to peer over her shoulder as she talks about the book...
open on her lap. In hundreds of essays, some unpublished during her lifetime, others published unsigned or signed as Virginia Stephen (1904-1912) or Virginia Woolf (from 1912), this most uncommon of common readers puts salt on the tails of her reflections on literature and life. A virtuoso of the essay (from French essayer, to try), she catches thought on the wing, whether she muses on books and their writers’ lives, times, works, locales, milieus, and doings; on the myriad stories that memoirs, letters, novels, histories, and paintings convey; on the wordsmith’s craft, the history of English, the unruly ways of elusive, ever-changing English words; on the Russian novel’s influence, the relation of fiction to history and biography, or the difference between reading Twelfth Night in a garden and seeing it performed. The essays parlay her natural curiosity, gift for words, and lifelong ardent reading, disciplined by a rare education as Leslie Stephen’s home-schooled daughter, into a voice that ranges like a moth over the fields, alighting now on not knowing Greek or not knowing French; now on the genres and media of English verbal art; now, on spectators, audiences, readers, and publics; again, on women and war, peace, writing, the professions; now on what makes Ellen Terry vanish into a character or forget her lines, whether authors too prolific should be taxed, or why Georgians don’t write better than Elizabethans.

Woolf and her readers have been lucky in the editors of her diary and letters, and McNeillie and Clarke sustain this high standard in the essays. Appearing twenty-five years after volume I, volume VI (as McNeillie forecast in volume IV) bears the weighty burden of correcting errors and omissions in the previous five. Not only does its annotated text present the thirty-five essays that Woolf published from 1933 until her death in late March, 1941, then; it also gathers up fifty-five essays of 1906-1924 that eluded earlier volumes. Four essays from 1933-1941 and thirty-five from 1906-1924 are reprinted for the first time. Six pieces unlisted or listed as untraced in the fourth edition (1997) of B. J. Kirkpatrick and Clarke’s magisterial Bibliography are now positively attributed. Of seven appendices, two pertain to 1933-1941: the first reprints variant versions of two essays; the last describes the journals in which the essays of this period appeared. The five appendices between hold material from this and earlier periods. Appendix II presents nineteen essays posthumously published by Leonard Woolf, including revised versions of essays Virginia had earlier published. The third holds six unfinished essays, beginning with “Friendships Gallery,” first edited and published by Ellen Hawkes in 1979, and concluding with “Anon” and “The Reader,” first edited and published by Brenda Silver in 1979. The fourth gathers the texts of Woolf’s three BBC broadcasts of 1927 (“Are Too Many Books Written and Published?”)—a provocative and entertaining debate with Leonard, their entire exchange published here, 1929 (“Beau Brummell”) instead of Dorothy Wordsworth” for the BBC’s “Potted Biographies,” both adapted for the Second Common Reader), and—despite her complaint that “At the last moment the BBC condemned Dorothy Wordsworth and made me castrate Brummell—never again”—1937: “Craftsmanship,” well known as the text of the only extant recording of Woolf’s resonant, expressive reading voice (617-18). The fifth appendix holds “Additions and Corrections to Volumes I-V,” including the full text of “Miss Ormerod,” published in the Dial in 1924 and in the American, but not the British, Common Reader; the sixth, a historical collation of editions of The Common Reader. Besides the apparatus for volume VI—editor’s introduction, editorial note, acknowledgments, abbreviations, introductory notes and annotations, brief bibliography, and index—there is a handy separate index to the essays in volumes I-VI. The editorial principles remain unchanged, and volume VI, like volume V (2009), follows the fourth edition of the Bibliography (volumes I-IV rely on the 1980 third edition).

Volume VI accomplishes its complex mission with aplomb and completes the Essays with stunning thoroughness and clarity. Sadly or not in our throwaway age, it is not as well-made a physical book as some might wish. The paper is lighter and the print kerned in the last two volumes, though the margins remain adequate and the page is still attractive. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich’s earlier hardcover volumes of the Essays are sewn, but Random House, owned by Bertelsmann AG, appears to be exporting the UK edition of V and VI largely unchanged except for a new copyright page, cover design and copy, and soft binding. The glued pages and acid paper that set the teeth of librarians, collectors, and book lovers on edge may at least have the merit of helping to keep the hardcover price down. But then why not produce a library-quality limited edition as well? In any case, as more readers migrate to cyberbooks the Essays will no doubt follow. Virginia herself joked to her fellow author and publishing partner Leonard that “one of the great drawbacks of books” is that they “last a lifetime. They take up space on our walls forever. They need dusting forever. How many times, after all, is one going to read the same book through? . . . Yet there they stand, unopened and, I am afraid, often undusted, month after month and year after year” (613). To mitigate this regrettable effect of the printing press, she proposed that first editions be designed to “crumble to a little heap of perfectly clean dust in about six months time,” with good paper and bindings reserved for a second edition if required (615). Were Virginia with us today, would she be reading—and publishing—on a Kindle?

For the present, readers can peruse the Essays with ease, and scholars will find the edition an indispensable resource. Clarke pulls details relating to the essays’ geneses and contexts not only from Woolf’s diaries, collected letters, and earlier editorial and critical work but also from letters and other documents recently found and published, and he cites recent bibliographic scholarship. He indicates by author and title some of the company the essays keep in the journal issues in which they appeared. He identifies the sources of virtually all of Woolf’s quotations; the few elusive ones he flags in the notes, which also detail Woolf’s transcription errors, e. g., “scopped” (22) for “scooped” (27 n.12). The text approaches perfection, an awesome achievement in a work of this scope and detail. Dante Alighieri twice loses an “ì”; Édouard Michelin loses an “o”; the Hogarth handpress is said to have been located in the Woolfs’ drawing room, not their dining room; but these are insignificant nano-slips. Only the treatment of “Miss Ormerod” raises a question. One of its sections having been accidentally displaced to the end in McNeillie’s volume IV, Clarke reprints the entire essay at the end of the “Additions and Corrections to Volumes I-V.” Since, for practical purposes, this correct text of the essay supersedes McNeillie’s, readers may wish that its annotations, both McNeillie’s in volume IV and Clarke’s in volume VI, had been consolidated and attached, along with Woolf’s note about its genesis (Diary 1:260; 30 March 1919). A word from Clarke, Kirkpatrick’s expert collaborator on the 1997 Bibliography, on the conventions and attribution of unsigned essays in the Editorial Note would also have been welcome.

But such quibbles pale beside the inexhaustible gift that McNeillie’s and Clarke’s meticulous scholarship has bestowed. Indeed, Woolf herself would have found the Essays a godsend of a resource for the ambitious project she conceived in 1930, pondered over her last decade, began sketching in “Anon” and “The Reader” (in some 100 manuscript and 161 typescript pages), and left unfinished at her death: a history of English literature “from Chaucer to Lawrence.” It would take her “twenty years, if I have them”—“a vast vista of intense and peaceful work” during which she would mine her essays and reading notebooks and transmute “English lit: as I’ve read it & noted it during the past twenty years” into “some kind of critical book” (580). What might this History of English Literature, to be called perhaps “Reading at Random” or “Turning the Page,” have looked like had she lived to complete it? In “Anon,” her long fascination with Shakespeare’s anonymity and his mysterious power to coin into words his contemporaries’ thoughts and feelings, never before spoken or known, deepens into a vision of successive phases of English, first as performed and heard, later as written or printed and read aloud to others or alone in silence. “The printing press brought the past into existence,” she writes; by Goldsmith’s time
“Everybody was turning reader” (584, 20-21). Together, the published essays and the brilliant draft sketches—which, in Silver’s edition, followed by Clarke, open with Trevelyan’s History of England—suggest that this culminating work by the twentieth century’s preeminent common reader would have interwoven aspects of England’s natural, social, political and economic history with the history of its language, verbal arts, and publics. Grounded in the essays yet an incalculable leap beyond them, this radical vision would require her “to invent a new critical method—something swifter & lighter & more colloquial & yet intense”: “The old problem: how to keep the flight of the mind, yet be exact” (xiv).

Woolf often bemoaned “the starved condition of criticism in our time” (44) and felt it “a sad thing for us common readers that we have no critic to keep us on the rails”; Dr Johnson and Matthew Arnold, after all, had not read Chekhov, Shaw, or Proust (549). But she had read (or would) Chekhov, Shaw, Proust and innumerable other writers, from Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides to her contemporaries and les jeunes—Auden, Spender, Isherwood, her nephew Julian Bell (“It still wants CURRENCY I think,” she advised him about one of his poems). And, although her real work, her novels, did not leave her time to write about them all, she herself was a born critic. A synergy of unsentimental intellect, creative imagination, and a practicing artist’s exacting knowledge and experience stamps the essays she did produce. Possessed of avid curiosity about life, language, and literature, a deep, clear-sighted power of comparison founded on a lifetime of reading, and an infallible ear for English akin to a musician’s perfect pitch, she enters the lists with the imperturbable courage of her convictions. To read Congreve—“sheer joy” (122 n1)—is to find oneself “at loggerheads with Dr Johnson’s dictum . . . that ‘the perusal of his works will make no man better’”: “On the contrary, to read Congreve’s plays is to be convinced that we may learn from them lessons much to our advantage both as writers of books and—if the division is possible—as livers of life” (117).

Is the division possible? Not for this fearless writer and common reader, crossing swords with the likes of Dr Johnson, spoiling for a fight over Scott, tilting at Percy Lubbock’s “doctrine” of literal form and delivering a mortal blow with a reading of Un Cœur Simple: “both in writing and in reading it is the emotion that must come first,” decides the future author of “Time Passes”; it is “false to imagine ‘that you can do this sort of thing consciously’” (427, 432 n14). Her two great subjects, life and literature, admit no division. It is this, perhaps, and the freedom of subject and tonal range it opens up, that set her apart from her contemporaries Eliot, Pound, and Joyce, uncommon critics all. Unlike Lawrence, she is “interested in literature as literature” (467), and she is also interested in life as life and lives as lives—“those canvases upon which we paint so many queer designs” (61). She writes about “Tchékhov on Pope,” Thomas Hardy, The Faerie Queene, Gibbon’s “dangerous” irony—and also about “Butterflies and Moths,” “Fishing” (a review of Jack Hill’s My Sporting Life), and (as it were) “Flying over London.” In a piece commissioned by the Picture Post (which apologetically rejected it while paying her the 25 guineas), she probes the British public’s mysterious fascination with royalty (“In France for example there are princes . . . whose blood is perhaps bluer than that of our own House of Windsor. But nobody cares to see them feeding pandas”) and speculates on whether this profound “desire . . . for something to dream about” might soon shift not (as in France) to religion but to science, mediated by photographic journalism in those very “picture papers” now “full of Dukes and Kings” (504-06). In “Women Must Weep,” rejected by “Three USA papers” but published at a tidy profit in the Atlantic Monthly, she streamlines Three Guineas for an American audience and revises its original pulsilanimous ending. Two early volumes of the Oxford-Yale Walpole edition—“the best letters in the language”—find an ideal reader in Woolf, who from this “fleeting glimpse” judges Walpole “the best company in the world” and foresees a fortunate “posterity” who will read this “magnificent work” entire (volume 48, the last, appeared in 1983) and only then say “what Horace Walpole really was” (177-78).

However one ranks Virginia Stephen Woolf against her contemporaries as a critic, no one communicates the exhilaration of reading better than she. The Essays establish her as, if not precisely the Dr Johnson or Matthew Arnold or Charles Lamb of her time (though one could easily argue such a claim), the adventurous explorer and experimental inventor of “a new criticism” (xiv) that beckons readers through the page and beyond—to life, to literature. More important, seventy years after she ceased to create them, they give her to us as a critic of our time, whose vibrant, alluring words amid “the present discordant and distracted twitter” (200) cannot help but keep real reading alive and literature green, “shading the landscape with its august laurel” (192).

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Bibliography


1 Butler, “Document: Woolf’s Letter to a Young Poet.” Thanks to Anne Fernald for bringing this letter to the attention of Woolf scholars.
than others) are accessible to the common reader. No doubt she would appreciate the sheer variety of interpretive methodologies deployed to illuminate and contextualize her writing in relation to the arts, including commendable attention to the aesthetic and historical cross-currents of her cultural moment. Pointing readers toward the interdisciplinary focus of the book, Humm notes that “Woolf was involved in many artistic issues: the tensions between literature and the other arts; the new arts of cinema and photography; cultural debates and events of her period; exhibits and artistic friendships; the role of gender in art; tensions of high and low cultures, and domestic and high modernisms; and, above all, the significance of ethical and personal experience in art” (1-2).

She explains that “the Companion’s twenty-six chapters examine the totality of Virginia Woolf’s relation to the arts, from childhood through her writings and career. . . . Indeed, this is the first time that a twentieth-century woman writer’s aesthetics have been addressed in such depth” (13).

The Companion is very well designed, beginning with its organization: encompassing nearly five hundred pages of text and illustrations, the chapters are pertinently grouped within six primary categories: Aesthetics; Paintings; Domestic Arts; Publishing, Broadcasting and Technology; Visual Media, and Performance Arts. An especially noteworthy feature of the book’s user-friendliness is that the endnotes, Works Cited, and a list of further readings appear at the end of each chapter rather than at the back of the book. In keeping with its multi-disciplinary focus and its respect for the non-verbal arts, the collection incorporates a substantial visual dimension, with 39 black-and-white figures—including photos of Woolf and of Monk’s House, stills from adaptations of her novels for the stage and from landmark films that she viewed, and other pertinent subjects—and sixteen color plates, including reproductions of a number of book jackets designed by Vanessa Bell for Woolf’s books.

In a review of this length, it is impossible to do justice to the wealth of new insights or even to comment on all chapters; selected highlights must suffice. Several chapters revisit and update ideas or approaches that may be familiar to Woolf scholars through their authors’ previous publications: the groundbreaking interdisciplinary work of Diane Gillespie on Woolf and the visual arts and Pamela Caughie on Woolf in the age of mechanical reproduction; Jane Goldman on the visual dimension of Woolf’s modernist aesthetics; Laura Marcus on the Hogarth Press; Evelyn Haller on dance and performance; and updates by Brenda Silver to her work on Woolf as cultural icon. (Silver shares the astonishing fact that a recent Google search for “Virginia Woolf” produced “more than 3,500,000 hits” [413].)

Other chapters feature refreshingly less-familiar areas of consideration by scholars working in related fields whose specialties intersect with Woolf scholarship: Victoria Rossner explores Virginia and Leonard’s repeated transformations of Monk’s House; Jane Garrity analyzes Woolf’s complex responses to clothing and fashion; and Tony Bradshaw illuminates Woolf’s involvement with book design.

In the first section of the Companion, six chapters address aspects of Woolf’s aesthetics, including Victorian, Modernist, Bloomsbury, Performing Race, City, and Realist. Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina’s analysis of Woolf “performing race” and Vera S. Neverow’s appreciative exploration of Woolf’s city aesthetics are especially noteworthy. Gerzina proposes that, prior to and during Woolf’s time, “the performing of race was a ‘natural’ and pervasive part of the London scene” (77) through staged minstrelsy and other racially-inflected performances. Concentrating on Woolf’s unique relation to that aspect of cultural expression, she notes both the representations of people of color in The Voyage Out and Orlando and Woolf’s own cross-gendered “racialised guise” (77) as a black man in the celebrated Dreadnought Hoax.

Neverow, focusing on city aesthetics, celebrates Woolf’s multifaceted adoration of London, ranging from the “multi-media word collage” of the city (89) in Jacob’s Room and the “cubist style” by means of which it is depicted in Mrs. Dalloway (89) to frequent references elsewhere in Woolf’s fiction to its history and seasons as well as to consumer culture, flâneurs, and modes of transportation—trains, buses, the Underground. The only areas of London missing from Neverow’s laudable survey are its gardens.

However, Nuala Hancock effectively addresses that subject from another perspective. Although Virginia was not a gardener—that hobby fell to Leonard, who pursued it avidly—gardens figure in her life and writing as suggestive emotional spaces. Hancock proposes that Woolf’s relationship to gardens may be a nostalgic one, regarded through the two significant and complementary spaces and central figures of her childhood: the “elegiac gardens” of Talland House, associated with Julia Stephen; and the “historic terrains” of London’s Kensington Gardens, located not far from 22 Hyde Park Gate, associated with Leslie Stephen. “These two childhood gardens—one private and rural, one public and urban—one saturated with memories of her mother, the other pulsing with the energy of her father—deeply informed . . . Woolf’s idea of garden” (249).

In the same section on Woolf and the Domestic Arts, Victoria Rossner proposes that the sixteen or more substantial “modernisations” of Monk’s House between 1919 and 1940 may be read as the material dimension of Woolf’s evolving Modernism during the same decades. Virginia and Leonard’s continuous “reshaping” of their home “suggests a project that could never have been completed. The Woolfs’ domestic space was permanently provisional, ever-adapting to the needs of its owners” (192). In “Virginia Woolf and Fashion,” Jane Garrity ponders the “complex associations between clothing, shame, and rapture” (195), particularly as expressed in “A Sketch of the Past.” Clothing and fashion, first associated with painful memories of childhood violation, later came to function for Woolf as “an effective and stylish tool of rebellion against the rules and observations that governed taste in the Victorian Age” (200). Other chapters in the section on domestic arts address Woolf’s relation to Bohemian lifestyles and entertaining.

Inevitably, there is some overlap among essays; some redundancy appears in the section entitled Paintings, in which three different chapters—Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, and painting; Art Galleries and Museums; and Portraiture—converge on several of the same visual objects and events in Woolf’s life. In “Virginia Woolf, Art Galleries and Museums,” Benjamin Harvey observes that “Woolf’s relationship to art galleries and museums was . . . remarkably rich, varied, and layered. She visited these spaces as someone interested in art, as a writer of criticism and fiction, as a friend and relative of artists, and as someone who could even expect, every now and then, to find her own likeness before her” (157).

The Companion’s sections on Publishing, Broadcasting and Technology (encompassing chapters on the Hogarth Press; book design; scrapbooking; journalism; and radio, gramophone, and broadcasting) and Visual Media (chapters on film, photography, and the transformation of Woolf into cultural “icon”) explore the important influences on Woolf—and vice versa—of popular media, several of which were in their own infancy during the writer’s formative and later years. Leslie Hankins’ essay on film is a standout, not only for its vignettes of Woolf’s multiple relations to cinema but for her witty imitation of the opening paragraph of A Room of One’s Own and her striking creation of Judith Shakespeare’s cineaste counterpart, Judith Chaplin. Among the noteworthy examples of “buried treasure” that Hankins found by examining Woolf’s holograph drafts of “The Cinema” and Three Guineas is her discovery that “Woolf originally penned her blast against film adaptation [‘The Cinema’] about the character of Becky Sharp from Vanity Fair, not Anna Karenina,” substituting the heroine of the silent film, Anna Karenina, in a later draft of the essay (353).

The final section of the Companion, Performance Arts, addresses Woolf’s relation to music, theater, and ballet. Steven Putzel offers a table of adaptations of Woolf’s novels to the stage—six dramatizations
of The Waves between 1990-2006 and ten of Orlando between 1977-2008—and observes that directors have only recently accomplished satisfying adaptations of Woolf’s interior narratives through application of innovations in visual and sound media.

The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts is ambitious, comprehensive, and intellectually suggestive—sufficiently so in each of these contexts that it will be an indispensable resource for scholars, serious students, and common readers of Woolf and the arts for some years to come. Most readers are likely to seek out specific chapters that dovetail with their own interests rather than reading the book from cover to cover. Although even selective browsing will enhance one’s understanding of the multiple aesthetic forms and historical developments that influenced the artistry of Woolf’s fiction, I recommend the latter approach, which illuminates the author’s complex and profound aesthetic engagement with visual, technological, domestic, and performance arts. An invaluable addition to every personal Woolf library, the Companion will likely not benefit from widespread private purchase. Regrettably but unavoidably, a book of this scope, with its extensive contents and generous number of visual illustrations, is expensive to produce; its cost (list price: $225.00) is likely to place it out of reach of many of its intended readers. If that is the case, urge your library to acquire a copy soon.

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Review
Virginia Woolf, Modernity and History: Constellations with Walter Benjamin

Virginia Woolf and Walter Benjamin intrigue twenty-first-century critics and thinkers, partly, I would argue, because both stimulate the intellectual imagination with their delight in figurative language and multiple meanings. Rather than codifying, they debunk the systematic apparatus of much of conceptual thought and startle us into new ways of thinking. Readers find Benjamin compelling, not so much for his coherent systems of thought (though I do not deny that such may exist), but because of something quite different. His witty profundity in the title, “Paris, capital of the 19th century,” comes to mind; it is not enthralling because it gestures toward a totalizing system of thought, but because such modernist koans stimulate the mind to re-conceive thought. Though Woolf’s techniques differ (using hypothetical figures and rhetorical seduction for example), she also derailed the cliché, the hackneyed. Both Woolf and Benjamin lob disruptive word play towards cultural fault lines, producing explosions that light things up anew.

It is both thrilling and daunting to bring these two together. Thrilling, because the collisions or constellations inspire us to think and re-think the usual subjects (in this case, history) and daunting, because Woolf and Benjamin are both so wildly idiosyncratic that any attempt to devise a comprehensive system of parallels is fraught. Angeliki Spiropoulou tackles the ambitious project of reading Woolf’s works in constellation with the ideas of Walter Benjamin, and it is a project that the academic world can use productively. It manages—often successfully—to capture the visionary impulses of Woolf and Benjamin without reducing them to clones with parallel systems of thought. Chapters offer constellations of Benjamin’s concepts and Woolf’s novels: Jacob’s Room, The Years, Orlando and Between the Acts—chapters that offer fresh slants on Woolf’s novels through the lens of Benjamin, and provide tantalizing ways to probe theories of history.

The project of bringing Woolf and Benjamin together poses significant challenges, some of which Spiropoulou meets more effectively than others. Readers hoping to reduce the tantalizing resonances between their ideas of history to a systematic set of parallels will be thwarted by this book. But, that is not necessarily a bad thing. Surely, any such attempt is not only doomed, but misguided, because it would miss the potential of these two unique minds. As ecletic, idiosyncratic thinkers, Woolf and Benjamin arrest our attention not by the systematic scaffolding of their thought, but by their dazzling leaps to insights and provocative turns of phrase that impplode the usual thought systems. Any attempt to relate Woolf and Benjamin thus requires delicate handling. How can one bring these two outsiders into constellations without Procrustean mangling? Recognizing as she does their “final incommensurability,” Spiropoulou alerts the reader, “what is attempted here is not so much a full comparison of the two writers as the drawing of parallels, creating ‘constellations’ between their apparently incongruous lines of thought and vocabularies, which developed at around the same time, so that new insights might emerge” (3). Her Introduction also claims to avoid the pitfall of assigning causality: “this book draws together the work of Woolf and Benjamin not on the basis or with the view of establishing causal relations between them, but rather in order to highlight certain tensions and philosophical problems concerning modernity and history which are inscribed in Woolf’s writings by ‘constellating’ them with Benjamin’s nodal work in these areas” (4). However, readers may find themselves more clear about what the author wants to avoid than about the methodology she chooses. Reading Spiropoulou’s book looking for stimulation rather than a cohesive ideological package proves most fruitful. Those chapters, particularly 7 and 8, in which she approaches Woolf’s arguably most fragmentary works: Between the Acts and the unfinished “Anon” and “A Reader” may be most successful because they escape the totalizing impulse that haunts early chapters which attempt to set up paradigms.

The book is ambitious, but flawed. A serious gap is in the Introduction, which seems a bit thin. In it, Spiropoulou misses the opportunity to situate her scholarship within the deep, rich half century of Woolf scholarship relevant to her project. In a statement that elides over forty years of scholarship, leaping from the well-worn Woolf-bashing in Scrutiny to a 1997 book by Rachel Bowlby as if no cultural scholarship had occurred betwixt them, Spiropoulou asserts, “Although Woolf’s work and life has been the subject of endlessly ongoing research, it was not until recently that contemporary criticism turned to examining her writings in connection to wider cultural issues and conceptual categories” (4). This smacks of scholarly amnesia: a vast number of critics such as Jane Marcus dramatically reclaimed Woolf as a social activist in the 1980s and, especially in academic work in America, massive archives of scholarly work belies Spiropoulou’s odd oversights in the Introduction. References to Woolf studies in the Introduction tend to be recent overviews, such as the Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf, or Rachel Bowlby’s Virginia Woolf. Directly relevant to this project, Jane Marcus made the initial connection between Woolf and Benjamin in her 1988 scholarship, but you will only find a reference to this in a footnote on page 182 of Spiropoulou’s book. Fortunately, Woolf scholarship has a much more significant presence in the later chapters and the Bibliography, but grounding in Woolf scholarship in the Introduction and in the overview of her project would enrich her project in crucial ways. A book that purports to add to Woolf studies might more fully engage with that field in its conceptual frame.

The value of scholarship is not only to note where it has been, but also where it leads us, and I trust this book will lead to more studies of Woolf and Benjamin. In Virginia Woolf, Modernity and History, we get a sense of how an awareness of Benjamin can enhance our reading of
Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature

While Christina Alt’s title, Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature, seems broad, her focus is not. The author recognizes the previous contributions of authors whose work analyzed Woolf’s connections with scientific trends. These include Gillian Beer’s challenge to the view that Woolf was uninformed and uninterested in science, Michael H. Whitworth’s and Holly Henry’s examinations of Woolf’s interest in physics and astronomy as reflected in popular science writing, Elizabeth G. Lambert’s analysis of Woolf’s application of Darwinism to her own writing, and Craig Gordon’s examples of how Woolf borrowed language and concepts from the biomedical sciences. Alt, however, takes a different tack. She focuses on a single angle, one that places Woolf’s novels and essays within a scientific framework that Alt argues “adds rigour and specificity to the understanding of Woolf’s nature imagery” by seeing it as more than symbolic (5). In doing so, Alt moves beyond the oft-explored cultural influence of evolutionary theory. The scientific framework Alt investigates is that of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century nature study as it developed from a taxonomic tradition to the emerging disciplines of ethology, the study of animal behavior, and ecology, the study of the interrelationship among organisms and between organisms and their environment. Alt argues that Woolf’s lifelong familiarity with the work of contemporary nature and science writers influenced her fiction and non-fiction alike. And she recommends that we read Woolf in relationship to late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century scientific trends, trends that Alt expertly documents in her book.

Alt explains the taxonomic natural history tradition as a scientific discipline and popular nineteenth-century pastime. In the process, she documents Woolf’s early interest in nature study, her family’s support of that interest, and her youthful adherence to the mid-century, pre-Darwinian taxonomic tradition. She details Woolf’s exposure to the entomological works of the Reverend F. O. Morris and other classic natural history texts, as well as her adoption of brother Thoby’s interest in collecting and identifying butterfly and moth specimens. She also mentions Woolf’s simultaneous interest in The Natural History of Selbourne by English parson-naturalist Gilbert White, who at the end of the eighteenth century was ahead of his time in his behavioral approach to nature. Unlike other naturalists of his day, White was more interested in documenting animal behavior depending upon the season, the locality, and the environment than immersing himself in the taxonomic tradition. Despite his unusual perspective—and Woolf’s appreciation of his writing—Alt chooses not to credit White as being a serious early influence on Woolf’s changing views about nature study as she left static mid-Victorian methods behind and gravitated towards the modern.

When Alt moves on to consider laboratory biology, ethology, and ecology, the new scientific methods that arose to challenge the taxonomic tradition, she provides a thorough overview of the natural history writers and theories that influenced Woolf. She lists the nature writers, scientists, and popular writers that Woolf mentions or alludes to in her fiction, along with those with which she was familiar. These include Darwin, T. H. Huxley, Gregor Mendel, Richard Jeffries, Jean-Henri Fabre, and W. H. Hudson. Alt provides a detailed analysis of the theories underlying the modern natural history movement, including British challenges and religious resistance to the theory of evolution, the emergence of the animal protection movement, and the influence of psychoanalytic interpretations of the impulse to collect, an impulse thought to underlie the taxonomic tradition. Alt also makes the point that the debates surrounding theories of natural history influenced Woolf’s thinking and writing throughout her adult life, allowing her to employ an expert observational approach to nature.

Alt then provides analysis of how these themes play out in Woolf’s novels and essays. Woolf, Alt says, used the developments in the life sciences—from a tradition of collecting, naming, and arranging specimens in a system to one of observing and appreciating other life forms—as analogies in her writing. For Woolf, the taxonomic tradition of natural history is concerned with fact, order, and hierarchy. It asserts authority and control over the natural world and is imperial in nature. Alt says Woolf used collecting and categorizing nature as an analogy for the limiting and reductive social and literary conventions of her time. Like Woolf and her siblings, Jacob Flanders and the Ramsay children engage in the study of natural history by searching for, collecting, and naming specimens. According to Alt, not only does Woolf associate this process with the social constraints of a Victorian childhood, she also connects it to the British training in military violence and the British practice of imperialism. For Woolf, the process of naming something also controls it, isolates it, and restricts its identity. Alt explains how Woolf uses this analogy in The Waves. Early in the novel, Louis experiences unity with the natural world until he is approached by his friends. They carry butterfly nets and shout his name, which Louis sees as a threat to his individuality and his connection with the natural world.

Alt argues that Woolf’s well-known criticisms of science in Three Guineas reflect her knowledge and interest in the subject, rather than her wholesale rejection of it. In fact, Alt maintains that Woolf sees impartial scientific thinking as superior because it is androgynous and non-binary. As proof, Alt says Woolf presents characters that follow modern scientific methods in a positive light. These characters range from what Alt calls the “new naturalists”—Ralph Denham in Night and Day, Eleanor Pargiter in The Years, and Lucy Swithin in Between the Acts—to William Bankes in To the Lighthouse and to imaginary lab partners Chloe and Olivia in A Room of One’s Own. One criticism I have is that when discussing the novels, Alt sometimes neglects to provide quotations and examples that illustrate the claims she makes. Another is that when she discusses the similarities and differences between the fictional author Mary Carmichael’s Life’s Adventures in A Room of One’s Own and the actual author Marie Carmichael’s Love’s Creation, she provides far more exposition of Love’s Creation than is necessary. On the other hand, Alt does a credible job of illustrating Woolf’s use of analogies of collection and taxonomy in her essays, polemics, and novels as criticisms of the writing process. And, as already stated, she provides an expert discussion of the main methods for natural history inquiry from the late nineteenth through the early twentieth century.

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is here that Moffat’s excellent contribution is most apparent. Particularly astute are her depictions of the inseparability of Cavafy’s, Britten’s and Pears’s sexuality from their creative work, proving this to be an inspiration to Forster.

The necessarily underground life of “London’s gay scene” (Moffat 196-213) in the superb chapter mischievously entitled “Toms and Dicks” comes to marvelous life, chronicling the fervent love-making, anonymous sex and the juggling of bodies vying for bed space that in Forster’s case would occasionally “descend into farce” (211). Circling around J. R. Ackerley’s rooms at Hammersmith House were Ackerley’s and Forster’s sometime-lover, London policeman Harry Daley; Reg Palmer; Ackerley’s numerous men; J. H. Sprott and one of his lovers, Charles Lovett, whom he had “picked up in a public toilet” (201). Forster loved “the spirit of the place, which he slyly labeled ‘Erection Howze’” (207). Although Moffat believes that Virginia Woolf failed to see through E. M. Forster’s disguise in those years (213), in fact, Woolf, Duncan Grant, Lytton Strachey and Leonard Woolf compared these intertwined gay relations unfavorably to their own circle: Woolf, in her diary, “liken[ed]” Forster’s “Bugger Crew” to a “male urinal” (DS 6). Claiming sympathy, Woolf misread Forster’s joy in his “eighteen” sexual partners of the 1920s (Moffat 212).

This blazing forth of happiness is apparent, too, in Forster’s network of gay America on his trips there (one with Bob Buckingham) in the 1940s. Moffat’s distillation of complex character creates gems of insight, bringing to life, among others, the painters Paul Cadmus, Jerry French, Glenway Wescott and Wescott’s lovers, George Lynes and Monroe Wheeler. George Lynes’s photograph of Forster and Buckingham (numbered eight of those photos between pages 186-87) captures Forster’s serene self-acceptance, which was nurthured by this unashamed life. Forster’s settled integration into Bob and May Buckingham’s marriage attests to what he said he wanted, a “stable” kind of gay marriage (238), but his ebullient joy in promiscuous travel “flings” (212) and brief couplings rounds out a fuller picture. Hence, when Moffat notes that Forster’s sexuality burst forth in what became fifty years of posthumous gay fiction (7-9), the reader must acknowledge that, beneath his disguise (11), Forster lived a fulfilled life.

Just as Moffat refuses to psychoanalyze Forster’s relationship with his possessive mother, she refrain from theorizing Forster’s lifelong pattern of preferring working class men and men of color, although she does admit some troubling implications (209-11). She reports Forster’s own interrogation of his sexual behaviors: “With a clinical eye Forster watched his own complicity in the privileges of class and race” (184). Forster early acknowledged that, “I want to love a strong young man of the lower classes and be loved by him and even hurt by him” (Martin and Piggford 14). For a more closely theorized exploration of the problematic of Forster’s sexual choices, Queer Forster, edited by Robert K. Martin and George Piggford, deftly interrogates the submerged discourse of class, race, colonial power and desire in Forster’s published and posthumous fiction. By implication, these essays succinctly link to his life Forster’s fictional representation of “the racial and sexual other as ‘other,’ while it attempts not to participate in the fundamentalist imperial (literary) colonial appropriation” (Martin and Piggford 226).

Moffat suggests that Lily W. Forster, Forster’s mother, was a woman whose timidity reflected her own stultified upbringing, providing a convenient scapegoat for Forster’s fears (Moffat 17). Forster lived with his mother all her life, when not living abroad or in his rooms at King’s College Cambridge, writing to her frequently, but never acknowledging his sexuality or his hidden homosexual fiction. In addition to Forster’s use of Lily as his shield, Moffat historicizes what critics term his cowardice, arguing that the threat of shame and public exposure were very real, as entrapment and punishment of gay men only increased after the 1967 laws decriminalized some homosexual activity (305-12). Hence, the posthumously published novel Maurice, continuously revised...
throughout Forster’s life, served as a secret invitation to friendship, rather than the pioneering fictional breakthrough it might once have been.

Forthrightly, Moffat confronts Forster’s “categorical misogyny” (200). Virginia Woolf understood that the “homosocial elite” men who comprised her network had privileges denied to women, and she acknowledged her envy of Morgan’s eminence (Marcus 76; D5 130). “My hand trembles,” Woolf wrote in her diary from her rage recording their encounter on the steps of the London Library. The Board had discussed inviting her to join them. Forster’s reluctance called to mind her father’s contempt for the widow Greene, who had served during Sir Leslie Stephen’s presidency of the London Library (D4 297n6). She had challenged her father, asking “[b]ut havent [sic] ladies improved?” to which he replied, “No, no, no, ladies are quite impossible” (D4 297). Freighted with the past, Forster’s almost-invitation so infuriated Woolf that for some hours, she rehearsed an imaginary rebuff while in her bath. However, the concluding sentence to this passage reflects her honest admission of her mixed feelings: “God damn Morgan for thinking I’d have taken that[,] . . . And dear old Morgan comes to tea today” (D4 298).

Lest anyone doubt Forster’s condescending, consider his dismissal in his Rede Lecture of Woolf’s feminism ideas, remarking: “There are spots of it all over her work, and it was constantly in her mind” (32), depicting her views as a kind of acorn marring the surface of her work.

Further, even though he joined the protest in support of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, Forster admitted to Leonard and Virginia Woolf that he found lesbians “dissgusting” because they did not need men (Moffat 216-17). Working for the Red Cross in his position looking for soldiers missing in action, Forster was supervised in Egypt by Miss Gordon Duff, whom he resented and mocked (125). Moffat balances Forster’s implacable responses to women by reminding readers that his closest friend in his early years of self-acceptance was female, the forward-thinking Florence Barger (91). Moffat’s empathic recreation of Forster’s struggle with intractable heterosexual fictional plots and his suppression of much of his fiction highlight Virginia Woolf’s writing practices as another cultural outsider. Indeed, it is Moffat’s nuanced representation of Forster’s complex emotional contradictions that underpins her astute and compassionate “new life,” essential reading for all who wish to understand E. M. Forster’s “unrecorded history hidden in plain sight” (279).

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**Works Cited**


**REVIEW**

*A Room of Their Own: Bloomsbury Artists in American Collections*

Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, Nancy E. Green, Benjamin Harvey, Mark Hussey and Christopher Reed. Ed. Nancy E. Green and Christopher Reed. Ithaca: Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art Cornell University, 2008. Illus. color and b&w. 271 pp. $35.00 cloth.

*A Room of Their Own: Bloomsbury Artists in American Collections* includes not just a rich trove of articles, which I will discuss below, but images in full color of all of the works displayed in the entire exhibit (pages 120-270). Any image that was not exhibited at every one of the museums carries an additional caption indicating the location(s) where it was on view (all but four of the works were exhibited at Cornell University’s Howard F. Johnson Museum in Ithaca, New York, the second location, and most of them were also displayed at the fifth location—Smith College Museum in Northampton, Massachusetts).

Further, the excellent individual essays are strewn with remarkable photographs and images of art works not included in the exhibit itself. For anyone who visited an iteration of the exhibit, this book is a treasure trove of memories, and for anyone interested in things Bloomsbury, the book is a treasure trove of scholarship that is both readily accessible to the general reader and yet invaluable to the Woolfian community. I was fortunate enough able to visit both the Johnson Museum and the Smith College versions of this traveling Bloomsbury exhibit—and both were gorgeous. The exhibits were quite different from each other, in part because installations and the physical spaces of the museums were so dissimilar and in part because access to auxiliary works from the local collections varied somewhat from museum to museum as noted above.

This most recent robust and impressively extensive Bloomsbury project comes ten years after the amazing *Art of Bloomsbury* exhibit, curated by Richard Shone. Launched first at the Tate Gallery in London in 1999, it then moved to the Huntington in San Marino, California in early 2000. Its final destination was the Center for British Art at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut where it was on display from May 20 to September 2, 2000. At the time, Hilton Kramer, in his inimitably caustic style, wrote of the exhibit in an article contemptuously titled “Bloomsbury Show a Bust, Made of Minor Artists”:

> We have been made to wait a long time—almost a century—for the visual art produced by the Bloomsbury Group in England to be given a comprehensive exhibition of its pictorial accomplishments. Now that a show called *The Art of Bloomsbury* has at last been mounted on a major scale—it currently occupies two spacious floors of the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven—we can better understand why it had never been done before. We can also understand why it is unlikely that it will ever need to be done again.

One gives thanks that he was wrong. Yet, while the 1999-2000 *Art of Bloomsbury* exhibit was poo-pooed by much of the art world at the time, the most recent exhibit seems not to have been extensively reviewed at all. Thus, one of the few commentaries on the “A Room of Their Own” exhibits I have been able to locate is Akiko Busch’s online review, “The Bloomsbury Aesthetic: Sick of Virginia Woolf? A New Exhibit May Change Your Mind,” available both on the

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1 The other exhibits were as follows: the first was at Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina; the third was at the Mills College for Art Museum in Oakland, California; the fourth was at the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois; the sixth and last was at the Palmer Museum of Art at Pennsylvania State University in University Park, Pennsylvania. These four were, alas, too far away for me to visit, though I did fantasize about travelling to see them.

2 Teaching at the other university in New Haven (that would be Southern Connecticut State), I was able to offer a summer class in 2001 based on the exhibition and visited the Yale Center for British Art so many times that I had practically memorized the works on display.
In her article, “From Little Holland House to Charleston: Bloomsbury’s Victorian Inheritance,” Green provides the substantive and often fresh historical context for the Bloomsberries’ aesthetic origins, inspirations, rebellions and re-envisionings mapped in her title. Briefly examining the individual lives of various key Bloomsbury figures, and focusing initially on Roger Fry, she combines narratives familiar to the typical Woolf reader with those much less commonplace, especially with regard to figures who do not ordinarily impinge on Woolfian scholarship— for instance, her passing references to C. R. Ashbee and Lisa Stillman suggest new directions of inquiry. Particularly striking are the rich illustrations Green provides in a volume already dense with images. While some are benchmarks of Bloomsbury imagery, others are quite unfamiliar. The de rigueur images include Edward Burne-Jones’s painting of The Annunciation for which Julia Prinsep Stephen posed (27 fig. 12) while pregnant with Vanessa (see Hussey 267) and various photos: Vanessa (31 fig. 19) and Virginia Stephen (31 fig. 20) as girls; young Virginia with Leslie Stephen (28 fig. 13); Duncan Grant circa 1910 (37 fig. 24). These are interspersed with Roger Fry’s 1894 portrait of Edward Carpenter (21 fig. 5); an 1895 photograph of Helen Coombe, Fry’s future wife (22 fig. 6), images of artworks such as Helen Fry’s Design for the Green Harpsichord (1896) (24 fig. 8), and Fry’s “Magpie and Stump,” described in the caption as “the drawing-room fireplace with design . . . reproduced in The Studio, 1895, vol. V, page 68” (25 fig. 9). Green reminds the reader toward the end of the essay that, “Despite their professed disdain for Victorianism, the ‘Bloomsberries’. . . were intricately knit with the previous generation . . . [and] retained much that they insisted they had forswn” (40).

Mark Hussey’s “Virginia Woolf in America” brings into focus Woolf’s Anglo-vs.-American reception by referencing Leslie Stephen’s links to the U.S. and Woolf’s own commentary on American culture. He then aligns the familiar issues of class, snobbery, and elitism with the standard caricature Woolf as the “Invalid Lady of Bloom” (Bell and Ommann 361) with Woolf’s immeasurable influence on Second Wave (white) liberal and radical American feminisms in the 1970s. Hussey highlights various key moments in the evolution of Woolf’s influence, referencing examples of British class-based aversion such as the negative views of F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis. He also quotes Leonard Woolf’s perception that: “if [Virginia’s] MSS went to Cambridge or Oxford, they would be stuffed away somewhere and no one would ever look at them . . . then except that one would be shown from time to time to the public under a glass case” (49). Hussey also draws attention to the skirmishes between American scholars and the British intellectual establishment, quoting Jane Marcus’s response to “a London Times article mocking the vulgarity of American readers and critics for the tastelessness of an interest in Virginia Woolf”” (52). Toward the end of the article, Hussey alludes to the era of Michael Cunningham’s The Hours and Stephen Daldry’s cinematic version of the novel. He concludes with a list of recent American book titles that pay homage to Virginia Woolf and the assertion: “Woolf wrote in her diary on April 13, 1930 . . . ‘Shakespeare surpasses literature[,]’ [and] Americans have long felt the same way about her” (55).

“Only Collect: Bloomsbury Art in North America,” the essay by Christopher Reed, also explores the disconnect between Britain and America, but on a very different level. As he notes, in America, interest in Bloomsbury was primarily “text-based” (58), emphasizing such

3 See also the photograph of the harpsichord itself (23 fig. 7) and further references to the work on 39-40.

4 Though Hussey does not quote the passage, those of us in the world of Woolf can hardly forget Q. D.’s infamous review of Three Guineas, “Caterpillars of the Commonwealth Unitel,” where she notoriously remarks, “There is every reason to suppose Mrs Woolf would hardly know which end of the cradle to stir” (210), in response to Woolf’s statement: “the daughters of educated men have always done their thinking from hand to mouth; not under green lamps at study tables in the cloisters of secluded colleges. They have thought while they stirred the pot, while they rocked the cradle” (77).
written work as that of Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, and E. M. Forster rather than the visual arts.

Reed’s focus is on the American collectors themselves. While the previous articles cover biographical, historical and cultural material that may be familiar to most Woolfians, Reed’s angle of investigation relies on primary sources that have not previously been available. As he comments in an endnote: “I have drawn on written records (augmented by a few oral anecdotes) to understand the generation of Bloomsbury collectors active between the 1950s and 1970s. Interviews conducted between 2005 and 2008 form the basis of my account of the motivations and experiences of Americans who collected Bloomsbury art in the 1980s and after” (84). As he comments, “American interest in collecting Bloomsbury art arose outside the institutions of art history” (62). He discusses the various rationales for the early-adopter collectors, all of whom are academics: Charles Richard Sanders, an English professor at Duke University; Sanders’ daughter Nancy and her husband, the Duke economist Craufurd Goodwin (author of *Art and the Market: Roger Fry on Commerce in Art* [1999]); and Philip Reiff, the University of Chicago sociologist, who “married the very young Susan Sontag, . . . one of his students” (65).

Shifting gears, Reed then discusses the more overtly gendered motives for Bloombury-ing: Among them was Carolyn Heilbrun. Reed quotes Heilbrun’s comments on a classroom setting where she encountered: “A very bright young Englishman [who] accused all [Bloomsberries] of being shrill, arty, escapist, aristocratic, and insufficien[tly] talented[,] . . . he finally attacked them, with passion for being, many of them, homosexual” (66-67). Mary Ann Caws also collected Bloomsbury works, including several drawings by Grant and *Begonias* by Dora Carrington (cat. 39). Others of this ilk whom Reed mentions include Mona Pierpaoli, Wendy Gimbel, Susan Chaires, and Patricia Oresman. Lila Acheson Wallace, cofounder of the *Reader’s Digest* also collected Bloomsbury artwork and, after her death, her endowment “became the major benefactor of the restoration of the gardens” (71).

Reed also identifies gay men as a specific group of Bloomsbury art collectors (the section has multiple illustrations to support the commentary). These collectors include Douglas Turnbaugh, who was introduced to Grant in the late 1970s when Grant was living with Paul Roche. Grant gave Turnbaugh the key to his studio in London and directed Turnbaugh to view a collection of Grant’s erotic drawings located “under the bed” (73); Turnbaugh eventually published these works as *Private: The Erotic Art of Duncan Grant* in 1989. Other gay male collectors mentioned are Rick Purvis, Dean Malone and Mitch Bobkin, all of whom experienced Grant’s work as a “sense of freedom associated with casting off Victorian strictures” (75). As Reed emphasizes, many of these American Bloomsbury collectors developed a very real connection to Bloomsbury because they had met Frances Partridge or Duncan Grant or others close to the Bloomsbury Group. Reed quotes Peter Stansky’s observation that Noel Annan was “amused that someone would want to study Bloomsbury because, for people at King’s [College] they were friends, not an academic subject” (78). The final pages of Reed’s essay are strewn with the personal comments of American collectors. Their voices bring the sense of Bloomsbury home in remarkable ways.

The final article, ‘Lightness Visible: An Appreciation of Bloomsbury’s Books and Blocks,” by Benjamin Harvey, is heavily illustrated with the woodcut prints that are his focal point. Harvey explores the aesthetics of this particular art form in depth, discussing Roger Fry’s views on the form, as well as various techniques used in creating woodcut designs, and specific works of various artists including Edward McKnight Kauffer as well as Carrington, and, of course, Vanessa Bell. In his commentary on Bell’s woodcuts for Virginia Woolf’s works, Harvey notes (referring back an to earlier discussion of Bell’s broadside for Woolf’s “The Mark on the Wall”): “Instead of replicating Woolf’s verbal imagery, Bell contributes to and extends the author’s task, this thinking about wood.” Harvey also touches on the “potential antagonism between author and illustrator” (95). Further, he examines the actual process involved in printing from the woodcuts, referencing Woolf’s letter to Carrington about how the margins of her wood blocks for “The Mark on the Wall” were physically modified: “we bought a chisel, and chopped away” to fit the woodcut to the page, writes Woolf (97). Harvey also notes that the Bloomsbury artists did not outsource the creation of the woodcuts—they crafted them by hand. He quotes Woolf’s observation that Fry sounded like “a large pertinacious rat” as he worked (97). In the remainder of the article, Harvey goes into fascinating detail regarding other woodcut-illustrated volumes including, of course, *Kew Gardens*.

On a more material level, the physical attributes of the volume are anxiety-provoking. Though the pages are pleasantly heavy and glossy, the book does not fall open readily or evenly but has to be pressed, at which point the canvas binding cracks and crackles, suggesting that the pages are likely to fall out after multiple readings. The numerous endnotes that accompany most of the essays and provide valuable ancillary information are almost unreadable because formatting perversely allocates the notes to four columns per page, each column only one-and-one-quarter inches wide. Such complaints are perhaps inevitable in a time when the book as a physical object begins to verge on extinction and cost-saving takes precedence over quality. We are now in an era of digital reproduction that Walter Benjamin may never have anticipated, and I suppose that if this volume were to be published as an e-book, one could enlarge the images and study them more closely, but skittering about on a virtual screen just isn’t as satisfying as viewing an actual object—even if it is a volume filled with mechanical reproductions. While there are still opportunities to see the real thing displayed in a museum during an exhibit (or, for the fortunate ones, in the setting of one’s own home), if the original object itself is not available, at least one can see it on an actual page in a beautifully illustrated work like *A Room of Their Own: The Bloomsbury Artists in American Collections*.

### Works Cited

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5 The passage on the broadside itself begins: “Wood is a pleasant thing to think about. It comes from a tree, and trees grow, and we don’t know how they grow” (see 88 fig. 1)
From the President of the IVWS:

I write at the very end of a three-year term as President of IVWS. The term has been extremely rewarding to me, in large part because of your generosity and kindness. In every ballot, I felt connected globally to our members, with little notes of well wishes coming back to me from you. And working with Madelyn Detloff, Celia Marshik, Thaine Stearns, Karen Levenback, and Members-at-Large AnneMarie Bantzinger, Kristin Czarnecki, Alice Lowe, and Anne Hanafin has been generative.

The current officers will step down this January, and almost all the officers will change. Our new president will be Leslie Kathleen Hankins. Our new Vice President will be Kathryn Simpson. Our new Historian/Bibliographer will be Kristin Czarnecki, and our new Treasurer/Secretary will be Jeanne Dubino (Jeanne plans to resign after one year, so as to begin to create staggered rotation of officers). In addition, we have had two new officer positions put in place in these last years. The first is Archival Liaison; Karen Levenback has fulfilled this role for two years and will continue in this position for a full term beginning in January. The second is Membership Coordinator; Lynn Hall will be our first Membership Coordinator, also beginning in January. Our new Members-at-Large will be AnneMarie Bantzinger, Elizabeth Evans, Emily Hinnov, and Alice Lowe. Welcome!

In this, my last letter to the Society, I’ll just remind us all of how to join IVWS and how to renew membership. The Society now accepts five-year memberships from full-time employed members ($95). For someone like me (who always forgets sending in yearly dues), that longer-term membership has been extremely helpful. Yearly memberships are still only $20 ($10 for students, retired members and part-time employed members), and will be put on a new system of June and December renewals, so that the Membership Coordinator can more easily remind us when we should send the yearly fee. A PayPal link is on the Toronto Website (<http://www.utoronto.ca/IVWS>), or checks can be sent directly to Jeanne Dubino after January 1, 2012. I am sure she will let us know the best way to contact her, once she settles into the Treasurer position.

Many thanks to all,

Georgia Johnston

Officers serving from January 2012 through December 2014

President:
Leslie Kathleen Hankins
<lhankins@cornellcollege.edu>

Vice-President
Kathryn Simpson
klsimpson@bham.ac.uk or
simpsokl@adf.bham.ac.uk

Historian/Bibliographer
Kristin Czarnecki
<kristin_czarnecki@georgetowncollege.edu>

Archival Liaison
Karen Levenback
<ivwsarchive@att.net>

Membership Coordinator
Lynn Hall
<halllj@muohio.edu>

Officers serving from January 2012 through December 2012

Treasurer/Secretary
Jeanne Dubino
<dubinoja@appstate.edu>

Members-at-Large

serving from January 2012 through December 2014

AnneMarie Bantzinger
<ambantzinger@hotmail.com>

Elizabeth Evans
<evansef@gmail.com>

Emily Hinnov
<emhinnov@yahoo.com> or <emhinnov@bu.edu>

Alice Lowe
<alicedowell@yahoo.com>

Officers serving through December 2011:

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

Members-at-Large through December 2011:

Kristin Czarnecki
<kristin_czarnecki@georgetowncollege.edu>
Alice Lowe
<alicedowell@yahoo.com>
AnneMarie Bantzinger
<ambantzinger@hotmail.com>
Anne Ryan Hanafin
<umrk@encsols.com>