**To the Readers**

**Queering Woolf—an Introduction**

It is a pleasure to bring to you this special issue on Queering Woolf, an outgrowth of several illuminating conversations we have had on the place of queer studies in Woolf studies and/or the ways that Woolf herself was “queering” before the terms “queer theory” and “queer studies” were coined in the early 1990s. The first of our conversations began on the Virginia Woolf listserv (vwolf@lists.service.ohio-state.edu) with a lively debate about whether queer studies indeed had anything to offer Woolf studies beyond earlier work on Woolf from lesbian feminist and/or gay and lesbian studies perspectives. (We purposely have left out the “B” and the “T” from the now ubiquitous “GLBT” above because, in our estimation, it is only recently that work on Woolf from a transgender studies perspective—focusing mainly on Orlando—or a bisexual studies perspective has made it into the repertoire of critical work on Woolf, and, due in part to their more recent scholarly establishment, both transgender and bisexual studies have been more imbricated with queer studies since their inception.)

Inspired by the debate on the listserv, we decided to host a breakfast roundtable discussion on “Queer Bloomsbury, Queer Studies, and Woolf’s Place in Both” at the Twentieth Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf at Georgetown College. Kristin Czarnecki, the conference organizer, graciously added the session to the program at the last minute, and (especially for a breakfast session) the roundtable was packed with a number of scholars and common readers interested in pursuing the question of Woolf studies’ relationship with queer studies. We resumed the conversation in Glasgow the following year, thanks to the generosity of Jane Goldman, the conference organizer of the twenty-first annual conference. The plenary roundtable focused more specifically on queering, Woolf, and pedagogy.

Because the conversation in this issue is a continuation of discussions that preceded it, we wish to forgo the usual practice of offering a summative introduction in favor of offering some observations, Wallace-Stevens-style, on the interwoven nature of Woolf’s queering and queering Woolf.

**THIRTEEN WAYS TO LOOK AT QUEERING WOOLF**

I. “Queering” is a verb

And “queer” is an adjective. It has become commonplace to use “queer” as a synonym for gay, lesbian, bisexual, or trans. But we mean queer as a kind of doing, even a way of living, that does not take for granted the presumptions that are often made about the naturalness of identity, of sex, of gender, or of desire. As an adjective, “queer” announces this critical/epistemological predisposition.

II. “VS.” is a symptom of the problem

For reasons that have more to do with the institution(s) of scholarly production and less to do with lived experience—the messy and pragmatic realities of our daily co-existence with others—“queer theory” has been often set out as an alternative to, often an alternative against lesbian and gay studies, LGBT politics, and even feminism. It is our position that queer and GLBT scholarly efforts and political movements are far more likely to be contiguous or overlapping than in direct opposition to each other. As Jacob Hale notes, identity is always doubly relational (at a minimum). We form and maintain our identities by making continually reiterated identifications as members of some category U(s). This is accomplished both positively and negatively by repeated identifications with some (not necessarily all) members of U, and by reiterated identifications as not-members of some other category T(hem). (330)

“U” and “T” are often closely related, not opposite to each other, and counter identifications serve to denote relatively fine gradations of distinction. Following Chela Sandoval, we believe it has always been a more practical option (indeed a more livable option) to move between and among seemingly fixed ideological or theoretical positions with what Sandoval calls “diﬀerential consciousness” than to maintain an unlivable allegiance to theoretical purity (62). Sandoval seems to be on the same wavelength as Woolf, who proposed an “outsider” society in Three Guineas, insofar as the “intellectual liberty” practiced by the “outsider” would require “freedom from unreal loyalties” (TG 78). Linda Camarasana, writing in this issue, focuses on the liberties garnered by outsiders who “trespass” and “transgress” in Woolf’s work, especially the liberties taken and used by the outsider La Trobe in Between the Acts to resist the heteronormativity of nationalism.

III. Beware the umbrella

The colloquial use of the term “queer” to mean gay or lesbian, or sometimes bi- or trans-, and rarely intersexed or asexual, is probably unavoidable, but those of us who do queer studies do not use it as a catchall synonym for an identity term in our scholarship. As clunky as the acronyms can get for identity-based movements—GLBTQIA now being the acronym in common usage for Gay, Lesbian,
Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersexed, Asexual—using “queer” as an umbrella term for all of the above draws it back into the vortex of identity-based ontology that denudes it of its critical force as a discourse that questions how identities are made (and un-made).

IV. Granite matters as much as rainbow
That is, materiality matters to Woolf, and it matters to queer theory. One of the bad raps that queer theory has taken from its detractors is the straw-person argument that queer theory suggests that “everything is discourse,” as if discourse were wholly immaterial or without material consequences. Embodied and experienced realities (granite) do matter to us as queer scholars, as they did to Woolf, who was a committed socialist. To say that embodied realities, even phenomena as solid-appearing as identities, are made is to admit they are real, with material implications following from how those identities are interpreted and experienced. Questioning how identities are made allows for an investigation into the political, social, and cultural forces that informed that making as well as the consequences thereof.

Referring to the importance of remaining accountable to verifiable “facts” in the production of biography, Woolf nonetheless highlights the necessity of contextualizing the facts employed in the human sciences:

But these facts are not like the facts of science—once they are discovered, always the same. They are subject to changes of opinion; opinions change as the times change. What was thought a sin is now known, by the light of facts won for us by the psychologists, to be perhaps a misfortune; perhaps a curiosity; perhaps neither one nor the other, but a trifling foible of no great importance one way or the other. The accent on sex has changed within living memory. This leads to the destruction of a great deal of dead matter still obscuring the true features of the human face” (“The Art of Biography” 194).

In this issue, Melanie Micir illustrates the ways Woolf (especially in Orlando) queered the seemingly immutable “facts” that seem to dictate the (hetero)normative chronological and etiological underpinnings of traditional biography—a queering that anticipates contemporary queer temporality studies.

V. Tyrannies and servilities of the private world
Woolf herself argued that “the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other” (TG 142). Several decades later, Michel Foucault popularized the term “biopower”—power concentrated on the regulation of life rather than the right to take life. Biopower is hinged like a compass with double reach—one arm extending to our most intimate experiences and domestic arrangements, and the other extending outwards towards the regulation of populations. Foucault did not cite Woolf’s Three Guineas in his discussion of biopower, but there is no reason we shouldn’t. Biopower works through the regulation of life through normalizing discourses that prompt the regulation of populations, what Sir William Bradshaw in Mrs. Dalloway worshipped as “divine proportion” (99). Woolf’s complex analyses of interlocking networks (or webs) of intimate behavior, social conventions, pedagogical “memory and tradition,” and ideological, moral, and political influences—all part of her gift for pattern recognition and articulation—are attentive to the workings of biopower, called by other names in her work, such as “odour,” or “atmosphere,” a “framework with all kinds of minutely-teethed saws,” or the “embryo” of the creature “who believes that he has the right, whether given by God, Nature, sex or race is immaterial, to dictate to other human beings how they shall live; what they shall do” (TG 52: “A Sketch of the Past” 152; TG 53). Queer scholarship is ideologically consistent with Woolf’s attempts to avoid constructing political and theoretical –isms that serve to dictate how others should live, what others should do. Queer Woolf studies therefore tend to explore how Woolf’s works create or expose possibilities for her readers. In this issue, Erin Douglas emphasizes the queer fantasy work Woolf’s fiction performs in the service of such possibilities.

VI. And “odour” in the public sphere
Wars and genocidal atrocities are connected epistemologically to the “tyrannies and servilities” of the “private” world, which includes sexual and gender-based ideologies. “Odour, then—or shall we call it ‘atmosphere’?—is a very important element in professional life; in spite of the fact that like other important elements it is impalpable,” Woolf wrote in Three Guineas (52). Like dominant discourse, “atmosphere” is not tangible, but its effects are materially significant: “Atmosphere plainly is a very mighty power,” Woolf continues. “Atmosphere not only changes the sizes and shapes of things; it affects solid bodies, like salaries, which might have been thought impervious to atmosphere” (TG 52). Seemingly “private” arrangements like the relationship between a husband and wife, are infused with heteronormative “atmosphere” which is “powerful” in part because it is “one of the most impalpable” forces regulating the lives of “the daughters of educated men”—and, we might add, the lives of others, although in differential ways (TG 52). As Abby Wilkerson argues in her development of the concept of “normate sex,” “If a given condition can be seen as a departure from normate sex, then the primary target for intervention should be social norms and practices rather than individuals. Likewise, a critical notion of sexual interdependence calls for intervention into social conditions” (184). In other words, the oppressive “odour” of the public sphere must be investigated for an understanding of why and how some individuals become the negative referents (and thus targets) of normative discourses. Queer studies of Woolf are particularly attuned to the myriad socio-political invisible realities that shape the possibilities her characters (all of her characters) can imagine for their lives, their loves, their identities. As Sandra Inskeep-Fox’s poem in this issue shows us, for instance, Woolf’s work allows all of us, her readers, to think of all our Sallys—all those love-opportunities (or life-opportunities, for that matter) precluded by socio-political proscriptions. Queer studies of Woolf often seek to illuminate her work in ways that are as meaningful to readers who identify as straight as they are to those who identify as lesbian, bisexual, trans, or gay.

VII. Thinking back through our mothers = genealogy
In A Room of One’s Own, Woolf suggests that women “think back through [their] mothers,” but far from a traditional lineage of great (wo)men, Woolf provides a genealogy of the contextual (social, political, cultural) forces that produced women as certain kinds of writers, certain kinds of benefactors, certain kinds of scholars (76). Whether or not one agrees with the conclusions Woolf makes about the quality of writing that can be produced by women under the circumstances she outlines, she has at the very least demonstrated a genealogical methodology attentive to absences and occurrences which may have gone unremarked in traditional historiography. Referring to her own mother, Woolf notes that,

she was one of the invisible presences who after all play so important a part in every life. This influence, by which I mean the consciousess of other groups impinging upon ourselves; public opinion; what other people say and think; all those magnets which attract us this way to be like that, or repel us the other and make us different from that; that has never been analysed in any of those Lives which I so much enjoy reading, or very superficially. (“A Sketch of the Past” 80)

Tracing such “influence” is akin to what Foucault calls “effective history,” or what we might call discourse analysis—not an exclusively queer methodology, but certainly part of a queer theoretical toolkit (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 88). Matt Franks employs exactly this tool in his essay for this issue, in which he explains how Woolf, in her depiction of Mrs. Ramsay’s “influence,” reimagines lineage in ways
that coincide with contemporary scholars’ theories of queer futurities—
“queer generationality”—which respond to or refute those of the anti-
futurity queer theorist, Lee Edelman.

VIII. Biography as performance
In “The Art of Biography,” Woolf outlines the tension between artistic
freedom and historiographic constraint that the biographer must
negotiate. Biography "imposes conditions, and those conditions are that
it must be based upon fact. And by fact in biography we mean facts that
can be verified by other people besides the artist" (192). Biography, as
Woolf demonstrates in Orlando and articulates in several of her essays,
is also an art that tells perhaps as much about the biographer as it does
about the subject of biography. Moreover, biography does cultural and
perhaps psychological work for the biographer and the biographers’
audience(s). The many "versions" (to borrow a phrase from Brenda
Silver) of Woolf that readers know from biographical material about
her do cultural work that is connected, like the "spider’s web" of
fiction, to the world in which the biography was produced (Silver xiii;
AROO 41). It is not surprising, then, that the biographical versions of
Woolf’s sexual/sensual life have tended to reproduce the sexual/sensual
possibilities currently legible to the culture from which a biography
has been produced: from the mad/frigid genius of Quentin Bell, to the
lesbian feminist Woolf of the 1970s and 1980s, to the queer or queering
Woolf that a younger generation of scholars has made legible.

IX. There is more than one way to read a book
Woolf made this seemingly obvious point in “How Should One Read a
Book?,” but it bears reiteration in light of the cultural work Woolf
scholarship does to elucidate the critics’ cultural moment as Woolf’s
own cultural moment is investigated. We are less interested in presenting
the authoritative Woolf than investigating how and why certain critical
and biographical constructions of Woolf are sustained. Queering Woolf
entails a commitment to the how and the why of the who, when, and
where—with special emphasis on how heteronormative “atmosphere”
naturalizes certain ways of being and becoming while making other
ways of being and becoming appear unnatural, even monstrous.

X. Pedagogy shows us our unacted part
In that very same essay, “How Should One Read a Book?,” Woolf
demonstrates an invitational pedagogy, inviting students at a girls’ school
at Hayes Court to come to their own conclusions about what makes a
good book. She encourages them to become readers, with an accent
on the process of becoming, rather than mastering. Exemplified for us
here, Erica Delsandro presents her own queer pedagogy of becoming,
at once incorporating Woolf’s work (Orlando) and modeled on Woolf’s
invitational pedagogy. Delsandro invites her students to think about
the seeming “fact” of biological sex—to consider its mutability, its
historicity, its performativity. Invitational pedagogy opens up a space
for triangulating (to borrow a term from Robyn Wiegman’s recent essay
on Eve Sedgwick) the relationship among what is (the “granite” of
reality and fact), what one hopes could be (the “rainbow” of dreams and
desires), and the work that would need to be done in order to imagine
the not-yet possible into existence. Woolf’s resilient writing, playful
and dead serious, makes that elusive triangle visible.

XI. Rainbow matters as much as granite
Addressing her hypothetical male correspondent in Three Guineas,
Woolf concedes that,

with the sound of the guns in your ears you have not asked us to
dream. You have not asked us what peace is; you have asked us how
to prevent war. Let us then leave it to the poets to tell us what the
dream is; and fix our eyes upon the photograph again: the fact. (143)

But Woolf does not herself downplay the importance of the imaginative
arts in fostering new ideologies that cultivate the desire for more just,
convivial, and livable lives. Because cultural work needs to be done
in order to drag the unthinkable (equality for women, sexual freedom,
intellectual liberty, “telling the truth about [one’s] own experiences as
a body,” peace, happiness, believing in art as much as we are taught to
believe in war) into the realm of the imaginable, “rainbow” (dreams,
desires, discourse) matters as much as the material “granite” of what
is (“Professions for Women” 241). Two years after publishing Three
Guineas, as she was living through daily life in wartime England, aware,
quite literally, of “the sound of guns in [her] ears,” Woolf imagines
the possibility of a different mindset that might bring about outcomes
different from nationalistic war. She calls upon her readers to “think
peace into existence” and to “compensate the man for the loss of his
gun” by giving him “access to the creative feelings” (“Thoughts on
Peace in an Air Raid” 243, 247, 248). Derek Ryan, writing in this issue,
provides a sustained examination of the ways Woolf “queers granite”
throughout her work; that is, the ways Woolf subverts iconic monuments
to hard realities like war and pillowage (statues of patriarchs,obelisks like
Cleopatra’s Needle) by pairing them with “rainbow”—the “invisible,”
“intangible,” immateriality of human dreams, needs, emotions that serve
to undermine their nationalistic and militaristic import. While such
subversions might not necessarily be queer in all instances, the examples
which interest Ryan are those in which Woolf subverts patriarchal
and nationalistic bravura and heteronormative ideals (such as the idealization
of marriage).

XII. Parody has its power
Like Judith Butler, who in Gender Trouble noted the power of parody
to undermine the “naturalness” of gender norms, Woolf demonstrates
(even more playfully) how the parodic spectacle of gender performance
calls into question less spectacular forms of gender performance (what
we might call the unremarked everyday doing of gender). Our favorite
moments of parodic gender performance come in Orlando (when
Orlando nearly causes a sailor to fall from the mast by accidentally
exposing a bit of leg, for example), but Woolf’s staging of hyperbolic
gender performance appears in several of her texts, from Susan
Warrington’s Jane-Austen-like engagement in The Voyage Out to Mrs.
Manresa’s primping and preening (and Giles Oliver’s stomping and
huffing) in Between the Acts (O 157, VO 149-50, BTA 39-41, 99).

XIII. Why?
As we explained in our opening paragraph, we brought together this
special issue on Queering Woolf in response to ongoing conversations
about the value of queer theory to Woolf studies. Its value, for us, lies
not in the answers queer studies can provide about Woolf, or the answers
Woolf can provide for queer studies, for that matter. The habit of asking
questions about matters that are often accepted without question is of
more importance to us. Why is health insurance (in the U.S. at least)
tied so intimately to marriage status, for example? Why are some
modes of relation (no matter how abusive or not fulfilling they may be
in particular instances) sanctioned and idealized by states, religions,
psycho-medical establishments, popular culture, etc., and other modes of
relation (no matter how fulfilling and life-giving in particular instances)
vilified, made illegal, pathologized by states, religions, psycho-medical
establishments, popular culture, etc.? Why are genders so segregated
and taxonomized even today? Why are only two genders recognized
in a world where surely there is room for more? Why is it commonly
assumed that people make decisions about their loves and sexual
attractions based on gender or biological sex? These are questions
that may seem simple-minded, or may rankle, or may amuse. But they
do less harm, certainly, than the stifling of such questions does. In
questions of oneself? They should be asked openly in public” (227).
However, she notes that “The little twisted sign that comes at the end
of a question has a way of making the rich writh: power and prestige
come down about it with all their weight. Questions [. . .] shrivel up in
an atmosphere of power, prosperity, and time worn stone” (227-28).
Falling on the “rainbow” side of the balance for a moment, Woolf asks
her interlocutors at Lysistrata to imagine an ongoing discussion, rather
than a lecture filled with answers: “Why not create a new form of society
founded on poverty and equality? Why not bring together people of all
ages and both [sic] sexes and all shades of fame and obscurity so that
they can talk, without mounting platforms or reading papers or wearing expensive clothes or eating expensive food? [ . . . ] Why not invent human intercourse? Why not try?” (231). Why not, indeed?

And so, in this inquisitive spirit, we offer this special issue to you as an invitation to continue the conversation about Queering Woolf.

Enjoy . . .

*Madelyn Detloff & Brenda Helt*  
**Miami University & Independent Scholar**

**Works Cited**


**Issues of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany**

Dating from Spring 2003 (issue 62) to the present are currently available online in full text PDF format at:  
<http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowl/VWM_Ownline.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>.  

**Panel Selection Committee**

Jeanne Dubino  
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**Louisville Conference 2014—Call for Papers**

The International Virginia Woolf Society is pleased to host its thirteenth consecutive panel at the University of Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900. We invite proposals for critical papers on any topic concerning Woolf studies. A particular panel theme may be chosen depending on the proposals received. Please submit by email a cover page with your name, email address, mailing address, phone number, professional affiliation (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 13, 2013.
THE IVWS & VWS ARCHIVE INFORMATION
<http://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/special/F51ivwoolfsocietyfonds.htm>
<http://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/collections/special_collections/f51_intl_v_woolf_society/>

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:
<http://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/special/F51ivwoolfsocietyfilelist.htm>
[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.

For information about the history of the Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf go to:
<http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/annual_conference_on_virginia_woolf.html>

Consult Paula Maggio’s Web site, Blogging Woolf, for up-to-date information about all things Woolfian including information about upcoming Woolf conferences and recent publications from Cecil Woolf Publishers. <bloggingwoolf.wordpress.com>
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/~neverowv1/VWM_Ownline.html>.

The IVWS was founded in 1973 as the Virginia Woolf Society. The society has a direct relationship with the Modern Language Association and has had the privilege of organizing two sessions at the annual MLA Convention. As of 2010, MLA has transitioned to a new format in which the IVWS will continue to have one guaranteed session.

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

The VWWolf 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 VWWOLF 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 VWWOLF. 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 ivwarchive@att.net.

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. For information about the history of the Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf, go to <http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/annual_conference_on_virginia_woolf.html>.

The Selected Papers from the Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf 2001-present (excluding 2004) are published by Clemson University Digital Press under the auspices of Wayne Chapman. The editors of the publication vary from year to year. Electronic versions of the selected papers from 2001-present, including selected works from 2004, will no longer be available on the Center for Woolf Studies website at <http://www.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 <neverowv1@southernct.edu>.

The Selected Papers from 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>.

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/~neverowv1/VWM_Ownline.html>.

The Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf
For information about the history of the Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf as well as the upcoming conferences is available at: <http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/annual_conference_on_virginia_woolf.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:

Blogs:
Visit Paula Maggie’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 information: fernham [at] gmail [dot] com. The blog is located at <http://fernham.blogspot.com/>.

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

E-books
The majority of Virginia Woolf’s novels as well as A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas can be read online at <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/>. Woolfian Alerts
Have you signed up for Google Alerts? Did you know you could be totally up-to-date on the latest developments in the Woolfian and Bloomsburian world with just a few keystrokes? Check it out! It’s simple, fast and very rewarding.

WVListserv
To join the VWListserv, please go to the IVWS home page a <http://www.utoronto.ca/IVWS> and click on the VWListserv link in the left column. Then, follow the instructions.
Virginia Woolf Miscellany

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS AND EDITORIAL POLICIES

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

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: <neverowv1@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 <neverowv1@southernct.edu>

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

NOTE: The Editorial Board takes no responsibility for the views expressed in the contributions selected for publication.

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Many thanks to the International Virginia Woolf Society for its generous and continuing support of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany.
All Our Sallys

Oh no, don’t say you’ve never
Known one, gone from your life
But surest still
To bring a smile (private) & she, the blessing
Counted first,
The one who touched that springing chord.
She, existing full in memory:
Lips, laughter, floating flowers,
Just inside the border of who we are
That tall impenetrable hedge proven
Imperfectly impenetrable as her light
Does filter through wondering as we do
What pinpoints of possibility
Have vanished through the June days while she plants
Outrageously the gardens of rare hibiscus &
We ourselves go off most happy to purchase what blooms
We can. She would
I am convinced, say
“I’ll buy the damned flowers myself,“ gone off
In a huff
And toss down a few pounds as gauntlet
Not caring one bit for messages looming overhead.
It was not passion alone but passion for life
That lingers in our balloon of memory
The helium tug of always wanting
And her swift way of always saying
Yes.

Sandra Inskeep-Fox
Proprietor, Dorley House Books, Inc., Clear Spring, MD

Trespassing the Nation: A Queer Reading of Between the Acts

In Fear of a Queer Planet, Michael Warner articulates the preference of some critics and activists for the word “queer” over “gay and lesbian.” More than an umbrella term covering various sexual minorities, the word “queer” and the critical impulse behind queer theory emphasize “a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal” (xxvi). Virginia Woolf’s final novel, Between the Acts, anticipates queer theory’s subversive critical stance. Reading the novel queerly enables the reader to see how the novel, especially via the pageant at its heart, critiques “the regimes of the normal,” including, and perhaps especially, national belonging. By illustrating how normative constructions of gender, sexuality, and nation are interwoven, Woolf’s novel anticipates key insights of queer theory.

Much of Woolf’s work critiques borders and binaries, and at times posits a utopian acting up in order to transgress borders that divide. In “The Leaning Tower,” a paper read to the Workers’ Educational Association, Woolf writes: “Literature is no one’s private ground; literature is common ground. It is not cut up into nations; there are no wars there. Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves” (154). In this idealized view, Woolf posits literature as a transnational space that everyone can inhabit to produce a borderless community. Woolf’s command to her listener—to trespass—recalls the walk on the grass Mary (take your pick: Beton, Seton, or Carmichael) takes at the beginning of A Room of One’s Own. Reprimanded by the beadle for trespassing where only male fellows and scholars are permitted, Woolf’s narrator asserts the need for women to transgress boundaries, particularly gender boundaries, that lock one sex in and the other out (24).

Gendered demarcations of space are again an issue in her 1930s anti-war manifesto Three Guineas, when Woolf poses the questions, “What does ‘our country’ mean to me?” and “[H]ow much of ‘England’ in fact belongs to it?” (127, 125). In Woolf’s England, a woman’s nationality was determined by marriage; thus, from a feminist perspective, “[T]here are no ‘foreigners,’ since by law she becomes a foreigner if she marries a foreigner” (128). Woolf’s use of scare quotes around the words “England” and “foreigners” indicates her acknowledgment that the designations of national and alien identity are social constructions. Thus, an “English” woman owes no natural or legal allegiance to the nation. Although patriotic appeals might attempt to seduce the daughter of an educated man into the narrative of the nation, in accepting this inclusion, she produces another division: now locked in, her positionality would lock others—foreigners—out.

Reading Between the Acts queerly allows us also to see similar connections between the assertions of nationalist ideology and the regulation of sexuality—the embeddedness of the martial with the marital. The novel takes place over the course of a summer day in 1939 in a “remote village in the very heart of England” (16). On this day the annual village pageant will be presented. Written and directed by La Trobe, the pageant, a creative interpretation of English history and literature, is presented beside the house in which the central heterosexual couple of the novel resides. The present-day story focuses on various domestic conflicts and a sense of foreboding—felt most keenly by Giles Oliver, the most militarily-minded of the novel’s characters—about the approaching war. The novel begins and ends with a domestic scene. It is, however, a perpetually quarrelsome domesticity that resides at Pointz Hall. The discussion of the cesspool
that opens the novel is, to Mrs. Haines, an unwelcome intrusion into the presumably genteel world of the village, a metonym for the nation, and sets the stage for various intrusions and disruptions that will disturb the tranquil, and antiseptic, domesticity Mrs. Haines desires.

La Trobe comes late to the text, about one quarter of the way in, after the domestic setting and the ongoing conflicts between the heterosexual couple Isa and Giles Oliver and siblings Lucy Swittin and Bart Oliver have been established. La Trobe is described in overtly masculine terms. She is “swarthy, sturdy and thick set; [she] strode about the fields in a smock frock; sometimes with a cigarette in her mouth; often with a whip in her hand; and used rather strong language—perhaps, then, she wasn’t altogether a lady?” (58). Her masculinity is further emphasized in the description of her “abrupt manner and stocky figure; her thick ankles and sturdy shoes; her rapid decisions barked out in guttural accents” (63).

Arguably, La Trobe is the queer character on which to focus when discussing subversive erosics and cultural disruptions—especially the anti-imperialist and anti-war assertions—in Woolf’s novels. Unlike other Woolf novels, in which lesbianism is submerged in a fantastical gender parody (Orlando), has been revised out of the text overtly (as is the case with Rhoda in The Waves), or coincides with heterosexual marriage (as in Mrs. Dalloway), at the time of its publication in 1941 it took no very sophisticated reading to perceive La Trobe’s sexuality.1 Thus in her final novel, one that deals thematically not just with past war (as in Mrs. Dalloway) but with impending war, Woolf has cast in a key role “the only ‘out’ lesbian in [her] fictional repertoire” (Weil 241), an artist who presents a critical image of the nation and its normative regimes.

La Trobe is marked as a misfit not just by her masculine style, but also by her foreignness; she is perceived by the villagers as not “pure English” (57). Characters try to guess her place of origin from the shape of her face or the sound of her name: Mrs. Bingham speculates that she may be Russian; others think she may be from the Channel Islands. Their preoccupation with her origins—“But where did she spring from?” they want to know (57)—and their suggestions that La Trobe must not be English imply that the provincial villagers assume that the threat to their cultural purity comes from outside their community. Their questions represent a type of border-policing. As Madelyn Detloff notes, Woolf intervenes in the formation of [...] voluntarily sacrificial subjects [...] by acknowledging the centrality of homophobic repudiation (the violent disavowal of queer ‘objects’) to the formation of national subjects and thus showing how it is that national belonging is predicated on violent exclusion, rather than the putatively innate bonds of Englishness. (35)

In Between the Acts, queerness is the way Woolf resists the normative regime of British nationalism. Although the inclusion of characters such as the homosexual William Dodge and lesbian La Trobe are important to the history of representations of queer characters in literature, it’s La Trobe’s national trespass that arguably anticipates more recent developments in queer studies regarding the twenty-first-century deployment of “homonationalism” as a way to marry (through increased acceptance of normative enactments, such as gay marriage) queer subjects to national identification while simultaneously constructing others abjected from this new national, and now queer-friendly, formation. Jasbir Puar warns, in a post-9-11 world, against the bourgeois constructions of gay and lesbian domesticity into nationalist ideologies by advancing a “regulatory script [...] of normative gayness” (xxiii). Woolf makes her lesbian creator radically resistant to normative regimes. As a lesbian, La Trobe is outside the sex-gender system: her masculinity places her outside gender norms, and her place of origin remains illegible throughout the novel. From her outsider position, La Trobe is able to read the divisions and exclusions inherent in nationalist narratives, including the literary tradition.

The Victorian section of La Trobe’s pageant is especially notable for its articulation of the divisions produced by empire. In contrast to the Reverend Streatfield’s assertion that the play’s inspirational message posits, “We act different parts; but are the same” (192), this section, and the audience’s negative or confused reaction to it, emphasizes the assertion of borders and construction of others. The central figure in this section is the village publican Budge, made up as a constable and wielding a truncheon. The words spoken by Budge indicate that the policing done from the heart of London in Queen Victoria’s England focused on maintaining control over the subjects of empire: “crossing the ocean; to proclaim her Empire; all of ’em Obey the Rule of my truncheon” (162).

Besides extending beyond the “natural” borders of England, the concerns of empire also extend into the domestic sphere: “The ruler of an Empire must keep his eye on the cot; spy too in the kitchen; drawing-room; library; wherever one or two, me and you, come together. Purity our watchword; prosperity and respectability!” (162-63). Note what is under surveillance: erosics (the cot), knowledge (the library)—and for what purpose: purity and prosperity. “Purity” is a word that implies the defining and policing of the borders of race, sex, and class. The punishment for those who are presumably impure: “[L]et ’em fester in . . . (He paused—no, he had not forgotten his words.) Cripplegate; St. Giles’s; Whitechapel; the Minories. Let ’em sweat at the mines; cough at the looms; rightly endure their lot” (163). Thus the impulse are to be incarcerated, institutionalized. However, as Budge openly declares: “That’s the price of Empire; that’s the white man’s burden” (163). Although Budge evokes Kipling’s imperialist “white man’s burden,” he also shows that the subjects of control are domestic “outsiders” as well; the ideology of empire demarcates the boundaries between the insiders and outsiders both in the homeland and the colonies. The rule of empire is not just political rule; it reaches into the most private spaces and behavior, it extends “Over thought and religion; drink; dress; manners; marriage too” (162). The connection between domesticity and the cultural work of Empire is also exemplified by the evangelical lovers presented in this section, Eleanor and Edgar. Their mutual desire to spend “a lifetime in the African desert” in order to “convert the heathen” is what cements their marriage (166). Pointing to Pointz Hall at the end of this section, Budge as the policeman proclaims in the name of Victoria’s Empire the country house that has been host to this pageant, respectable, prosperous and pure: “‘Ome, Sweet ‘Ome” (172).

The original title of the novel, Pointz Hall, made the domestic setting more central to the text. The novel is thematically concerned with people and place: with families who trace their origins to the Domesday book, with Miss Swittin’s preoccupations with geographic history and ancient tectonic shifts, and with the newspaper’s portent of pending destruction as the characters wonder what would happen should the channel that separates England from the dangers “out there” be bridged. The house, which “had been oblitered” by the pageant, emerges after the audience leaves and the players pack up and go home (204). However, before she can create again, La Trobe must depart the domestic scene.

Between the Acts is a queer title that calls attention to performativity, as does the novel in various ways. Rather than reify the centrality of the domestic space, the novel prefers to enact interplays between the domestic dramas and the unruly pageant. The pageant actors are residents of the village. The juxtaposition of the pageant with the familial concerns of the residents of Pointz Hall—the sibling rivalry of Bart and Lucy, the marital and erotic disappointments of Isa and Giles—and the villagers’ attempts to grasp the meaning of the pageant places the “real” lives in the novel on the same performative plane as the pageant itself. In the final scene of the pageant, “Present Time. Ourselves,” the audience

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1 Laura Doan has shown that the extensive publicity given the 1928 trial of Radclyffe Hall’s The Well of Loneliness was largely responsible for the widespread popular association of mannish fashions and mannerisms with lesbianism or “sexual inversion” in women in the late twenties and following in England. See Doan.
is forced to look at themselves in reflective objects (177). At the pageant’s conclusion, the border between performer and audience is thus completely blurred—there is no inside or outside. As Detloff notes, “The uncomfortable sense of dispersion that accompanies La Trobe’s ‘mirror-staging’ at the end of the pageant [. . .] acts as a philosophical counter to the identity-producing spectacle of the Lacanian ‘mirror stage,’ with its reliance on the illusion of a coherent identity” (51). What La Trobe stages in the final section represents “a significant alternative to the logic of repudiation that consolidates identity” (51).

As she is packing up to leave, La Trobe notes that the site on which the pageant had been held is “land merely, no land in particular” (210). In its natural form it is a borderless space, unmarked by normative regimes. While the pageant is underway, the land and townfolk are shaped into narratives about England. In contrast to the certainty and security the villagers wish to attach to the site, La Trobe throughout the novel literally never seems to have a place to be. The Olivers live at Pointz Hall; the audience members take their seats and mingle between the scenes; the actors have their stage or their makeshift dressing room. Although La Trobe may hide in the bushes, she also hangs her props from the trees, tramples the grass, and alters the landscape. Her radical outsidersness is emphasized to the end; post-play she sits separate at the local pub.

However, as the author of the pageant, La Trobe enacts Woolf’s injunction to the Workers’ Educational Association that “literature is no one’s private ground.” La Trobe, as Woolf implores literature to do, “trespass(es) freely and fearlessly” (“Leaning Tower” 154). By setting the pageant at the site of heterosexual domesticity, Woolf frames La Trobe’s trespass as a queer disruption of both domestic space and nationalist ideology. La Trobe’s trespass provides not only a critique of normative narratives, but in both a literal and epistemological sense, the very ground on which such narratives are written.

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The Queer Timing of Orlando: A Biography

Since Nigel Nicolson’s proclamation of Orlando as “the longest and most charming love letter in literature” (202-03), there has been a sustained critical desire to read Orlando as the encoded, otherwise untellable story of a private love between two very public women. These readings are both necessary and valuable, but they make it easy to forget that, at the time of Orlando’s publication, Vita Sackville-West’s status as the inspiration and model for Orlando would not have been known to anyone but those familiar with Bloomsbury gossip. The possibility that one might now understand Orlando as only a love story limits Sackville-West’s importance as biographical subject and reduces the formal difficulty of Orlando to scarcely more than a set of references to “the love that dare not speak its name,” which, once decoded, becomes unworthy of study except as biographical evidence. In this way, one queer reading actually diminishes the larger stakes—both feminist and queer—of the text.

While Orlando has long held the attention of scholars working at the intersection of modernist and queer studies, I want to suggest the expansion of these approaches to Orlando through renewed attention to genre: specifically, to the book’s often overlooked subtitle, “A Biography.” Woolf’s revision and expansion of biography’s generic codes in Orlando make it a uniquely important text to revisit in light of contemporary theorizations of queer temporality. In this brief essay, I foreground what I think of as Orlando’s queer time in relation to biographical form, and I demonstrate the resonances between Woolf’s critique of the generic conventions of biography and contemporary queer critiques of the institutions of what Lee Edelman has called “reproductive futurism.” Queer temporality studies critique understandings of time as a naturalized, internalized, bodily performance of the too easily accepted social scripts that govern our lives, asking us instead to recognize and resist—in our scholarly practices as in our lives—the standard, heteronormative, biologically-driven temporal organization of our world. This is why someone like Carolyn Dinshaw, whose Getting Medieval might be said to have inaugurated the field of queer temporality studies, holds out the possibility of what she calls “touching across time” (“Theorizing” 178)—collapsing it, even, through the vectors of desire that connect marginalized subjects in different historical periods. This is a non-linear vision of history in which time holds the potential to twist and pull in unexpected directions as, in Elizabeth Freeman’s words, “some minor feature of our own sexually impoverished present suddenly meets up with a richer past, or as the materials of a failed and forgotten project of the past find their uses now, in a future unimaginable in their time” (163). Orlando is hardly “failed and forgotten,” but I suggest that, in reading its modernist frustration with normative temporality as queer frustration with the mandates of heteronormative temporality, we open up productive new avenues for understanding Orlando’s cultural work.

Biography, as a literary genre, is the gatekeeper par excellence of reproductive time, and it is difficult to extract oneself from the normativizing pull of biographical form. In what I take to be a representative critique of the genre, Terry Eagleton recently issued a complaint about the exasperating “paradox about biographies”:

We read them to savor the shape and texture of an individual life, yet few literary forms could be more predictable. Everyone has to be born, and almost everyone has to be educated, oppressed by parents, plagued by siblings, and launched into the world; they then enter
upon social and sexual relationships of their own, produce children, and finally expire. The structure of biography is biology. For all its tribute to the individual spirit, it is our animal life that underpins it. (89; my emphasis)

Eagleton implicitly names reproductive time as the temporal logic of standard biographies, and his contemporary impatience with the chronological predictability of biographical form seems to have been learned from Woolf and other modernists, for whom such impatience was axiomatic. For example, A. J. A. Symons, author of The Quest for Corvo: An Experiment in Biography (1934), delivered a nearly identical critique in a 1929 lecture given as part of the “Tradition and Experiment in Present-Day Literature” series. Symons, too, objected to the dependence upon chronology as the inviolable structuring principle of biography:

Constructed on the simple formula of chronological sequence, they begin, for the most part, with their subject’s birth, and describe his curly headed innocence, his sailor suit. Chapter 2 and 3, which show no diminution of the one or discarding of the other, are headed “Schooldays” and “Alma Mater,” and precede “Early Manhood” in which a passing reference to “wild oats” shows that the author has also experienced much; and then chapter 5, “Marriage,” sets us on the trail for home. “Life in London,” “Early Work,” and “Later Work” lead naturally to “Last Days”: a deathbed scene, several moral reflections, a list of the books or acts of the victim, and one more biography is on the shelf, probably to stay there. (2)

If biographies tell individual life stories, so the modernist critique goes, then there is no reason why all biographies must follow the same deadening, if factually accurate, formal structure. For both modernist and contemporary critics, the major problem with biography is its inviolable progression of the body through time: a biography details its subject’s birth, education, inheritance, marriage, children, and death. And, crucially, this complaint is reiterated again, almost word for word, in the work of Judith Halberstam, who has defined queer time as “the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence-early adulthood-marriage-reproduction-child rearing-retirement-death” (Dinshaw et al. 181-82). The normative understanding of the human lifetime that is the object of this shared critique undergirds the generic structure of standard biography.¹

Throughout Orlando, Woolf protests the tyranny of such temporal logic, arguing that an hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the timepiece of the mind by one second. (98)

Instead of capitulating to Symons’s “simple formula of chronological sequence,” she imagines an entirely new life trajectory for her subject. Although the biography does begin when Orlando is a young boy, the details of his birth and education are not given; although Orlando begins (biographical) life as this young boy, he becomes a woman at the age of thirty; and, finally, although more than three hundred years have passed over the course of its more than three hundred pages, Orlando has not yet died when Orlando ends. Indeed, Orlando’s biographer insists that the “true length of a person’s life, whatever the Dictionary of National Biography may say, is always a matter of dispute”:

[I]t cannot be denied that the most successful practitioners of the art of life, often unknown people by the way, somehow contrive to synchronise the sixty or seventy different times which beat simultaneously in every normal human system so that when eleven strikes, all the rest chime in unison, and the present is neither a violent disruption nor completely forgotten in the past. Of them we can justly say that they live precisely the sixty-eight or seventy-two years allotted them on the tombstone. Of the rest, some we know to be dead, though they walk among us; some are not yet born, though they go through the forms of life; others are hundreds of years old though they call themselves thirty-six. (305)

Although every “normal,” “successful,” often “unknown” individual contains “sixty or seventy different times which beat simultaneously,” those who are not “normal” do not successfully synchronize these different times into a single unified self. In these cases, standard “life and times” biographies that fix individual lives into set allotments of historical time, such as the short lives contained in the DNB, are insufficient. Even the best biographies are unable to narrate fully the complexities of individual life, “since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many thousand” (309). Modernist biographies, like so many modernist novels, highlight the individual, subjective experience of time in order to dissociate the multiple “lives” of private individuals from the unified “times” of public, historical record. If one of the projects of modernist biography is to represent more than “six or seven selves” in any given individual, then this taxonomy of people-in-time in Orlando indicates Woolf’s refusal of Victorian biography’s insistence upon documented fact and its reliance upon the standard chronology of “every normal human system.” In Orlando, she demonstrates the power of fiction to stretch understandings of what constitutes the “normal” in biographical writing. This may be, in part, simply the rejection of objectivity in favor of radical subjectivity that one expects from Woolf and other modernist writers, but this lesson, when delivered via the genre of biography, takes on new meaning. Formal choices about the representation of lives cannot be one-size-fits-all. If biography investigates, charts, records, and memorializes life, then the formal structure and generic conventions of biography are directly related to the types and ways of life that are understood as normal, or even possible, at any given time. One might adapt Gertrude Stein’s judgment of history to biography, and realize that biography, too, is deeply enmeshed in pedagogy: Let me recite what biography teaches. Biography teaches. (In other words, no matter their subjects, histories and biographies are both driven by a fundamentally pedagogical impulse.) The formal structure of biography teaches its readers about the possibilities—and impossibilities—of human life. In short, formal normativity protects and produces living normativity. Disrupting this form is not a merely literary decision; though playfully undertaken, this is not mere play: for Woolf, rupturing the generic conventions of biography is a means of unseating the keystone of normativity itself. I am suggesting that Woolf’s questions are still contemporary questions: how can one escape—or at least shift—the weight of standard time, standard expectations, standard lives?

Woolf may have begun Orlando, the first of her biographies, as a joke, but the stakes of her project were quite serious. Should conventional understandings of temporal progression govern the representation of individual lives? Or should the normative milestones of standard time be subordinate to other methods of representing the subject, as Ford Madox Ford argued about the novel: “To get [. . .] a man in function you could not begin at his beginning and work his life chronologically to the end. You must first get him with a strong impression, and then work backwards and forwards over his past” (194). Similarly, Woolf broke from the constraints of realism in biography-as-history and engaged in the unconventional temporal and formal freedoms of semi-fictionalized biography, of biography as something betwixt and between craft and art. In Orlando, Woolf isn’t simply writing a “joke biography” of Vita Sackville-West; she is modeling an alternative—feminist, modernist, queer—biographical structure that is not dependent upon the social scripts of standard time. The combination of reality and fantasy in Orlando offers an alternative model of a human lifetime that is bound by the limits of the imagination rather than somatic and social facts. If,

¹See also Halberstam, In a Queer Time and Place.
as Elizabeth Young-Bruehl suggests, “biography-writing can be a field for the playing out of fantasies, which is not a negative possibility—it is not mere subjectivity,” then fantasy and the work of the individual imagination should be understood as a social, even pedagogical, practice (8). In Orlando, Woolf frees her unconventional subject from the trappings of a conventional, biologically-bound lifetime (and its correspondingly conventional, chronologically-organized biography). Orlando is part of a long history of imaginative and theoretical attempts to set free the human experience from the shackles of standard time. It is part of a genealogy of frustration with normative temporalities. In rejecting and reshaping the formal conventions of standard biography, Orlando shifts the conditions of legibility for the queer life story.

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**Works Cited**


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**Queering Flowers, Queering Pleasures in “Slater’s Pins Have No Points”**

When Virginia Woolf sent “Slater’s Pins Have No Points” to *Forum* in July 1927, she wrote to Vita Sackville-West that “I’ve just written, or re-written, a nice little story about Sapphism, for the Americans” (L3 397). Later, in a letter to Vita on October 13, 1927, she wrote of “Sixty pounds just received from America for my little Sapphist story of which the Editor has not seen the point, though he’s been looking for it in the Adirondacks” (L3 431). Conceptually limited by heteronormative logic, the editor cannot see the “point” of Woolf’s popular and economically

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1 The story was first published in the January 1928 issue of *Forum*, as “Slater’s Pins Have No Points.” I have chosen to retain Virginia Woolf’s original title rather than using the more cumbersome later title (“Moments of Being: ‘Slater’s Pins Have No Points’”), which Leonard Woolf gave the story in republishing it in *A Haunted House and Other Stories* in 1944.

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2 For previous scholarship on Woolf’s queering of flowers and desire, see Douglas, Roof, and Simpson.

3 On Woolf’s rejection of selenology, see Helt.

4 For scholarship on eroticism and mentoring relationships, see Winston.
but never spoken. On the level of fantasy, the flower stands in for this unspoken communication to represent the two women’s queer desires. And, as fantasies will do, it suddenly becomes palpable, manifest, impossible to ignore.

The two women have previously developed the queer insinuations between them by explicitly undermining heteronormative stereotypes. Fanny remembers an earlier conversation, in which Julia had said to her, rather satirically, “It’s the use of men, surely, to protect us,’ smiling at her that same odd smile, as she stood fastening her cloak, which made her, like the flower, conscious to her finger tips of youth and brilliance, but, like the flower too, Fanny suspected, inhibited” (217). With desire, Fanny watches Julia touch the flower and doesn’t want Julia to be inhibited. Fanny seems to fantasize that the flower is her own body yearning for Julia to touch her uninhibitedly. At this moment, Fanny imagines “It was the only use of men, she had said” (217). She wants Julia to have said that protection is the only use of men, suggesting that pleasure is something that happens between women—both sexual pleasure and independence. Fanny flirtatiously replies, “Oh, but I don’t want protection,’ Fanny laugh[s], and when Julia Craye, fixing that extraordinary look, ha[s] said she was not so sure of that, Fanny positively blush[e[s] under the admiration in her eyes” (217). Here, not only does Julia insinuate that Fanny is attractive in a way that might make protection necessary, but Fanny, in saying that she doesn’t want protection, implies that she does not want men. As readers, we are aware that Fanny’s desires and pleasures structure this text as she continually watches Julia, blushes under her gaze, wonders who or what Julia desires and wants, and possibly knows that Julia wants her in the same way she knows she’s Julia’s favorite pupil—something felt and fantasized rather than named.

While Fanny and Julia discuss what the “use of men” is, they use the flower to show what the “use of men” is not. Fanny imagines Julia’s youth and “her rose flowering with chaste passion in the bosom of her muslin dress,” wondering why she had never married (217). Here the rose seems to provoke Fanny’s fantasies about Julia’s body, passion, and sexual innocence. But Fanny’s fantasies take a different direction when she then creates a number of elaborate scenarios imagining all the men who must have admired this woman, Julia Craye. Without naming Julia’s desire for women, Fanny ends each scenario with the misrecognition of heterosexual desire—the man wanting to propose with the ultimate goal isn’t to define sexuality or even to suggest that sexualities are the locus of desire and pleasure. Julia holds Fanny’s carnation upright in her lap, which excites both herself and Fanny. All Fanny can do is stare, until finally, suddenly,

She saw Julia—

She saw Julia open her arms; saw her blaze; saw her kindle. Out of the night she burnt like a dead white star. Julia kissed her. Julia possessed her.

“Slater’s pins have no points,” Miss Craye said, laughing queerly and relaxing her arms, as Fanny Wilmot pinned the flower to her breast with trembling fingers. (220)

Until this point in the story, Fanny has been staring at or watching Julia, but now she truly sees her. The word choice suggests that Fanny sees Julia’s desire right before Julia kisses her. Julia is revealed to her. The unspoken desire between the two women is communicated with a flower, with a kiss.

Fanny notices that Julia “choos[es] her pleasures for herself,” which critiques heteronormative ideas that people (especially women) cannot or should not choose pleasures, particularly erotic ones, and that people’s pleasures are fixed at birth by gender, sex, or even sexuality. In other words, a queer reading of the story shows that our pleasures are impossible to ignore. A queer reading of the text questions how, in these passages, desire and fantasies that produce pleasure challenge heteronormativity. Here the goal isn’t to define sexuality or even to suggest that sexualities are the locus of desire and pleasure. Julia holds Fanny’s carnation upright in her lap, which excites both herself and Fanny. All Fanny can do is stare, until finally, suddenly,

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which becomes a carnation (220). This queering of pleasure fantasizes sexuality, gender, and the intersections thereof in non-normative ways. Kathryn Simpson argues that

the flower (and the female sexuality it can be seen to encode) is intensified and in excess of what is usual. It seems imbued with the lesbian passion of the giver and it is this, with the possibility of future exchanges, that Fanny accepts with such trembling excitement and trepidation. [. . .] Here we see that far from being deflowered (with the underlying sense of violation and being laid claim to that this term implies), Fanny, like the carnation, is revivified. (28)

Simpson points out that the flower not only signifies queer desire and pleasure in Woolf’s text, but also that it critiques heteronormative conceptions of sex. Rather than Fanny being deflowered in the traditional sense, her flower is revived, intensified, made frilly feminine, and more brilliant. Also, it is Fanny who “surprises [Julia] in a moment of ecstasy,” complicating the erotic power relations of masculine/feminine and teacher/student. Fanny takes the flower that has fallen out of her dress and pins it to Julia’s breast. The flower together with the queer desire and pleasure that it stands for is thus exchanged between the two women.

After reading Woolf’s “Slater’s Pins Have No Points,” we are left with the possibilities of a queer flower that transforms pleasure, desire, gender, and sexuality. At the end of the short story, emphasis is placed upon Fanny representing Julia as “choosing her pleasures for herself” (220). Fanny understands the act of a woman choosing pleasure for herself as very queer indeed as it intermingles with the kiss, the flower, and the emphasis on independence the two women share. The flower represents women choosing pleasures for themselves as it enables Fanny and Julia to experience and explore their queer desires. Rather than Woolf self-censoring the purported lesbianism of her text to evade censorship, Woolf deliberately leaves pleasure to the imagination of her readers through the metaphorical use of a flower that expands pleasure rather than limiting it to bodies and what happens between them. This use of fantasy might encourage some readers not to contain or define pleasure, but rather to expand their ideas about genders, sexualities, and desires.

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Mrs. Ramsay’s Queer Generationality

What we might call the temporal turn in current queer studies scholarship comes out of a desire to radically rethink linear notions of heterosexual generational progress. For example, in his influential and polemical book No Future, Lee Edelman insists that queers must reject what he calls reproductive futurism. Edelman posits that reproductive futurism is the dominant mode of contemporary politics, wherein the figure of the child stands for the generational future of humankind and represents the ultimate dominance of heteronormativity. Other queer theorists have refused Edelman’s call to reject generational temporalities, and have instead theorized ways to reappropriate and subvert normative and “straight” notions of time such as reproductive futurism. For example, in her book Time Binds, Elizabeth Freeman posits queer generationality as a means to “complicate the idea of horizontal political generations or waves succeeding each other in progressive time with a notion of “temporal drag”” (65). Temporal drag describes the queer practice of taking up discarded political strategies and cultural objects and using them in unpredictable and unfaithful ways, in order to resist narratives of progress by pulling them backward. Freeman attempts to rethink Judith Butler’s notion of drag as gender performativity, tracing its dependence on “bad timing” in its use of anachronisms and creation of alternative genealogies. These and other theorists have subversively and imaginatively taken up temporalities of regression, reversal, synchronicity, failure, and delay in order to challenge both mainstream and queer notions of generational succession and progress.1

In a sense these new ways of theorizing generational lines are in the spirit of Foucault’s reversal and refusal of the commonly held belief that we have “evolved” from Victorian repression to modern sexual liberation. In The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction, Foucault argues that discourses of sexuality inscribe subjects within the realm of power in increasingly pervasive ways, and in doing so he challenges the progressive logic that we have become more enlightened and liberated about sexuality through the generations of the twentieth century. Instead, he demonstrates that the emergence of recognizable sexual identities has fostered the ever-intensifying biopolitical management of sexuality. However, I argue that non-linear, non-progressive articulations of queer generationality go back further than Foucault, and date at least back to Woolf. In To the Lighthouse, Lily and Mrs. Ramsay’s relationship is both queer and generational; the sexual desire between them and their surrogate mother-daughter bond

1 Other examples of texts that engage and formulate queer notions of temporality, generationality, and failure include Love, Ahmed, Muñoz, and Stockton.
complicates Lily’s feminist “inheritance” as a non-heteronormative modern woman. Mrs. Ramsay at once exceeds and fails to uphold the rigid Victorian sex roles that she is charged with, and Lily’s painting—her queer, modernist vision—does not represent transcendence of or succession from Mrs. Ramsay, but rather stages her incorporation and synchronic presence through lesbian desire. I take Brenda Silver’s observation that “younger women, who have grown up with more options and with mothers who had already taken advantage of them, tend to find Mrs. Ramsay not so much a threat to their independence as of out date” (270), as an opportunity to take up the outmoded figure of Mrs. Ramsay as a queerly unsettling example of temporal “drag.” I aim to demonstrate that through Mrs. Ramsay’s queer generationality, To the Lighthouse is a text that resists genealogical progress and linearity in favor of perverse, disruptive hereditary relations and temporalities.

An oversimplified reading of Mrs. Ramsay might position her as a figure for a passing Victorian era—an old-fashioned character who is subsumed by the more modern and liberated Lily. However, throughout the novel Mrs. Ramsay’s temporal and generational excesses disrupt such a linear progression and notion of inheritance. In the simplistic reading, Mrs. Ramsay seems bound to the rhythm and temporality of patriarchal Victorian sexuality, as exemplified in her sexual relationship to the lighthouse itself. By describing it as “a yellow eye, that opened suddenly” (189), Woolf emphasizes its power as an embodiment of the masculine gaze (as in “I’ve got my eye on you”) and the standardized temporal beat of patriarchal surveillance. The lighthouse is a ready-made symbol, asserting the persistent dominance of the phallus and regularized watchfulness of the panopticon in one emblem. In one sense, then, Mrs. Ramsay’s erotic relationship to the lighthouse represents her submission to hetero-masculine sexuality: “that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke” brings her to a climactic state, “stoking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight [. . .] and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough!” (66, 68). Mrs. Ramsay’s orgasmic response to the lighthouse beam seems to secure her subordinated position as desirous of the phallus, submissive to its beam, visible to its eye’s gaze, and regimented to its regularized temporal rhythm. For example, Laura Doyle shows how this scene’s phalliccentric inscribes Mrs. Ramsay within an “ecstatic yet problematic heterosexuality” (154). In this reading, Mrs. Ramsay’s “biological clock” seems to be in sync with the regulated time of Victorian reproductive futurism.

But Woolf’s text complicates such a one-sided interpretation of Mrs. Ramsay’s submissiveness to nineteenth-century temporalities and discourses of gender, since she exceeds and “drags” on the linearity and heterosexuality of the lighthouse’s beam. Mrs. Ramsay’s fantasy is also masturbatory; she inverts her subservient relationship with the phallus by taking it up and using it to please herself. Earlier in the passage, Woolf describes the stroke of the lighthouse as representing a distinctly autoerotic and lesbian desire: “it seemed to [Mrs. Ramsay] like her own eyes meeting her own eyes, searching as she alone could search into her mind and her heart [. . .] felt an irrational tenderness thus (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself” (66). She then describes this mirror vision as if “there curled up off the floor of the mind, rose from the lake of one’s being, a mist, a bride to meet her lover” (67). Mrs. Ramsay meets herself as her own sexual partner, takes up the phallus apart from any male presence, and uses its power for herself. Moreover, she drags on its temporal regularity by envisioning it as a “long steady light,” rather than a quickly passing beam or a watchful blinking eye. This move is in line with Butler’s analysis of the lesbian phallus as a resignification of masculine power that is divorced from the desire for maleness, which “contests the relationship between the logic of non-contradiction and the legislation of compulsory heterosexuality at the level of the symbolic” (73-74). So in fact Mrs. Ramsay wrenches the phallus from its normalized place as a symbol of hetero-masculine temporality, and instead uses it for queer, autoerotic desires and acts, altering and dragging on its rhythm as she does so.

Lily also perceives Mrs. Ramsay’s queer reappraisal of sexual symbolism and temporality in To the Lighthouse. At one point, she thinks “for that was true of Mrs. Ramsay—she pitied men always as if they lacked something—women never, as if they had something” (87). In a reversal of Freudian theories of development that posit feminine lack and penis envy, Lily imagines that it is not women who experience an emotional and psychological deficiency because they need a penis, but rather men who “lack something.” Mrs. Ramsay refuses the linear, normative psychoanalytic explanation for gender difference and heterosexuality—refusing the idea that women need men in order to be complete. She also reverses a developmental model of psychoanalysis whereby normative subjects must complete certain stages of development in order to reach maturity and heterosexual normalcy. As Sara Ahmed argues, “any acts that postpone the heterosexual union are perverse[,] [. . .] The postponement or ‘delay’ threatens the line of heterosexuality, insofar as it risks ‘uncoupling’ desire and reproduction; the point of the straight line, one might speculate, is the reproduction of ‘the father’s image’” (78). Mrs. Ramsay’s auto-erotic temporal drag, her use of the lesbian phallus, and her refusal of feminine lack represent this refusal to faithfully reproduce progressive heterosexual generations.

But Mrs. Ramsay’s temporal perversity, her reversal of heterosexual linearity, and her “uncoupling” of sex from reproduction are even more radical than these above examples demonstrate. At one point in the novel Woolf describes Mr. Ramsay as standing in front of his wife “demanding sympathy,” and she “seemed to raise herself with an effort, and atonce to pour erect into the air a rain of energy, a column of spray [. . .] and into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare” (40). While Ruth Vanita reads Mr. Ramsay’s “beak of brass” as a phallus, Annis Pratt argues that it is Mrs. Ramsay who embodies a male orgasm by becoming erect and ejaculating a “fecundity” of sperm. But I argue that Mrs. Ramsay inverts both her and her husband’s sexual roles, along with the generational temporality of insemination and reproduction. A beak is also an orifice, and so the scene in fact depicts what is closer to an act of male-male oral sex: Mrs. Ramsay’s “strength flaring up to be drunk and quenched by the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of the male” (41). While Mr. Ramsay retains the empty symbol of his masculinity (his “scimitar”), its reinvention is dependent upon his being orally penetrated and inseminated—“drinking” and being “quenched” by his wife’s “spray of life.” Instead of being inseminated in order to reproduce the generational futurity of the family and the eugenic progress of “the race,” Mrs. Ramsay inseminates her husband in a non-procreative, perversely queer sex act that exceeds her maternal role in reproductive futurism and uncouples sex from reproduction. She simultaneously performs a sexual act in “drag” as a man while “dragging” on heteronormative generationality by lingering in her own perverse queer pleasures.

It would be easy, too, to read Lily’s painting as an abstract, modernist vision of succession from and rejection of Mrs. Ramsay’s Victorian morality if the mother figure did not exceed the supposedly rigid sexual roles of her own generation. But the painting itself also embodies Mrs. 

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2 Lise Weil offers a more in-depth analysis of Mrs. Ramsay’s maternal and lesbian relationship with Lily, but traces the radical lesbian politics of their relationship and argues for a kind of ideal lesbian “wholeness” that is in tension with my reading of the novel as queerly disrupting stable subjectivities and temporalities. See Weil.

3 For a closer and more detailed examination of Lacanian symbolism in To the Lighthouse, see Pratt. See also Gough. For a closer analysis of Freudian phallic imagery in the novel, see Jacobus.

4 Pratt reads Mrs. Ramsay’s “erection” as analogous to the central phallic symbol of the lighthouse, but still conceives of the exchange as heterosexual, rather than lesbian or queer.
Ramsay’s non-heterosexual, non-procreative generationalities. For example, Mr. Bankes ponders the painting and thinks, “Mother and child then—objects of universal veneration [. . .] might be reduced, he pondered, to a purple shadow without irreverence” (55–56). In formally abstracting the mother and child bond, Lily blurs and drags on Mrs. Ramsay’s generational transmission by making her one with her child. But Lily also imagines herself taking the son’s place in the abstract shape, remembering a time when she cradled Mrs. Ramsay’s knees in her arms, thinking, “Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one?” (54). Here Lily’s desire to merge with Mrs. Ramsay embodies queer generationality: she wants to love her and be loved by her both as sexual partner and as mother and daughter, challenging notions of descent as successive, biological, and non-sexual. Lily’s feminist genealogy does not involve rejecting Mrs. Ramsay, but incorporating the mother figure into herself and her modernist vision in a kind of temporal drag. Woolf makes it clear that Lily depends on Mrs. Ramsay for her own ability to reject hetero-reproductive temporalities in more clearly marked ways as a modern, unmarried woman and as an artist. Lily’s painting represents how she has “triumphed over Mrs. Ramsay,” but it is also “a tribute to the astonishing power that Mrs. Ramsay had over one” (178–79). This tension complicates Lily’s generational inheritance: as both a lover and a daughter, Lily is able to bring Mrs. Ramsay’s queer legacy into the future and let herself be “dragged” into the past, lingering inside her generational inheritance.

As Judith Halberstam points out in her recent book, The Queer Art of Failure, Woolf’s claim that “We think back through our mothers if we are women” is dependent upon a conditional “if”: “if we do not think back through our mothers, then we are not women, and this broken line of thinking and unbeing of the woman unexpectedly offers a way out of the reproduction of woman as the other to man from one generation to the next” (125). Halberstam proposes anti-generationality as a way to refuse Woolf’s conception of gendered subjectivity, but in fact my reading of To the Lighthouse demonstrates that Mrs. Ramsay exceeds her socially assigned womanhood and refuses her maternal role by taking up generationality in queerly perverse ways. In her temporal drag, she herself produces what Halberstam calls “a theoretical and imaginative space that is ‘not woman’ or that can be occupied only by unbecoming women” by reversing her sexual roles and gender performance (125). In other words, Woolf insists that generationality can be as radically “unbecoming” as anti-generationality. Or, as Freeman argues, “‘Generation,’ a word for both biological and technological forms of replication, cannot necessarily be tossed out with the bathwater of reproductive thinking” (65). If Lily “thinks back through her mothers,” she has quite a queer inheritance. In place of a progressive and linear temporality of generations secured through the mother, To the Lighthouse offers irregular generational relations that are not only maternal but also sexual. The modern Lily does not depose the Victorian Mrs. Ramsay in order to have her abstract aesthetic vision; rather Mrs. Ramsay’s queerly unsettling temporality enters into Lily and the painting as a presence, as a temporal “drag” on modernity’s and high modernism’s forward-marching momentum. Woolf’s generationality is not based on progress or succession from mother to daughter, but on the queer temporalities of delay, unbecoming, synchronicity, and retrospectivity.

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**Works Cited**


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5 There are too many readings of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily as mother and daughter to take into account here. See Silver for an overview of earlier scholarship and many scholars’ personal reactions to the generational relationship between and differing generational reactions to Lily and Mrs. Ramsay. For a reading of Lily and Mrs. Ramsay specifically in terms of the “purple shadow” in the painting, see Jane de Gay. See also Weil, Daugherty, and chapter 5 of Froula.

6 But, as Mary Lou Emery points out, Lily’s painting is dependent upon the physical labor and abject status of the working-class Irish housemaid Mrs. McNab. See Emery. So even in its radical destabilization of generationality, Woolf’s text leaves non-white, working class, and disabled subjects out of its genealogical vision in problematically eugenic ways.
In the Classroom: Virginia Woolf and the Possibilities of Queer History

As is the case with Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, this essay will not provide a “nugget of pure truth” (4). Instead of truth, or even answers, this essay will reveal the possibilities that emerge when literature, science, history, and sex meet in the fifteen-week period of an interdisciplinary, undergraduate course. My course, “Queering Sex,” and this essay are motivated by the spirit of queering articulated by the late Eve Sedgwick in her book *Tendencies*. Queering, according to Sedgwick, seeks after the “open mesh of possibilities” (8) that disrupts traditional epistemologies reinforcing the reign of binary thinking in which two concepts or identities are constructed and understood as hierarchical, oppositional, and interdependent. Queering challenges binary constructions by seeking out the fluidity, dissonances, gaps, and excesses of meaning that materialize “when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality, aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (8). It is this definition of “queering” that initiates the semester’s exploration, and it is the notion of monolithic signification that, by the end of the term, students not only are able to recognize, but also are able to critique and revise, as well. I present my experience of “Queering Sex” in the hope that after reading, others too will be excited by the possibility of Woolf and queer studies.

Queering Sex

Leonore Tiefer, in her collection of essays titled *Sex Is not a Natural Act*, explains that like “Jell-O, sexuality has no shape without a container,” and in our modern culture, the container is a sociohistorical one of meaning and regulation (3). Her intention is to destabilize the common and often invisible assumption that human sexuality rests upon “the biological bedrock” provided by anatomy and physiology (2). Fighting against the attraction of biological determinism that dominates when biology is given priority in the theorizing of human sexuality, Tiefer wants to encourage thinking of sexuality first and foremost as a concept—a concept “with shifting but deeply felt definitions” (3). Tiefer does not want to remove the body from consideration, but rather to orient human sexuality and the human body within a field that encompasses “human potentials for consciousness, behavior, and expression that are available to be developed by social forces: that is, available to be produced, changed, modified, organized, and defined” (3).

I begin my short essay on Woolf and queer studies with *Sex Is not a Natural Act* because in “Queering Sex” I use Tiefer’s work to introduce my students to the discourse of human sexuality that emerged in distinction from the ancient science of humors and the one-sex body that we examine in the first unit of the semester. Following a historical chronology from ancient Greece to the present day, my students and I, by mid-semester, have encountered and discussed early Western scientific and philosophical understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality ranging from Galen to Rousseau; moreover, we have explored the ways in which contemporary science and medicine continue to construct sex, gender, and sexuality along the lines of Western society’s (changing) convictions about what makes a man and what makes a woman. Many students articulate their surprise as they begin to perceive history to be a discourse of questions, providing us a framework that reveals the fluid and contingent nature of scientific constructions of biological sex and the cultural assumptions that attend these evolving constructions.

At mid-term, however, I switch gears from the scientific and philosophical history of sex and turn to Woolf and, appropriately, I believe, to the middle of *Orlando*, where the title character changes from a man to a woman. The trumpeters blow “one terrific blast”—“THE TRUTH”—to wake the sleeping Orlando, and the biographer, who is both narrating and historicizing, declares the simple but surprising fact that Orlando is now a woman (137). It is at this point in the course that students begin to entertain the idea that sex and sexuality are mutable concepts, and are not simply confined by science, biology, and philosophy, or, for that matter, forever restrained by the evolving norms of our heteronormative, patriarchal culture. With the introduction of Woolf’s mysteriously sex-shifting Orlando, we begin to conceive of sex and sexuality not as fixed concepts to be studied and mastered, but as realms of epistemological possibility.

Orlando’s abrupt and unexpected sex-change initially garners applause from my students, who appreciate it as a whimsical joke, unsettling readerly expectations. However, when I challenge my students to take Orlando’s transformation more seriously—as a very real possibility—they articulate frustration, wondering how Woolf could so fundamentally change the book’s title character and get away with it. “What has changed?” I ask with exaggerated naiveté. We turn to the text for guidance: “Orlando had become a woman—there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity” (138). Inevitably, what ensues is a frank and sincere discussion about the role of sex—the biology and the act—in identity formation, the way society molds our expectations regarding gender identity, and the impact of sex and gender politics in shaping our conceptions of ourselves. Moreover, what our discussion reveals is the power of literature to bridge the gap between academic study—history, science, philosophy—and critical and creative self-reflection, disrupting students’ traditional assumptions about what constitutes learning in college. “But let other pens treat of sex and sexuality,” the narrator of *Orlando* orders (139). And we do, turning our attention to contemporary biology.

Sexuality as possibility finds a strident ally in the unlikely realm of biology, and the experience of reading and discussing *Orlando* prepares students to turn their attentions to the biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling’s book, *Sexing the Body*. Within the first few pages, Fausto-Sterling explains her approach to sex and sexuality: “A body’s sex is simply too complex. There is no either/or. Rather, there are shades of difference” (3). Citing the work of pioneering biologists, philosophers, and anthropologists, Fausto-Sterling provides multiple and various examples of what is understood as non-normative sex and gender—including intersexuality in the Western World and *guevedoches* in the Dominican Republic, among others—in the process revealing many of the cissexual (that is, non-transsexual) assumptions that support mainstream scientific methodology. Suddenly Orlando’s sex-change does not seem so abrupt or so fantastic. At this juncture in the term, students begin to perceive ways that literature and science have joined forces to challenge and disrupt the rule of sexual difference that governs our society. Snakes and snails, on one hand, sugar and spice, on the other—no more! From this point forward in the semester, sex is about possibilities.

Conundrum, or Travels with Virginia

Jan Morris examines the conundrum of sexual difference from the perspective of someone trapped in society’s adherence to epistemologies
derived from either/or paradigms. Jan Morris was born James Morris, and her memoir, *Conundrum*, tells the story of her transformation from man to woman. Born in 1926, the author of the acclaimed multi-volume history of Victorian England, *Pax Britannica*, and a prolific travel writer and essayist, Morris recalls that she was “three or perhaps four years old when I realized that I had been born into the wrong body, and should really be a girl . . . it is the earliest memory of my life” (3). Despite her conviction, she elaborates: “by every standard of logic I was patently a boy” (4). However, she concedes that if she had announced her adolescent sexual self-awareness, her family “might not have been shocked” because, she explains, Woolf’s *Orlando* was already on the bookshelves (4). This reference to Woolf, made with a narrative wink, implicates the role literature plays in cultivating sexuality as a concept of possibility.

Much later in her life, Morris returns to Woolf in a more sustained and attentive manner in her *Travels with Virginia Woolf*, a collection of Woolf’s letters and diary entries that, although they do not resemble conventional travel writing in the least, do illustrate the power of place to inspire:

> The book should never be put on a travel writing shelf. The reader will learn very little about the countries Virginia visited, and that little is often misleading. What is displayed here is one of the fundamental influences that have moulded the gifts of a great writer, and unless one has read the novels one would hardly guess from these carefree extracts how important that influence was—that sense of place, I mean, which distilled into something far grander than mere gossip or entertainment, elsewhere colours her art more somberly. (10)

I quote Morris at length in order to convey the importance of place to cultivate, not fixity or permanence, but possibility. Woolf’s “travel” writing is less about documenting visits to new locales, according to Morris, and more about exploring the influence of place—familiar and unfamiliar—on one’s sensibility. And for Morris, whose sensibility is inextricably linked to the conundrum of her sexuality, place offers the possibility of imagining a new sexual sensibility.

Anglo-Welsh, Morris always preferred her Welsh side, as she explains in *Conundrum*: “When I looked Januslike to my double childhood view, it was always the line of the Black Mountains that compelled me, with their suggestion of mysteries and immensities beyond, and their reminder that there lay my strongest roots” (131). The Welsh mountains and her house, Trefan, both provide a sense of rootedness and encourage the potential of Morris’ dual gender vision; it is to Trefan that Morris goes to spend the last summer of her manhood. It is the place where she simultaneously feels the strongest sense of belonging and the strongest desire to transform from a man to a woman. Traveling back to Wales before undergoing the long process of treatments and surgeries, Morris enacts Woolf’s approach to travel writing: “What one records is really the state of ones [sic] own mind” (qtd. in Morris 9).

Although Morris travels much more extensively than Woolf ever did, she, like Orlando, traverses one of the most difficult-to-cross borders: that separating male and female. And all three—Morris, Woolf, and Orlando—illustrate the paradoxical consequence of travel: that in traveling away from home, we often come closer to ourselves. This is a very queer way to understand travel, disrupting the binaries of home/away and arrival/departure as well as challenging the linearity of conventional understandings of distance and the fixity associated with concepts of location. Judith Halberstam, in *In A Queer Time and Place*, theorizes such queer understandings of space and time as leaving “the temporal frame of bourgeois reproduction and family” and offering “nonnormative logics and organizations,” proposing that a “‘queer’ adjustment in the way in which we think about time, in fact, requires and produces new conceptions of space” (6). And it is such a queer adjustment, temporally and spatially, that accrues through our explorations in “Queering Sex.” Even T. S. Eliot—himself recently queered by modernist scholars such as Colleen Lamos and Tim Dean—offers a similar sentiment in “Little Gidding” when he suggests that “the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time” (209).

**Science Fiction Possibilities**

When my students and I approach the end of the term, having traveled far from the familiar territory of gender essentialism to the new regions of social construction and, with Octavia Butler’s science fiction novel *Dawn*, to a world of gender possibility, Eliot’s words echo in my mind. When Lilith, the protagonist of *Dawn*, chooses to throw in her lot with the Oankali and help to raise a mixed race of humans and aliens, my students and I find ourselves not in some far off future, but in a world very similar to our own, parsing the consequences of genetic engineering and stem cell research. An intimate relationship with an ooloi—a genderless being who mediates sexuality between males and females as well as between humans and aliens—motivates Lilith to transform her prejudice and discomfort into respect and empathy, seeing possibility in the merging of cultures instead of de-evolution and the demise of the human race. When we reach the last page of *Dawn* and encounter the origins of a new race, each student in the room has metaphorically returned to the present and is confronted with the politics, stereotypes, and expectations that attend gender and sexual identity in our society. However, as Eliot suggests, my students see this place with new eyes, as if for the first time. Through science fiction fantasy, students are forced to examine the confines of our binary gender system, to recognize our culture’s intense reluctance to think beyond either/or, and to entertain the possibility of new frameworks for constructing not only gender and sex, but also sexuality, intimacy, familial bonds, social roles, and the nature of humanity in our twenty-first-century world.

**Queer History**

By starting with ancient history and concluding in the far reaches of the future, with an emphasis, thanks to Jan Morris, on the metaphoricity of travel, students in my “Queering Sex” course journey through the history of sexuality. We begin by seeking answers, but quickly realize that what the history of sexuality provides is not answers, but a series of questions continuously revised and reoriented. Following the lead of Madhavi Menon and Jonathan Goldberg who advocate that “the project of queering [...] insists on queering historicism, with all its concomitant notions of ontology, teleology, and authenticity” (1610), my course takes seriously the intersection of sex and history as the means to disrupt the reign of heteronormative epistemologies that have for centuries in the Western world dictated the science, philosophy, and politics of sex and gender, determining what is natural and normal. Queering history challenges “the notion of a determinate and knowable identity, past and present,” forcing us to pay attention to “the question of sexuality as a question” (1609). The result is that history is no longer a “discourse of answers” but rather is revealed to be “a discourse whose commitment to determinate signification [...] provides false closure, blocking access to the multiplicity of the past and to the possibilities of different futures” (1609). What Woolf and Orlando demonstrate is that history is a narrative of our own creation—“verbal fictions” as Hayden White has argued (82), or, to borrow from Tiefer, a container that gives shape to an otherwise shapeless concept. Moreover, Woolf and Orlando, located at the intersection of sexuality and history, offer an alternative to the heteronormative, patriarchal container that constructs sex in terms of binary epistemologies. Instead of either/or logic, Woolf’s Orlando offers readers a way to imagine both history and sexuality as discourses derived from and cultivating possibilities.

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**Works Cited**

I have argued elsewhere that these terms are not quite as fixed into a "rainbow" figuration to reflect various oppositions found in her writing. Therefore, while many critics invoke Woolf's famous "granite and rarity), and the clay/granite symmetry (as naturally occurring materials). Be made for the rainbow/diamonds symmetry (mysticism, beauty, transformative, non-fixed form. But delighting in "the muddle and extent, the symmetry of rainbow and clay works in the sense of clay's diamonds is no surprise—being hard, obdurate rocks—and, to a lesser upon us, making us so unequally of clay and diamonds, of rainbow and

The luminous colours of the rainbow become dark and obscure. The bland shades of granite become mystic and filled with light, and light properties appears to confuse the opposing granite and rainbow; the hidden channels of the soul" (E4 473). The inversion of dark and thought and emotion" in fact "meanders darkly and obscurely through atoms of light." And the rainbow-like intangibility of "that inner life of distinctively queer coupling. In "The New Biography" (1927), when Woolf concludes that we cannot yet "name the biographer whose art is subtle and bold enough to present that queer amalgamation of dream and reality, that perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow" (E4 478, my emphasis), this very sentence subtly undermines the expected order; while at the beginning of this essay Woolf assimilates granite with "solidity" and "hard facts" and the rainbow with "intangibility" and "personality" (E4 473-74), here she parallels "dream" with "granite," "reality" with "rainbow." Indeed, from the second paragraph Woolf is already blurring the distinctions between granite and rainbow. We learn that even granite-like scientific fact has "an almost mystic power. Like radium, it seems able to give off forever and ever grains of energy, atoms of light." And the rainbow-like intangibility of "that inner life of thought and emotion" in fact "meanders darkly and obscurely through the hidden channels of the soul" (E4 473). The inversion of dark and light properties appears to confuse the opposing granite and rainbow; the bland shades of granite become mystic and filled with light, and the luminous colours of the rainbow become dark and obscure. The following year, in Orlando (1928), Woolf again complicates the expected parallel when we read of "Nature, who has played so many queer tricks upon us, making us so unequally of clay and diamonds, of rainbow and granite" (O 46, my emphasis). In one sense, granite's pairing here with diamonds is no surprise—being hard, obdurate rocks—and, to a lesser extent, the symmetry of rainbow and clay works in the sense of clay's transformative, non-fixed form. But delighting in "the muddle and mystery" (O 46), Woolf is playing with the overlapping possibilities for these "queer" couples whereby an argument could just as convincingly be made for the rainbow/diamonds symmetry (mysticism, beauty, rarity), and the clay/granite symmetry (as naturally occurring materials). Therefore, while many critics invoke Woolf's famous "granite and rainbow" figuration to reflect various oppositions found in her writing, I have argued elsewhere that these terms are not quite as fixed into a binary framework as appears to be the case.\(^1\) Free to mate with many other words, Woolf's "granite" and "rainbow" terms are extended and complicated across the span of her writing, and in this short essay I want to touch on just a few of the uncoupled, but still queer, appearances of granite in passages from The Voyage Out (1915) and Night and Day (1919).\(^2\)

Before turning to Woolf's first two novels, it is important to note those instances in her diaries, letters, and essays when she records the more conventional, memorializing function of granite in keeping with the "hard facts" and "solidity" it initially appears to represent when set against the rainbow in "The New Biography": in a diary entry on February 10, 1923, she writes that she "proved" among "several tons of granite crucifix" used to commemorate Belgian soldiers (D2 233); in a letter to Julian Bell in 1936 she notes seeing some of the "granite crosses" situated in and around Falmouth ("Nineteen Letters" 186); and in "This is the House of Commons," first published in 1932, Woolf imagines that if statues are to be erected one day in the honour of MPs they will be "like granite plinths set on the tops of moors to mark battles" (E5 327). While the first two examples here are passing references, in "This is the House of Commons" Woolf undermines the value of such memorializing. Notwithstanding the future possibility of becoming granite plinths, these men are already "featureless, anonymous": "as [the Secretary of Foreign Affairs] spoke so directly, so firmly, a block of rough stone seemed to erect itself there on the Government benches" (E5 326). The "secret" of the House of Commons, the "code" that unlocks these "[m]atters of great moment" is in the hands of "plain, featureless, impersonal" men (E5 326-27). Woolf is clearly not in any mood to celebrate the granite substance of patriarchy here.

But rather than simply criticizing the memorializing function of granite, Woolf subtly queers the conventional symbolic associations of granite monuments erected in the name of patriarchy, war and empire. In The Voyage Out the word "granite" actually appears only once, in a description of "massive granite rocks" by the sea in chapter 16 (218), yet as David Bradshaw has recently pointed out, granite is present in the opening pages of the novel in the form of Cleopatra's Needle, a granite obelisk situated on the Victoria Embankment in London and standing at 18 metres high and weighing 185 tons. Made in Egypt in 1460 BC, it was brought to England from Alexandria in a specially designed container and "set in place on the Victoria Embankment [...] on 12 September 1878" to commemorate Britain's victory over Napoleon sixty-three years earlier (Bradhaw 192). Bradshaw draws particular attention to the passage in which we learn that Helen Ambrose, walking on the Embankment, knew how to read the people who were passing her; there were the rich who were running to and from each others' houses at this hour; there were the bigoted workers driving in a straight line to their offices; there were the poor who were unhappy and rightly malignant. Already, though there was sunlight in the haze, tattered old men and women were nodding off to sleep upon the seats. When one gave up seeing the beauty that clothed things, this was the skeleton beneath. (VO 4)

On the one hand the granite obelisk that would be looming over Helen here as she walks is an enduring emblem of imperialist bombast, but on the other hand it is linked to the meeting and passing of a wide range of society. As Bradshaw outlines, "[a]most from the outset [...] the Victoria Embankment became a space not just where London's genteel and governing classes could disport themselves but, especially at night, an infinitely more abject environment where her myriad dispossessed

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1 See Ryan, "‘Nature.’"
2 For an exhaustive account of the appearances of “granite” and “rainbow” in Woolf’s writing, and an explanation of why these are crucial terms in her materially embedded mode of theorizing, see chapter 1 of Ryan, Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory.
congregated. [...] Helen’s distress becomes un-containable in the vicinity of Cleopatra’s Needle, where, twice a day, queues of destitute men and women had doled out to them” (192, 195).

Focusing on Cleopatra’s Needle helps us to uncover the socio-political import of Woolf’s novel, demonstrating here, as with her depiction of London spaces elsewhere, that Woolf’s writing is immersed in the material world in which she lived. But it also, I would suggest, tells us something about the queer nature of Woolf’s granite. Rather than celebrating its solidity and endurance (it is, after all, almost 3,500 years old), or taking part in imperial bravura, Woolf’s focus is firmly on the mixture of social classes and sexes that pass by the monument. She is less interested in basking in the masculine grandeur of what this phallic granite obelisk commemorates and symbolises, and more concerned with how it becomes entangled with the everyday, multiple and diverse lives of Londoners. Queering the symbolic associations of this granite monument, Woolf denudes pompous symbolism and reveals the “skeleton beneath”; the material realities associated with this granite monument—both invisible and present, solid and intangible to the reader—are multiple and changing.

In chapter 18 of Woolf’s following novel, Night and Day, a different granite obelisk becomes the focal point for the very questioning of truth and reality. Before reaching the obelisk, the certainties of granite-like truth are undermined from the beginning of the chapter when both Mary Datchet and Ralph Denham, walking together in Lincoln, have moments of doubt concerning the object of love and of happiness. For Mary it “seemed a mere toss-up whether she said, ‘I love you,’ or whether she said, ‘I love the beech-trees,’ or only ‘I love—I love’” (208). And for Ralph: “‘Unhappiness is a state of mind [. . .] it is not necessarily the result of any particular cause’” (210). As Rachel Bowlby has put it, “Night and Day represents being in love as a state which may not have an object, may not be reciprocated and may not know a definite source of its feeling” (183). Even as Ralph apparently reconciles this with the realisation that “his unhappiness had been directly caused by Katharine,” he goes on to reveal that the whole matter of such emotion is always and already a balancing of illusions and delusions: “Like most people, I suppose, I’ve lived almost entirely among delusions, and now I’m at the awkward stage of finding it out. I want another delusion to go on with. That’s what my unhappiness amounts to” (210). Moreover, when Ralph later sees Katharine he realises that she was “quite different, in some strange way, from his memory”; the fleshly reality of Katharine and therefore the object of his unhappiness had in fact eluded Ralph’s mind and “he had to dismiss his old view in order to accept the new one.” But Katharine’s embodied presence is itself characterised by its non-fixity: “everything about her seemed rapid, fragmentary, and full of a kind of racing speed” (222). Ralph’s perception of the material world is attuned to minuscule, molecular movements more than predetermined subjects and objects: “The people in the street seemed to him only a dissolving and combining pattern of black particles” (218). When he does decide to “examine the objects in the shop windows, and then to focus his eyes exactly upon a little group of women looking in at the great windows of a large draper’s shop” in an attempt to find order, it is acknowledged that this provides him with only a “superficial control” (219).

Later, when the narrative viewpoint turns to William Rodney and Katharine Hilbery as they decide to disembark the carriage taking everyone home, the elusive “light of truth” comes to focus on “a lonely spot marked by an obelisk of granite” (220, 224). Around two miles short of their return to Lampsher from Lincoln they are let out at the obelisk, and in the scene that follows this granite monument over sees the uncertainties of truth and love. In the first instance granite is linked here to “the gratitude of some great lady of the eighteenth century who had been set upon by highwaymen at this spot and delivered from death just as hope seemed lost,” but it soon sparks a narrative shift to a general seasonal description which seems to belong to neither the particular story of this woman nor to any precise historical moment: “In summer it was a pleasant place, for the deep woods on either side murmured, and the heather, which grew thick round the granite pedestal, made the light breeze taste sweetly; in winter the sighing of the trees was deepened to a hollow sound, and the heath was as grey and almost as solitary as the empty sweep of the clouds above it” (224-25). “Here” it is that “Rodney stopped the carriage and helped Katharine to alight,” and the association of granite with the uncertainty of “Here” is reiterated with a further mention of “the couple standing by the obelisk” (225). Far from fitting with a view of Night and Day where, as Pamela Caughie puts it, the past is “stationary,” “standard,” or “absolute” (102), the past, the present, and the unknown collide as Katharine “read the writing on the obelisk.[ . . .] She was murmuring a word or two of the pious lady’s thanks” (225). After this episode, when she looks into her own past and asks herself why she had agreed to marry Rodney when she did not wish to, Katharine thinks of it as “a desperate attempt to reconcile herself with facts—she could only recall a moment, as of waking from a dream, which now seemed to her a moment of surrender.” In other words, the truth of her feelings now betrays the “fact” that she had tried to acknowledge as an “illusion” (229-30).

The uncertainty surrounding this obelisk is accentuated by the fact that, as Michael Whitworth has recently noted, Woolf’s chosen topography here “is that of classic realism, mingling actual places (Lincoln) with imaginary ones (Lampsher), and at this point on the road between the two we may not know whether we are in the actual or the imaginary” (13). This is reflected in the fact that there is a great deal of uncertainty over whether this obelisk alludes to a particular obelisk Woolf herself knew of in the same way she clearly knew Cleopatra’s Needle. Julia Briggs, for example, has suggested that Woolf’s source is the Dunstan Pillar, built by Sir Francis Dashwood in 1751 and located a few miles to the south of Lincoln (Briggs 446). But as Whitworth points out, “the Pillar fails to match Woolf’s obelisk in several respects: it is not a memorial to a specific incident of robbery; it is not an obelisk in form, and it is far taller than anything we might call an obelisk.” Whitworth offers a second possibility of the Robbers’ Stone in Wiltshire, built in 1840 to record the attack and robbery of a Mr. Dean of Imber by four highwaymen‘ (a further stone marks the spot where one of the highwaymen died while being pursued), but concedes that the narrative fails to exactly match Woolf’s obelisk, as do the proportions and location of this stone. “Both might be sources,” he notes, “but Woolf isn’t alluding to them in the conventional sense” (Whitworth 13).

We might say, indeed, that instead of alluding to any particular granite monument—in Night and Day, The Voyage Out or elsewhere—Woolf is queering the very notion that allusion can ever be a granite-like fact; that both words and sources will always be productively twisted and transformed, whether by author or reader. Such transformation is part

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3 See Snaith and Whitworth.

4 See <http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/535208>.
of Woolf’s own “queer” couple of granite and rainbow, as much as it is embodied by the added social, political, and theoretical resonances of “queer” in our contemporary context; whether then or now, it is important to remember that the term “queer,” as Judith Butler puts it in Bodies that Matter, is always open to being “redeployed, twisted, queered” (228), that its very etymology, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick recounts in Tendencies, means “across,” “transverse,” “to twist” (xii). Sara Ahmed has argued more recently in Queer Phenomenology that it is the term’s inherent twists that make it possible for us “to move between sexual and social registers, without flattening them or reducing them to a single line” (161). Using the term “as a way of describing what is ‘oblique’ or ‘off line,’” as I have been suggesting Woolf’s “queer” does, is not so much a threat to the significance of “queer” used to describe certain sexual practices as it is an important reminder of “what makes specific sexualities describable as queer in the first place: that is, that they are seen as odd, bent, twisted” (161). Through her queering of “granite and rainbow,” Woolf provides us with the tools to perform our own “queer tricks,” uncovering her suitably twisted, unexpected challenges to conventional couples in her figurations where words, as Woolf writes in “Craftsmanship,” combine “[v]ariously and strangely, much as human beings live, by ranging hither and thither, by falling in love, and mating together” (E 96). And while it is the rainbow that has more explicitly queer affiliations in contemporary culture, digging up Woolf’s granite reveals her queering of language and her queering of the material world.

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**Figure Two: Dunstan Pillar**

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Peter’s encounter with his friends at Bourton ties him to women’s rites, a motif which is subtle but significant. “It was shocking; it was horrible!” The event he broke into seemingly involves merely a moment when Sally Seton kissed Clarissa Parry on the lips. The sacred nature of the event for Clarissa however, the companionship exhibited between them as they walked up and down on the terrace, entails revelation and a religious feeling as she receives something from Sally. It is something infinitely precious and secret, wrapped up because she was not to look at it (MD 52-53). The occasion suggests sacred rites, women’s mysteries. This type of event has several parallels, historical and literary.

An historical event, the famous example involving Clodius, a Roman politician, concerns the 62 BCE scandal which resulted when he intruded on the rites of the Bona Dea. In pursuit of a romantic interest, a friend of Caesar’s wife, he dressed himself as a woman in order to gain access undetected to Caesar’s house where his object of interest was participating in the event. Tried for immorality, Clodius was only acquitted through a bribed jury. The behavior of Clodius is almost universally considered amusing. As Juvenal comments, “What altar does not attract its Clodius in drag?” (Juvenal Satires VI. lines 312-345 and 341).

A literary example is found in Euripides’s Bacchantes in which Pentheus wishes to see the rites of Bacchus. In female garb Pentheus does so but is torn to pieces by the women who discovered him. His mother, of course, who led the frenzy, was the first to recognize him. Ovid offers a similar version of the occasion (Ovid Metamorphoses 3.518 ff).

Peter gives no account of his intrusion into Clarissa’s moment of happiness when he “spoils the moment” for her (Fernald 79). He, however, retains an impression comparable to the long-ago occasion, “a sense of pleasure-making hidden, […] young people slowly circling […] Absorbing, mysterious […] that one passed, discreetly, timidly, as if in the presence of some sacred ceremony to interrupt which would have been impious” (MD 248). It is Sally, however, who is expected to be mauled and maltreated instead of him. Traditionally, though, the punishment for the unfortunate male who intrudes into women’s mysteries is for him to be afflicted with impotence.

Another literary example occurs in The Satyricon of Petronius. The hero has accidentally come upon the secret grotto of Priapus where the occult ritual is taking place. Having been warned that, “No man on earth may look on forbidden things as you have done and escape punishment.” (Petronius 31), he is consequently stricken with impotence, a condition he retains to the end of the narrative. Apparently the only male who is butch enough to escape impotence is Heracles (Propertius 4.9). The aptronymic significance concerning Peter’s name focuses ironically on his anatomical failings: “the troubles of the flesh” (MD 77). Moreover he seems euphemistically aware of his own infirm condition when he laments his inability “to come up to the scratch” and being “not altogether manly” (MD 240, 237). This is something more than a metaphorical condition as has been suggested (Squier 109). In the Byronic sense, “Il se pose en victime” (Elizabeth Barrett Browning qtd. in Woolf Flush 35). Peter is still smarting about the failed relationship with Clarissa, hinting that in truth he has a sense of the cause for his condition. “Clarissa had sapped something in him permanently” (MD 241). According to the myth at least, his account of the source of his anguish is accurate.

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**Works Cited**


Voyages Out, Voyages Home contains a great number of remarkable papers. My favorites are those that examine Virginia Woolf and the “real world,” and especially those that discuss the idea of influence.

One of the best of these is Beth Rigel Daugherty’s “From the Beginning: Virginia Woolf’s Reading and Virginia Woolf’s Essays” (55-61). In this tantalizing piece, Daugherty discusses the likely impact of two works Woolf describes as some of her earliest reading: Tom Brown’s School Days and Three Generations of English Women. Leslie Stephen read Tom Brown’s School Days aloud to his brood of precocious children; it is the first book Woolf remembers hearing in her father’s voice. Daugherty argues that Tom Brown’s School Days had a two-pronged influence on Woolf’s thinking. Excluded as she was from education outside of the home, the novel probably contributed to Woolf’s anger at “Arthur’s Education Fund”—that is, Woolf’s resentment at her exclusion from many of the privileges bestowed by a public school education. Yet Tom Brown’s School Days also made Woolf happy to be an outsider: she was grateful to have escaped the maw of the “great patriarchal machine” (57), and she was relieved she had not been “stamped and moulded” (57) by the English educational establishment. As Daugherty points out, Tom Brown’s School Days may even have informed Virginia Woolf’s reading of another early book, Janet Ross’s Three Generations of English Women. In this work, Woolf read about three generations of the Ross women, all of whom were self-educated, highly intellectual, and possessed of strong political opinions. Two of them even supported their families with their writing. These women gave young Virginia Stephen a model for education that was very different from Tom Brown’s School Days. And the Ross women gave her a model of feminine achievement that was utterly different from the life of her mother, Julia Stephen.

Another real-world favorite is Diane F. Gillespie’s delightful “Into the Underworld: Virginia Woolf, the Hogarth Press, and the Detective Novel” (70-76), which also takes up the question of “influence,” this time the influence of detective fiction on Virginia Woolf, and in particular the “influence” of the work of C. H. B. Kitchin. Brieﬂy stated, there was little of the latter. The Hogarth Press published two novels by Kitchin, in 1929 and 1934. Woolf did not know Kitchin particularly well, and did not particularly like him. Yet, as Gillespie points out, Woolf’s work can be placed in this same milieu; her works certainly portray the violent underworld of crime, as can be seen in The Years and Between the Acts. But, unlike Kitchin, Woolf characteristically portrays crime from the victim’s point of view rather than the detective’s. Gillespie’s paper is also delightful for its framing parody of A Room of One’s Own; like the narrator of A Room of One’s Own, Gillespie turns herself into a “detective” who hunts for clues in a library and is finally disappointed when she is unable to come back with a “nugget of pure truth” (quoted on page 75).

And Leslie Hankins’ intriguing “Reel Publishing: Virginia Woolf and the Hogarth Press’ Film Publications” (77-83) astutely situates the Woolfs and the Hogarth Press directly in the world of film culture in the 1920s and 1930s. Hankins makes the telling point that, at this time, literature and film were poised on a “fault line” (81), and that the film criticism published by the Hogarth Press (by Eric Walter White) tended to portray that fault line as a power struggle between the two media.

Su Reid writes about “influence” in an equally compelling way, although this time it is the influence of actual space on literary space. In “Walking Down Whitehall” (32-38), Reid concludes that Woolf invokes a sense of dislocation in Mrs. Dalloway by portraying spaces in the novel differently than they actually are on the streets of London. This dislocation certainly draws the reader into the imaginative worlds of the main characters; Reid makes the point that it also reminds the reader of the indeterminate nature of all literary readings.

Virginia Woolf and the Natural World: Selected Papers from the Twentieth International Conference on Virginia Woolf takes a very different, but also highly successful approach to the “real world.” In this collection, the focus is ecofeminism and its many manifestations in Woolf’s encounters with the world of nature. There’s not a bad paper in the lot, but the three best are written by Bonnie Kime Scott, Elisa Sparks, and Diana Swanson.

Bonnie Kime Scott’s paper—“Ecofeminism, Holism, and the Search for Natural Order in Woolf” (1-11)—as the opening plenary at the conference, sets the tone and context for this collection of papers. It is a brilliant piece that accomplishes several tasks: it summarizes the major critical lenses through which ecofeminism works; it summarizes previous scholarship on Woolf and nature; it writes beautifully of the many ways in which Woolf uses nature in her unrelenting search for connection to something outside herself. Scott is careful to point out that it would be anachronistic to claim that Woolf herself is an ecofeminist; the term itself dates only to 1974, and ecofeminism is best viewed as one strand in the second wave of late twentieth century feminism. Yet Woolf uses nature in a way that is terrifically attractive to readers who are attuned to the environment and its vulnerabilities in the twenty-first century. Woolf expresses a sense of connection to and reverence for nature; she also creates a sense of hope whenever she “interlaces” the consciousness of one character or creature with that of another.

Diana Swanson’s paper “The Real World: Virginia Woolf and Ecofeminism” (24-34) appears close to the beginning of this volume. It was presented as the closing plenary of the conference and nicely draws together Scott’s ideas. Like Scott, Swanson insists that we would be wrong to read Woolf as an ecofeminist herself. The better questions, she says, are whether Woolf’s work can help us understand how feminism is important for environmentalism, and whether Woolf’s writing can help us understand subjectivities of all sorts, and especially subjectivities of creatures who are not human. Swanson likens Woolf’s work to that of Doris Lessing, since both avoid what Swanson terms “the heroic plot” (27). Swanson also writes engagingly of the many ways in which Woolf conveys the “consciousness”—or at least the point of view—of creatures who are not human. The best examples are Swanson’s excellent analyses of the short stories “Mark on the Wall” and “Kew Gardens.” Swanson also writes well, but not quite so convincingly, on the subjectivity of the non-human in A Room of One’s Own, Jacob’s Room, and The Years.

But my favorite paper in the collection is Elisa Kay Sparks’ brilliant and comprehensive “Everything tended to set itself in a garden: Virginia Woolf’s Literary and Quotidian Flowers: A Bar-Graphical Approach” (42-57). In this paper, Sparks sets out to provide a complete catalogue of Woolf’s use of flowers in all her fiction. She begins by describing the ambivalent feelings Woolf associated with flowers—her first memory of the red and blue and purple anemones on her mother’s dress, counterpointed to the smell of flowers she always associated with her mother’s funeral. This “certain ambivalence about flowers” (44) carries over into young Virginia Stephen’s relationship with Violet Dickinson and expresses itself in increasingly complex ways in her novels, as Woolf associates flowers with women’s growth, development, and socialization. Sparks then analyzes flowers in each of Woolf’s novels: What do they symbolize? How many varieties of flowers are mentioned? Which flowers appear and why? Sparks’ paper even includes tables and graphs—the numbers of plants that appear over time in Woolf’s novels; the totals of different varieties of flowers in each work; the number of mentions of roses. But the best surprise of all: a plan for a Virginia Woolf garden, using flowers and trees and bushes mentioned in Woolf’s works. This is a wonderfully imaginative yet down-to-earth paper that studies a single symbol to an extreme, and yet manages to become neither rigid nor overdone.

There are of course other wonderful selections in this volume: Jane Lilienfeld’s comparison of the uses of nature in Woolf and Willa Cather; Vara Neverow’s discussion of horses and foxes in Jacob’s Room and Orlando; Diane F. Gillespie’s examination of Virginia Woolf, W. H. Hudson, and bird imagery. And there is a wonderfully evocative memoir...

In short, both these volumes of selected papers from International Virginia Woolf conferences cover a wide swathe of territory—there are nineteen papers in *Voyages Out, Voyages Home* and thirty-one papers in *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World*. Both volumes speak to the depth, vitality and general excellence of Woolf criticism. Both of these volumes manage to capture the variety and spontaneity of the conferences themselves—and in that way leave us eager for the next conference and the next volume of selected papers.

**Katherine C. Hill-Miller**

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**Works Cited**


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**REVIEW**

**HELLENISM AND LOSS IN THE WORK OF VIRGINIA WOOLF**


Readers expecting a textual analysis of the novels will not find much of that in *Hellenism and Loss in the Work of Virginia Woolf*, as Theodore Koulouris admits in the introduction. He has chosen, instead, to provide a cultural/historical study of Woolf’s relation to the Greeks, situating his argument within a careful examination of the history of British Hellenism, which is presented as anything but monolithic; Woolf’s early life and mature milieu; and her unpublished work. One of the great contributions of the book is the lengthy discussion of Woolf’s “Greek Notebook,” which is particularly helpful because it sheds light on Woolf’s later textual references to Greek myth, literature, and philosophy.

In this study of the impact of Greece and the Greeks on Virginia Woolf’s life and work, Theodore Koulouris argues that Woolf’s private study of Greek and her reworking of nineteenth-century British Hellenism lie at the heart of the qualities that have made Woolf most famous, including her experimental style and her political views. Following a Derridian approach, Koulouris examines Woolf’s “Greekness” and its contribution to an aesthetic that he characterizes as a “poetics of loss.” Koulouris coins these terms, placing them in quotation marks throughout his work, to distinguish Woolf’s unique relationship to the Greeks. Woolf’s Greekness, as opposed to British Hellenism, derives from Woolf’s nonprofessional and largely informal reception of Greek texts in literature, religion, philosophy, and mythology. Koulouris argues that she reworks these textual influences, filtering them through a network of gendered socio-cultural and political structures, into the poetics of loss.

Koulouris argues that Woolf’s notion of loss is a broad one, extending beyond early losses within her family to include the losses associated with modernity, as well as political dispossessions and marginalization, and the loss of ideals related to the two world wars. Ultimately, Koulouris argues, Woolf’s poetics of loss moves from being a response to the personal losses in her early life and a sign of her inadequacy—as a woman shut out from formal education, and education in Greek in particular—to being a powerful and intentional negation of absolutism and authoritarianism in all matters social and artistic. In developing this argument, Koulouris emphasizes Woolf’s lack of formal education in Greek throughout the book, a biographical detail that has recently been upended by Christine Kenyon Jones and Anna Snaith in a 2010 article. Kenyon Jones and Snaith report evidence of the enrollment of the Stephen sisters in several courses at King’s College London and discuss the inconsistency with Virginia Woolf’s portrayal of herself as not having access to university education. However, despite this recently discovered evidence, Koulouris’ point about Woolf’s self-presentation as excluded from formal education, and her relative lack of education in Greek compared to professional Classicists, still holds. Koulouris conceptualizes her “maturing poetics of loss” as a “discursive vacillation” over “ideological fixities” which imbues her work with a detached and skeptical critical attitude towards the socio-cultural issues of her time, including war, feminism, and fascism (16). He characterizes this discursive vacillation as a complicated intellectual attitude of withholding absolute conclusions and a willful positioning of herself in the middle ground. And, he links the vacillation to her understanding of the impossibility of mourning, inspired by her reading in Greek, and to her position as an outsider, which was also honed by her early reading in Greek. Thus, in Koulouris’s reading—and he argues this point strongly throughout the book—understanding Woolf’s relation both to Greek and to British Hellenism is essential to understanding her approach to aesthetics and politics, as well as to understanding the role of early loss in her mature voice.

The book goes a long way towards re-centering Woolf’s study of Greek in her thought, and situates this issue within recent directions in Woolf scholarship and contemporary literary and cultural theory. It has three sections, consisting of two chapters each, and proceeds chronologically. The first section contains an overview of British Hellenism and a study of loss in Woolf’s early life, conceived both as personal loss of family members and as a lack of a personal voice. The second section rethinks Woolf’s relation to male Bloomsbury through the lens of gendered authority and access to knowledge of Greek, offering the knowledge of Greek as another locus of loss for a woman excluded from its authoritative study. Koulouris traces Woolf’s response to the masculine culture of British Hellenism, experienced in part through her Bloomsbury contemporaries, as it manifests in her challenges to two central ideals of Hellenism, love and heroism. In the third section, Koulouris fully develops his portrait of Woolf’s mature poetics of loss as discursive vacillation, inspired by her critical relation to both the male and female lines of British Hellenism, and offers a fascinating and carefully argued reassessment of Woolf’s relation to Jane Ellen Harrison in which Koulouris builds on Mary Beard’s work to argue for a more complex understanding of Harrison’s negotiation of nineteenth-century British Hellenism. In the last two chapters he develops a reading of Woolf’s aesthetics as one of synthesis, counterpointing reductionist readings of both Woolf and Harrison.

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1 Indeed, Jones and Snaith position their findings within questions about Woolf’s silence about her formal education and pretense to being solely self-educated.
This study offers a welcome reevaluation of Woolf’s relation to the Greeks and to British Hellenism and the consequences of her private study on her political views and aesthetics.

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Work Cited
Jones, Christine Kenyon and Anna Snaith. “‘Tilting at Universities’: Woolf at King’s College London.” Woolf Studies Annual 16 (2010): 1-44.

REVIEW

This attractive catalogue presents selected items from a collection by William B. Beekman,1 exhibited at the Forbes Gallery in New York City from November 21, 2011 to January 4, 2012.2 Five hundred copies were printed on fine heavy paper, for sale at $65 each; twenty-five were specially combined with a signed David Levinthal print for $2500 each. Glenn Horowitz Bookseller offers the Beekman collection for sale en bloc for $4.5 million (Barry 1).3

The catalogue is an unusually shaped volume (6” high x 9” wide), a collectable artifact in itself. Acclaimed photographer David Levinthal has contributed front and back covers and additional photographs as section divisions. These are unusual, witty, and curiously nostalgic combinations of Woolf artifacts with tiny hats, doll-house-sized furniture, and other small-scale or distant objects in soft focus against dark backgrounds. The front cover, for example, juxtaposes a miniature doll’s bust, elegantly dressed in flower-trimmed lace and hat, with the jacketed first-edition spine of Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway. The back cover shows small red-striped canvas folding chairs on each side of a jacketed first edition of To the Lighthouse. The catalogue also includes several photographs by Robert Lorenzson of selected items on display.

Although the collection duplicates, as in the case of editions of Woolf’s work and Hogarth Press dust jackets, some materials and publications in other Woolf and Bloomsbury collections (see “Guide to Library Special Collections” in each issue of the Woolf Studies Annual), many items augment what is currently accessible to scholars. The catalogued materials are divided into five parts: I. Virginia Stephen: Her youth, and the Bloomsbury Group; II. Virginia Woolf: Her fiction, and The Hogarth Press; III.Woolf and Vita Sackville-West; IV. Woolf’s Non-fiction; and V. Woolf and her nephews, the latter with an emphasis on Julian Bell.

Highlights of the exhibition catalogue will differ for each reader/viewer. Photographs include one of thirteen-year-old Virginia Stephen after her mother’s death, one of Virginia Woolf on a page from her 1923 passport (opp. 79), and one of the unpublished ones (1939) by Gisele Freund (#18). The collection contains the originals of published letters, but also a number of unpublished ones. Among the latter are eight letters from Leonard Woolf and Vanessa Bell to Vita Sackville-West concerning Virginia Woolf’s disappearance and death, three of which have not been published (#45). There are also three unpublished letters from Virginia Woolf to Miss McAfee of the Yale Review (#52), one of which contains Woolf’s attempt to explain her revisionary characterization in The Waves.

Manuscript materials include Vita Sackville-West’s pair of unpublished love poems for Virginia Woolf (#42). Although we often are not given the provenance of items, these were “directly from [. . . Vita’s] desk” (81). There is also a typescript of Vita’s memorial poem to Woolf (#46) and a proof copy of The Years that differs from the published copy to which Woolf added the “1918” section (#40).

The collection includes several volumes Virginia Woolf bound herself. Although there are a number among the Woolfs’ books at Washington State University (WSU), others apparently are “scarce in commerce” and thus have become collector’s items (#73). Beekman collection examples are ten volumes comprising George Sand’s memoir that Woolf bound (#19), covered in stamped paper, labeled, and gave to Susan Buchan in a group with two letters to “My dear Susie,” one published, one unpublished, along with a copy of Buchan’s memoir of Charlotte of Albany, Funeral March of a Marionette (Hogarth 1935). In return Woolf received copies of two of John Buchan’s (Lord Tweedsmuir’s) biographies, one of Sir Walter Scott (1932) and one of Oliver Cromwell (1934), the latter still among the Woolfs’ books (WSU), inscribed by Susan Tweedsmuir.

Additional books in the Beekman collection include multiple editions of Woolf’s works with original dust jackets, many with inscriptions, and some from the libraries of other people. There are, for instance, three copies of first editions of Woolf’s Night and Day. Lytton Strachey inscribed one (with a page of review excerpts of The Voyage Out) to Carrington, then Frances Partridge signed it. Another is a first American edition Woolf inscribed to Euphemia (“Emphie”) Case, the sister of Vita Sackville-West; and a proof copy of The Years that differs from the published copy to which Woolf added the “1918” section (#40).

Most of the catalogue items are usefully annotated with information that provides, in addition to bookseller’s data, sometimes quite lengthy biographical and historical background about people and events as well as summaries of, or quotations from, rare and unpublished materials. The catalogue does not give credit to the writer of these descriptions, complete with endnotes and works consulted. Most-cited—in addition to Woolf’s writing—are the basic Checklist of the Hogarth Press 1917-1946 by Howard Woolmer and B. J. Kirkpatrick’s A Bibliography.

1 An online digital catalogue of the entire 150+ items in the collection was available for a time at <http://www.glennhorowitz.com/featured/VirginiaWoolfthehogarthpressandthebloomsburygroup> but is no longer available. It was arranged in the following categories: Bloomsbury Books and Association Copies; By Virginia and Leonard Woolf; Handprinted Books for the Hogarth Press; Additional Hogarth Press Books; Correspondence; Manuscripts, Photographs, and Documents; Translations; Periodicals; Biographies and Critical Works; A catalogue from another auction of interest is available at: <http://issuu.com/leighpatterson/docs/bloomsbury_list_1011?mode=window&backgroundColor=%23222222>

2 The collection was also at Glenn Horowitz Bookseller, 87 Newton Lane, East Hampton, NY from July 14 into August 2012.

3 Sarah Funke Butler, literary archivist and agent for Glenn Horowitz, confirms this price (e-mail, 1 July 2012).

4 Sarah Funke Butler deserves the credit for the exhibit. See note 2.
Apart from their contents, exhibition catalogues like this one raise questions about both collectors and sellers. Although the catalogue tells us nothing about either, we can identify Beekman as a senior finance partner in an international law firm and assume the first prerequisite for a serious collector—discretionary funds. A second prerequisite—interest and knowledge—is evidenced by his past or current involvement with the New York Historical Society, the American Friends of the National Gallery, London, the Library Council of the Museum of Modern Art, the Morgan Library & Museum (“Executive Profile”), as well as the Grolier Club. In 2004, the latter produced an exhibition and catalogue entitled *Virginia Woolf and the Hogarth Press: From the Collection of William Beekman*. Beekman explains his interest in these books by saying they reinforce his “‘dualistic image of Virginia Woolf herself, embossed, as it were, on opposite sides of a single coin: heads, the feminist, genius, and iconoclast; tails, the flower of an imperialist, paternalist, and complacent society which she herself was determined to change’” (qtd. in Butler). In 2008 Beekman, along with Sarah Funke, also curated for the Grolier Club, *This Perpetual Flight: Love and Loss in Virginia Woolf’s Intimate Circle*, an exhibition of Bloomsbury Group materials drawn from several major library collections (Levenback) and including a number of the items that were auctioned (e.g., Virginia Woolf’s passport).

As these exhibitions indicate, William Beekman amassed his collection not only for his own pleasure and enlightenment but for that of others as well. From the involvement of Glenn Horowitz in the sale of the collection and from the initial en bloc price, Beekman also seems to have collected for investment purposes. Clearly the value of Woolf materials has appreciated dramatically. In a digital age, as some observers confirm, printed and handwritten materials by writers with reputations have become the collecting objects of choice. The challenge for those who choose to invest in the market, as Beekman himself makes clear in his letter to a friend, is to find legitimate and expert guidance from someone like Horowitz who possesses “the expertise that is essential for the success of a serious collector.”


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**REVIEW**

**JULIAN BELL:**

**FROM BLOOMSBURY TO THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR**


“What more powerful poetry could there be than action amidst the shelling?” (Ying 14). In *K: The Art of Love* (2001), her fictional account of the romance between Julian Bell and the Chinese writer Ling Shuhua, the novelist Hong Ying asks this question of Bell’s decision to forgo Bloomsbury pacifism for ambulance driving in the Spanish Civil War. Ying’s rhetorical question acknowledges the two motivations that, at least as much as Bell’s Bloomsbury milieu, determined the shape of his short life: his fascination with war and his passion for poetry. Behind these motivations lies another, more fundamental one: an ethical impulse transforms him from “a mere second-generation and minor Bloomsburrain” (Stansky 263) into a figure of interest in his own right. Bell sums up this impulse in a letter to a friend written shortly before his death in Spain in July 1937: “It’s impossible to let other people go and fight for what one believes in and refuse the risk oneself... I should never recover from a sense of shame if I didn’t go” (243).

How Bell arrived at this decision is very largely the story told by Peter Stansky in a book that significantly expands his and William Abrahams’s treatment of Bell in their classic contrapuntal biography, *Journey to the Frontier: Two Roads to the Spanish Civil War* (1966). There, Bell pales beside the extraordinarily dynamic figure of John Cornford. Drawing on a large mass of materials that have become available over the past forty-five years—the period when the Bloomsbury that was became the Bloomsbury we know—Stansky makes a strong case for Bell’s vitality as a political, sensual, and artistic animal, and as “the sole Bloomsbury poet” (285). He also traces a drama of intergenerational negotiations that illuminate complex relations among politics, art, and the psychodynamics of Bloomsbury family life in the late 1920s and 1930s, when Bloomsbury’s faith in reason and in the supreme value of personal intimacy faced increasingly bellicose challenges from within and without. “Julian,” Stansky writes, “wished to be a hard man of action, almost an antithesis of the values of Bloomsbury” (287). Or, as Bell himself asserts in his posthumously published essay “War and Peace: A Letter to E. M. Forster,” “At this moment, to be anti-war means to submit to fascism, to be anti-fascist means to be prepared for war” (qtd. in Stansky 249). At this moment, his aunt Virginia was writing *Three Guineas*, which, Stansky points out, “was to a degree an argument with Julian” (287).

One may reasonably ask whether Julian Bell himself would be worthy of such attention if he hadn’t been a golden scion of that “very communicative, literate, letter writing, visiting, articulate... world” (Moments 65) that his aunt spoke of in her “Sketch of the Past.” Stansky acknowledges that, despite accomplishments “of considerable interest,” Bell “was, no doubt, a minor figure” (x). But “nowadays we are interested in such lives,” and he tells Bell’s story “in much more depth and detail” (x-xi). These are a depth and detail inspired and enabled by such works as Hong Ying’s novel and, especially, Patricia Laurence’s fascinating study of Bloomsbury and China, *Lily Briscoe’s Chinese Eyes*—a debt that Stansky readily acknowledges (viii). Stansky’s book indeed enriches our understanding of the five defining periods in Bell’s
This biography meticulously fleshes out Bell’s family relations, aesthetic efforts, and social and political commitments. It also details Bell’s complicated sexual life, and its permeation with Bell’s evolving political, ethical, and aesthetic ideas, from his early relationship with his Apostolic contemporary, the future art historian and Cambridge Five spy, Anthony Blunt, to the final, most intense, most socially fraught one, with Ling Shuhua. In his sexual, literary, and political endeavors, Bell, like many young men of his generation, strove “to reconcile the conflicting demands of the life of the mind and the life of action” (19). Like them, too, he “would never satisfactorily resolve” this “crucial conflict in his life,” which also took the form of an opposition between “his emotional commitment to the past [and] his intellectual commitment to the future” (178). This opposition finds especially poignant expression in Bell’s close relationship with his mother, against whose wishes he went to Spain. After Julian’s death, Vanessa Bell would, she said, “never be happy again” (280).

A keynote of this book is the claim that Julian Bell, for all his “determined individuality,” nevertheless harbored, in Woolf’s estimation, “no one gift in particular” (Platform 21). Indeed, Bell possessed a certain intellectual complacency that amounted to an ethical weakness, an inability or unwillingness to pursue fully any of his many interests. Intellectually he was, as Woolf said of his essays, “all over the place” (qtd. in Stansky 220). To put it more generously, he was adventurous, politically, poetically, sexually. His adventurousness also characterized his life geographically. But despite his time at Cambridge, his sojourn in China, his eventual journey to Spain, Julian Bell was forever a child of Charleston—and he was a child and a confidant of Nessa. Stansky and Abrahams explored the theme of “conflicting demands” (19); Stansky’s revised life attends to this theme in detail.

In the end, Julian Bell’s was a life of promise that ended in “a terrible waste” (280). But it ended well, too, when he discovered on his own terms the poetry of action amidst the shelling. It is not that he died in Spain that defines the end of his life, but how he died, as an ambulance driver who did his job with intelligence, bravery, and care. By Bloomsbury standards, Julian Bell’s life was not one of notable creative accomplishment. But in the end, it was a life marked by a redemptive courage, and it was, as Stansky and Abrahams show, a rich life—rich in the living, and rich in the telling.

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**Works Cited**


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**REVIEW**

**MODERNIST COMMITMENTS: ETHICS, POLITICS AND TRANSNATIONAL MODERNISMS**


Jessica Berman’s meticulously researched *Modernist Commitments*, her most recent contribution to the new modernist studies,1 offers a signal scholarly work in a rapidly proliferating field of cross-disciplinary investigations repositioning modernism as a planetary response to (among many other factors) “the interrelation of cultural, political, and economic transactions” (Mao and Walkowitz 739). Berman’s book is notable for the multiple critical threads it deftly brings together to explore a “multiplicity of transnational modernisms” (Berman 28) and particularly for the articulate urgency with which it posits modernist narrative experimentation as the means for “revising ethical experience, restructuring social action, and imagining a future justice within its local and global situations” (29). Readers will find in its pages engaging close readings of a myriad number of literary texts, familiar and less so, connected by Berman’s skillful focus on what she sees as central questions posed by narrative that are critical for imagining justice: “Who speaks, and from what location?” (283). In the wide range of examples offered in her careful analysis, we hear multiple responses in many languages, resonating across the “worldwide sphere of textual activity” (28).

This book extends and expands Berman’s research over the past dozen years. The critical strands Berman engages throughout her work—a philosophical, feminist ethics of community; a materialist and broadly post-colonial politics, and a contemporary reconsideration of the aesthetic—produce in this most recent text an effective two-part analytical framework. The multi-layered and multi-situated analyses provide the reader an experience of the “valences” made possible by Berman’s strategy of a “transnational optics,” which she defines as “a mode of reading that marries close attention to the local activity of the work in its specific contexts with a willingness to follow the nodal lines of interconnection that spin out from each text to its broader sphere of engagement” (30).

Berman initiates her complex reading invoking Woolf’s “Middlebrow” essay, which highlights Berman’s key focus: the use of the imagination to contemplate subjectivities other than one’s own “to explore the possibilities and limits of ethical connection across irrevocable distance” (40), an act which posits one in the realm of politics and the social. Adapting Gilles Deleuze’s concept of a textual “fold” (40), Berman carefully articulates Woolf’s experimental fictional strategy for bringing subjects together in nonnormative encounters that explore “the limits of intimacy, eros and care” (40), drawing on moments within *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando* as her primary textual examples. In contrast, Woolf’s *Three Guineas* marks a radically different textual strategy, one marked by “gaps, interruptions, and moments of narrative incoherence” that open up the potential for a different political relation derived not via enfolding but from recognizing the impossibility of consensus. The context of the 1930s provides stark differentiations in the use of language for coercion—e.g., propaganda—and the ability of language to give “an account of oneself,” a strategy Woolf deploys to interrupt the structures of address, breaking the teleology of a fixed

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1 For a concise overview of recent critical directions in the study of modernism, see Mao and Walkowitz.
point of view. The chapter constellates Woolf’s divergent narrative strategies with those of Jean Rhys, whose first three novels form the subject of Berman’s analysis. The embodied subjectivities of Rhys’s female “border walkers” (between classes, as well as between colony and metropole) reveal the peril of being “defined and limited by their global positioning” within the politics of imperialism (42). *Quartet, Voyage in the Dark, and Good Morning, Midnight* variously articulate the “power of a convoluted life story to illuminate the spatial constraints on the narratable self and to refuse the political imperatives of twentieth-century British colonial geography” (77). The force of the analysis for Berman lies in reading these narratives together. Woolf and Rhys come at the question of the relation of ethics, politics and aesthetics from different directions, allowing us to consider the bankruptcy of empire from multiple geopolitical locations while revealing modernist experimental narrative’s power to mark the “intimate scene of ethics” (89). In recognizing the horizon of narrative strategies utilized by this pair of modernist writers, we gain a more nuanced sense of how they open a space of possibility for imagining future justice. How these narratives pose the question of “who are you?” and “where are you located?” activates the critical negotiation between ethics and politics.

Chapter 2 takes up the idea of engaged writing in Joyce and Anand, circling questions of citizenship and enfranchisement through postcolonial geographies and the aesthetics of the *bildungsroman* to refocus readers’ consideration of complex cosmopolitan subjectivity. Berman seeks to read this pair of writers together “beyond remarking upon influences or commonalities” (94), instead seeking to elucidate the ethical and political challenges made possible by their aesthetic commitments in the context of their geopolitical critiques of colonialism. One of the crucial effects of such a reading leads us to a transformation in understanding the parameters for the *European bildungsroman* and its implications for the formation of the liberal subject of modernity in a postcolonial context.

The three “case studies” that form the second part of the book retrieve the domestic fictions of Indian women writers Cornelia Sorabji, Iqbalunnisia Hussain, G. Ishvani and Kamala Sathianadhan (Chapter 3: “Modernism in the *Zenana*”); the six-part Civil War series of Spanish novelist Max Aub, framed within the context of propaganda posters produced by both sides, in addition to cinematic texts *The Spanish Earth* (directed by Joris Ivens and narrated by Ernest Hemingway), George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* and *L’espoir*, a film directed by Andre Malraux adapted from his book by Aub (Chapter 4: “Commitment and the Scene of War: Max Aub and Spanish Civil War Writing”); and a refreshing look at the working-class fictions of Americans Jack Conroy and Meridel Le Sueur (Chapter 5: “Arising from the Cornlands: The Working-Class Voices of Conroy and Le Sueur”). The incredible range of Berman’s choice of texts, writers and genres in this section dramatically alters the geographical, political and aesthetic cartography of modernism, infusing it with an ethical imperative that realigns the contours of modernist subjectivity, and by extension, challenges the geopolitical realities of the current world-order and the place of narrative engagements within it. Readers will emerge from these ambitious encounters with a profound appreciation for Berman’s patient erudition, fluid critical voice and beautifully structured analyses.

**Jeanette McVicker**

**SUNY Fredonia**

**Work Cited**


**REVIEW**

*A RUSSIAN JEW OF BLOOMSBURY: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SAMUEL KOTELIANSKY*


S. S. Koteliansky has long been one of the more tantalizing figures from London’s early- to mid-twentieth century literary world, figuring, often prominently, in the footnotes, sidelines and margins of many volumes of letters, memoirs, biographies, diaries and cultural histories, and yet never making it to center stage. One felt instinctively that the man whom Irish writer James Stephens claimed to have authored “the greatest book never written” (3) and who rubbed shoulders with so many of the foremost writers, philosophers, politicians and scientists of his age had a story of his own to tell, and many voices have been heard since the 1970s urging scholars to delve more into these intricacies. Yet until Galya Diment’s new biography, no one came to take the lead.

While the wait may have been long, there is a certain satisfaction in noting that this volume marks the hundredth anniversary of Koteliansky’s arrival in Britain, a coincidence that the staunchly pro-English adoptee would surely have appreciated. And now that we have this volume in hand, we can but admit that the story was worth waiting for and feel relieved and enchanted by the fact that it was undertaken by so competent a biographer. Diment’s work is not just a rich contribution to modernist studies, nor merely a timely, pioneering study of the life and times of “Kot”; it is a far-reaching, vibrant and meticulous volume that is in itself a model in the art of biography. Diment’s task was daunting indeed, for while Koteliansky’s life — from his origins in a late nineteenth-century Jewish settlement in the Ukraine to Bloomsbury London until the 1950s, extending out via family to diasporas in Israel and Canada — had all the makings of a fabulous read, there were vast gaps in the narrative leaving his life story patchy and uncertain. And here, Diment’s talent as both scholar and biographer-turned-detective proved decisive, for she turns to private and public archives (in Europe, North America, the Middle East and New Zealand), telephone directories, contemporary fiction and publishers’ records to unearth and reassemble a wealth of information about the fascinating, brooding man who, from 5 Acacia Road near Regent’s Park in London, followed some of the most momentous and devastating events in the early to mid-twentieth century. The minutely researched facts of his life are woven into a compelling account, followed by more than one hundred pages of appendices and notes, enabling the interested scholar to work back to the sources, and the avid reader to read on regardless, caught up in the poignant tragedies and racy melodramas that Koteliansky witnessed. To satisfy both readers in us, the passionate booklover and the exacting academic, is in itself a fine achievement, for which Diment deserves our respect, and our thanks.

The life of Koteliansky as Diment has constructed it expands out into three perfectly integrated studies: the single story of “Kot,” and his broad circles of family, friends, and arch-enemies; a collective biography of London’s political and artistic circles and their often unexpected overlaps; and a devastating and sobering history of insidious, ingrained British anti-Semitism that was too complacent and hypocritically “tolerant” to see itself for what it was before the devastating revelations of the war and its aftermath. Diment uses the case of Koteliansky to explore “how it felt to be a Jew in Bloomsbury” (6) and to tackle
anti-Semitism at the heart of London’s intelligentsia, notably by tracing the pernicious and unacknowledged sneers that Leonard Woolf endured, the appallingly glib contempt that Lawrence expressed, and the rational violence of administrative decisions, such as the threat of deportation for “friendly aliens” (89) including Russian Jews who did not volunteer for the war.

This three-tiered biography is perfectly balanced. We follow the individual biography of Kot from the Pale of Settlement and life in the Ukraine before the pogroms, through his mother’s love for her son heard now in the folktales she told or the lullabies she sang, now in the poignant belief that separation and exile were a more reliable guarantee of survival. With each change of regime and new occupying forces marking wave after wave of hardship, brutality and ruthlessness, we see personal tragedies in the Koteliansky family bringing to the fore the collective history of Eastern Europe that is still insufficiently acknowledged in the West. The micro-historical perspective afforded by Polly, Kot’s niece, whom he helped emigrate to Canada and who corresponded regularly and affectionately with her often churlish uncle, reads as a searing testimony of loss, bravery and reconstruction across continents.

The patterns of Kot’s London friendships with major figures of the era reflect the better-known chapters in his life: his “perhaps uncommon friendship” (67) with Katherine Mansfield; his immense respect for Virginia Woolf, whom he viewed as “one of the finest human beings apart altogether from her uniqueness as a writer” (266); his longer-lasting association with Leonard Woolf; his affectionate solicitude in the company of Lawrence and Gertler; and his fierce (mutual) loathing of Frieda Lawrence. To these relationships, Diment adds a host of more marginal figures: Beatrice Glenavy, Esther Salaman, May Sarton, Marjorie Wells (“the most long-lasting and rewarding relationship of Kot’s entire English life” [107]), all of whom reflect Kot’s immense gift for friendship and his unconditional sense of steadfastness. His great, and in many ways surprising affection (bearing in mind his archly anti-elitist leanings) for Ottoline Morrell, emerges beautifully from the account of his later years, built up from some of the most moving and self-revealing letters he ever wrote.

These friendships and Diment’s reassessments of their broader cultural significance are brought to life against a backcloth of civil war, world wars, huge cultural and social change and depression. We see Koteliansky’s arrival in London being greatly facilitated by coinciding with the years of a Russian fever, as Russian arts and literature enjoyed unprecedented popularity (4). Diment returns to the well known example of the Ballets Russes, and its role in fostering a curiosity for the colors, patterns and rhythms of Russian life, but she also provides exceptional insights into far more forgotten highlights of the artistic world, such as two tours by the Habima Players and their staging of East European legends and myths in new productions straight from the Moscow Arts Theatre. Kot was keen to play the role of ambassador, bringing the literary and artistic achievement of modern Russia to the attention of his friends. There is a certain satisfaction in a misunderstanding that helped Kot’s fortunes along, which Diment charts so well. While Bloomsbury seized on him as a gateway to Russianness and an authentic incarnation of everything they sought in “Russia”—the soul, the Slavic temperament, an insider’s understanding of the art and the times—Koteliansky had, of course, been an outsider to the “Russian” world at home as a Jew and a Ukrainian with very restricted access to higher education. Following a pattern that has so often been observed in studies of diasporic communities and emigration, exile paradoxically made him into the Russian that he hadn’t been and couldn’t have become at home.

Koteliansky’s importance as a cultural mediator and ambassador comes to the fore in his work as an editor and translator. Here we see his rich collaborations with the Woolfs and the Hogarth Press in their full light, before appreciating his immense scope as an editor in the post-Hogarth era. Most Woolf specialists will be familiar with Leonard’s laconic description of Koteliansky in his autobiography: “In 1919 he came to us with a copy of the Reminiscences, just published in Moscow, which Gorky had sent him, giving him the English translation rights” (Woolf, Beginning Again 247 qtd. in Diment 129). Diment shows exactly what this visit implies: Koteliansky’s ties to Moscow via Zinovy Grzhebin and Michael “Grisha” Farbman, his well-calculated decision to build a career as a translator, his sometimes high-risk calculations when attempting to market more contemporary literary productions (not just Maxim Gorky, but Alexander Kuprin, Ivan Bunin, Leo Shestov, Zinaida Hippius), and his intuitive belief (that unfortunately proved to be too far ahead of its time) that intimate portraits, letters and secondary biographical materials were keys to editorial success. Diment’s biography does not dwell at any length on Kot’s skills as a translator, focusing rather on what he translated, but it does have quite a classical approach to what translation should entail, underlining his “largely cavalier attitude” (182) to English, and his tendency to privilege his source text rather than English fluency. Contemporary translation studies would certainly read this preference in more political terms, and surely value a certain “foreignizing” tendency that refuses to give in to the safe, homely appeal of idiomatic English. Whatever the case, Diment is certainly right when she concludes that the safer stylistic choices adopted by Constance Garnett or Louise and Alymer Maude were more in keeping with the reading norms of an English readership.

A revealing interrogation in the opening section inscribes the biographer very astutely into her text: “Did I like him enough to wish I had known him personally?” she wonders. The question comes as a surprise, if only because we so often presume a biographer is either neutral, or overtly in favor her or his subject. But as we read on, we do understand what prompted such an enquiry. While the reader is bowled over by the unbending integrity of this man whose Hasidic origins, socialist leanings, fierce anti-materialism and intellectual exactions can but compel a sense of awe, it is true that his “largely black and white world view” (53) along with his petty hatreds, brooding feuds and unbending judgments can irritate, inspiring Virginia Woolf to despair of his talking about his “soul with no preface” (129). Koteliansky’s sexual politics, even within their era, are primitive, such as when he concludes that women writers would do better to embroider their knickers (233). But not only does the humour redeem him in part, but also the tenderness and respect he reserved for so many women writers including Mansfield and Woolf as well as Dorothy Richardson, whom he continued to champion when so many publishers had given up on her. Once Kot’s life has been set in context, encompassing devastating chapters of national crisis, international warfare, personal bravery and medical traumas (the pitiless damage wrought by tuberculosis and mental breakdown in particular), the reader cannot but feel immense respect for all that he achieved. Speaking at his funeral, his friend Dr Fulton claimed that one felt “not only wiser, but happier, cleaner, stronger and braver for having known him” (299). I am convinced any reader will feel the same for having read Diment’s biography.

Claire Davison-Pégon
Université Paris 3 (Sorbonne Nouvelle)
and friends from other Societies to the Cash Bar! We plan to formally invite the Conrad Society, the (soon to be) Katherine Mansfield Society, James Joyce Foundation, Modernist Studies Association, and other insider and outsider societies in the orbit. Woolf moved in lots of circles, not just Bloomsbury, and we hope to make new friends, toast the New Year, make and break resolutions, and chatter away with questions and ideas.

IVWS panels at MLA BOSTON: When you make those hotel and flight plans, remember, our first panel begins on noon on Thursday! So plan to arrive on time so you miss nothing!

Thursday, 03 January
31. Everyday Woolf
12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., Back Bay D, Sheraton
Program arranged by the International Virginia Woolf Society
Presiding: Tara Thomson, Univ. of Victoria
1. “Mrs. Dalloway and the Rhythms of Everyday Life,” Adam Barrows, Carleton Univ.
2. “Virginia Woolf and ‘the Modern Blessing of Electricity’,” Sean Mannion, Univ. of Notre Dame
3. “Acting Instantly His Part: Moments of Being (at Work) in To the Lighthouse,” Kayla Walker Edin, Southern Methodist Univ.

Friday, 04 January
338. Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield: New Approaches for Comparative Studies
3:30–4:45 p.m., Liberty B, Sheraton
Program arranged by the International Virginia Woolf Society
Presiding: Elleke Boehmer, Univ. of Oxford
3. “Gift Enough: Gifts and Desire in Woolf and Mansfield,” Kathryn Simpson, Univ. of Birmingham

Saturday, 05 January
582. Conrad and Woolf: Crossing the Boundaries of Fiction
3:30–4:45 p.m., Republic Ballroom, Sheraton
Program arranged by the Joseph Conrad Society of America and the International Virginia Woolf Society
Presiding: Kathryn Simpson, Univ. of Birmingham
Respondent: Debra Romanick Baldwin, Univ. of Dallas

Saturday, 05 January
Cash Bar Arranged by the International Virginia Woolf Society
The Fens, Sheraton
5 January 8:45-10:00 p.m.

Question 3: How is the IVWS working for you? Is your membership current? Lynn Hall has been doing a great job clearing up some of the backlog in membership matters—let me know how we are doing, and contact her or Jeanne Dubino if you feel you have been lost along the way. I am eager to hear of any ideas that would benefit IVWS; keep those postcards coming!

On a personal note, I’ve been learning letterpress printing and have now a healthy respect for VW’s manual dexterity and patience, as I attempt to design a few IVWS posters as door prizes for the Cash Bar or next year’s conference.

Question 4: Have you thought of potential topics for the next year’s IVWS sessions in Chicago? Please do! Post-Ionicie Woolf? Woolf & the Society of Others? Other Allied Societies with which to plan?
And don’t forget to plan to come to plan ahead for the conference in June!

Best wishes,

Leslie Kathleen Hankins
President, International Virginia Woolf Society

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“So we made ourselves into a society for asking questions.”

Virginia Woolf, “A Society,” Monday or Tuesday, 1921.

“What does the International Virginia Woolf Society do?” I asked on occasion. I’ve come to realize that the wisest reply is to quote Woolf: “So we made ourselves into a society for asking questions.” And ask them we do—in the most congenial, generous-hearted, intellectually curious ways—and in the most captivating and enriching venues: Saskatoon, Paris, Boston, Japan, New Zealand . . . .

So, let me begin, the first question: did you attend the Woolf Conference in Saskatoon, hosted by Ann Martin? If so, you have your memories of magnificence! New words, such as “bounce” and “anorak,” lists of new books to read, and a postcard of St. Ives and Talland House from before 1895! If not, regrets, alas. The conference was brimming with ideas, friendship, camaraderie, questing and questioning, brilliance and mentoring. Electrifying! We all came away supercharged for another year of Woolf studies. I suspected the conference would be mesmerizing when I found myself drawn at once to the lush art of the posters and postcards advertising the event, brilliant designs by Robin Adair, a professional artist who came back to do his doctorate on Woolf and visual art. My personal favorite (I now own the original print) is the sailboat/quill pen amid waves curtained by a Vanessa Bell like prosenium window.

And the conference unfolded as promised, smooth sailing and stirring breezes.

My own eclectic meanderings encountered: Eleanor McNees on Leslie Stephen “out to fight The Times” and VW’s play with headlines in The Years; Melly Cuddy-Kean’s dazzling retrospective as a neo-eremita weaving her scholarly history with the critique of (the lack of) history in critical discourse; Jana Funke on the trials and surprises of doing history with a historian, Kate Flint; Mark Hussey on the arrogance of interdisciplinarity and the need to invite, not just welcome, such studies; Flicia Clements’ musical readings of the rhythms of language and silence, Trina Thompson on music as both symbol and process; Adriana Varga on “your inner audition”; Maggie Humm’s “anorak” keynote exploration of the Woolf postcard reproduction in the 1930s; my plenary talk bringing Emily Carr and Virginia Woolf together through postcard fantasies and Mrs. McNab; “truthiness” and more word fanary with Judith Allen; Suzanne Bellamy asking “how do ideas get into culture? And the role of the margins; Eliza Kay Sparks and the sunflower; Brenda Silver waving to Virginia across the ocean and surgical waste and upbeat—the ideal counterbalance for any traces of the Woolf of woe narrative.

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Aftermath: I immediately ordered and devoured Alexandra Harris’s Virginia Woolf (Thames & Hudson, 2011) and found it clear as a crystal and upbeat—the ideal counterbalance for any traces of the Woolf of woe narrative.

Next question? Will you attend the Boston MLA for your Woolf fix to keep you going until next June? The MLA Convention can be daunting, but we have many an oasis of IVWS magic to sustain you and to provide incentive for the trek:

MLA CASH BAR in Boston. Please come and help me host the IVWS CASH BAR at the MLA Convention—it's a new idea, and we hope it will give us a chance to meet with more of those stalwart souls who must stay around the convention site—and to mingle with the other societies we plan to invite. We have reached out to various Allied Organizations with our sessions; now let's all socialize! Bring a friend; everyone welcome! Key info:

Cash Bar Arranged by the International Virginia Woolf Society
The Fens, Sheraton
5 January 8:45-10:00 p.m.

This Late Night Cash Bar is on site at MLA in the Sheraton, the conference hotel. We have had such delightful parties in private homes over the years, & will do that again in the future, but the time seems ripe to stage a Society Celebration more accessible to all. So, the International Virginia Woolf Society is hosting a Society of Societies Cash Bar! Bring your colleagues & pedagogical practices in the roundtable with Pamela Caughie, Jeanne Dubino, Aureleah Mahood, Allan Pero, Jane Goldman & Helen Wussow!

All that! And of course—in the absence of cloning, I had to miss half of the sessions and rumor reports that they were equally rich and rewarding, I hope to catch up on some of those sessions in the forthcoming Selected Papers edited by Kathryn Holland and Ann Martin. Yet my brain, my heart, my imagination were full to the brim!! And I haven’t even mentioned the evening of Music & Film, the magic of the performance of the “interpretation of Professions for Women” by students from Walter Murray Collegiate, the mellow perfection of the savory banquet, and the spellbinding “Angel in the House” (written by Eureeka, a veteran member of the Ridiculous Theatre Company, and directed by Charlie Peters) that cast a searching light on the relationship of Vanessa Bell & Duncan Grant. The conference was magnificent—so artfully designed that every minute was a gift; the mix of creative and scholarly work, the thoughtful entertainment, the engaging visual work, the time for camaraderie, all melded magically into an enchanting time. The choreography of the conference was a whirl of delights. Thank you, Ann Martin and Kathryn Holland and all the omnipresent assistants. Smooth technology coaching, refreshing coffee breaks, and generous guidance surrounded us and made our sessions stress-free and stimulating. “The sign of a successful party,” Professor Brierly says of Mrs. Dalloway’s event—and so too did the hum of ideas and laughter follow us through airports and taxis and promise to live again in the Selected Papers, and in the 23rd Annual Conference, again in Canada—in Vancouver, British Columbia, under the auspices of Helen Wussow.

from the President:

The Society Column continues on page 31—the reverse of this page—and includes all the information about the 2013 MLA in Boston as well as the contact information for the IVWS Officers, Archival Liaison and Members-at-Large.