Virginia Woolf’s formally daring works of fiction and spirited critiques of Edwardian realism have earned her a reputation as an advocate of the modern novel. But, we suggest, Woolf was an ambivalent advocate. She was skeptical of the stasis implied by the word “novel,” aware that literary form must adapt to the needs of the age, and impatient for novelists to reflect deeply on their prose medium.

Privately and publicly, Woolf often refers to herself as a “novelist” (e.g., The Diary of Virginia Woolf [D] 347, “Speech to the London and National Society for Women’s Service,” “A Letter to a Young Poet”). And she often refers to her long works of fiction as “my novels,” but only in her private writing (e.g., D3 12, D4 40, D5 79). Publicly, she hesitates to identify any of her books as a “novel” and when she does so identify, the word is buried among qualifications, as in her introduction to the Random House edition of Mrs. Dalloway. As this hesitancy suggests, Woolf was readier to claim for herself a profession (“novelist”) than to claim for her books of fiction a genre. In the brief 1927 essay “What is a Novel?” Woolf writes of the term in question, “this repetition of a single word does considerable damage. The reader comes to think that since all these varieties of book have the same name they must have the same nature.” She declares, “There is no such thing as ‘a novel’, and condemns the term as a “highly potent bogey” that must be “destroyed” (The Essays of Virginia Woolf [E] 4 415). Like “Milton’s bogey” at the end of A Room of One’s Own, who confounds women’s reading and writing of poetry, or the Angel in the House, a phantom of Victorian femininity who impedes the young Woolf’s pen (E6 480-81), the term “novel” obscures individuality, in this case that of a work of art. Woolf resists not only “novel” but also other pat words for literary forms. We see this resistance in the arch subtitles of Flush and Orlando (each is “A Biography”) and in Woolf’s repeated description of her work as blending genres. The Waves is intended to be “prose yet poetry; a novel & a play” (D3 128) and a “playpoem” (D3 203). The Years should include “satire, comedy, poetry, narrative [. . .] and possibly] a play, letters, poems” (D4 152). Alert to the gain and risk of naming a work’s genre, Woolf seeks the exact description for each of her books.

Woolf was deeply conscious of the historical interdependence and interaction of literary genres and forms. This consciousness is not evident in what is usually considered her most important essay on the novel, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” which criticizes the realist novelists of the previous generation for their superficial handling of character. But this consciousness is evident elsewhere, as in the 1927 essay “Poetry, Fiction and the Future.” Here, distinctions among genres are little addressed; instead Woolf emphasizes the “duties [. . .] discharged” (E4 434) by a given genre in a given age. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Woolf argues, lyric poetry and drama could no longer convey the complexity of modern life. She predicts, “we are going in the direction of prose” (E4 435). This forecast might reasonably be read as an effort to promote Woolf’s own form. Prose was her natural medium; she attempted verse rarely and unsuccessfullly, and wrote drama only to amuse friends and family. As further proof that Woolf predicts “the direction of” her own work, her diary descriptions of The Waves and The Years echo her 1927 description of the novel of the future: “It will be written in prose, but in prose which has many of the characteristics of poetry [. . .] It will be dramatic, yet not a play. It will be read, not acted” (E4 435). But the medium Woolf chose instinctively she analyzed deliberately. Her prediction is informed not only by her own project but also by wide reading in past and contemporary literature, responsiveness to the postwar mood of “doubt and conflict” (E4 430), and an understanding of language as a “tool” to be adapted for use by every generation of writers. (The word “tools” recurs throughout “Poetry, Fiction and the Future” and a version of “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” as well as “Character in Fiction” [see E4 436 and 438, E3 430-32].) We might disagree with Woolf’s low estimation of the poetry and drama of her time, but we cannot fail to admire her capacious reading and ambitious synthesis. Woolf’s understanding of literary history finds clearest expression in her unfinished essay “Anon,” which traces the development of literature from verse, the form of a post-Gutenberg age. In this scheme, verse is created by a community while prose is created by an individual. Woolf’s beloved Elizabethan theater, which blends verse and prose and includes the audience in its creation, falls in between these poles, chronologically and formally. Woolf suspected that in her time prose was displacing verse as the more flexible and appealing medium.

Woolf’s defense of fiction thus entails two strategies: promoting, however uneasily, its dominant genre (the novel) and promoting its form (prose). She remarks with some discomfort in her review of E. M. Forster’s Aspects of the Novel, “a wise and brilliant book about fiction [. . .] can be written without saying more than a sentence about the medium in which a novelist works” (E4 462). Unlike Forster, Woolf was passionate about
prose, so much so that she begged Vita Sackville-West to “wire what[s] [sic] the essential difference between prose and poetry” (The Letters of Virginia Woolf [L] 3 281). Prose and verse were, to Woolf, the eternal rivals. Recognizing this helps us to see all of Woolf’s work, published and unpublished—her few forays into verse excepted—as formally unified. Novel, short story, biography, essay, diary, letter, drama: with every genre, Woolf probes the possibilities of English prose.

Scholarship on Woolf and literary genre usually pursues at least one of four approaches, which have evolved more or less in sequence: publishing Woolf’s work in all its genres, analyzing Woolf’s reading in a particular genre, studying Woolf’s interpretation and adaptation of a genre, and assessing responses in various genres to Woolf’s life and work.

The history of publishing Woolf’s many genres is the history of editing Woolf—a wide and lively subject, as the selected papers of the 2008 Woolf conference attest (eds. McNees and Veglahn). Leonard Woolf issued many of his late wife’s unpublished essays and short essays, as well as selections from his wife’s diary and from her letters to Lytton Strachey. Quentin Bell’s 1972 biography of his aunt included appendices of typescripts Woolf had not intended for publication, such as a self-critical reflection on Julian Bell and a poem in free verse written as private revenge against a prying journalist. After these family efforts, scholars assumed the responsibility of making Woolf’s unpublished work available and of editing and contextualizing this work. Lucio Ruotolo’s edition of Freshwater (1976), Jeanne Schultkind’s edition of autobiographical writing (1976), Mitchell Leaska’s edition of Pointz Hall (1983), and Susan Dick’s edition of the shorter fiction (1985) brought attention to Woolf’s efforts in, respectively, drama, autobiography, verse, and short fiction, the last comprising many subgenres (including journal, memoir, dialogue, and the idiosyncratic “Ode Written Partly in Prose”). The publication of Woolf’s Diaries (1977-84), Letters (1975-80), and the three Monks House notebooks for Three Guineas (2001) has dramatically illuminated Woolf’s life and art and has invited study of the genres of these ostensibly casual writings (e.g., Shannon, Tidwell, Pawlowski). Similarly, the publication, throughout the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, of the drafts of almost all of Woolf’s books has clarified Woolf’s writing process and spurred analysis on the drafts, including those yet-unpublished, as objects of study in their own right (e.g., DeSalvo, Wisor). In the past decade, yet more archival material has emerged in book form, including The Hyde Park Gate News (2005), which showcases Virginia Stephen’s talents as a household journalist, and the short essays in The Platform of Time (2007), which reveal Woolf as an affectionate writer of obituaries and a less affectionate writer of dialogue for her poet-nephew. The recently completed Essays (1989-2011) allows a thorough reconsideration of Woolf’s critical activity. Today, thanks to many diligent Woolfian editors, we are coming to recognize Woolf as a vigorous adventurer among literary genres. The anticipated publication this summer of The Charleston Bulletin, on which Woolf collaborated with her nephews, will surely encourage this recognition. And the new literary genre of the digital edition (e.g., <http://www.woolfonline.com>) will further clarify Woolf’s writing process.

Woolf’s adventures were informed by her readings of others’ explorations. The expansive range of Woolf’s reading has been demonstrated by the attentively annotated editions of Woolf’s work, Brenda Silver’s edition of the Reading Notebooks (1983), and the monographs of Beverly Schlack (1979), Elizabeth Steele (1983, 1987), Alice Fox (1990), Ellen Temper (1998), Jane de Gay (2006), and Anne Fernald (2006). Further, the checklist of the Hogarth Press points to the Woolfs’ interest in promoting contemporary literature written in a host of genres, such as open letter, poetry anthology, travel account, political pamphlet, etiquette book, psychoanalytic study, dream analysis, music history, and memoir (Woolmer). In addition, the Hogarth Lectures on Literature series attests to the publishers’ concern for the study of genre. In this issue, Joanna Lipking examines Woolf’s delight in the comedy and naturalness of William Congreve’s plays, and Melissa Sullivan considers Woolf’s tactful negotiation with middlebrow women writers in A Room of One’s Own.

Appreciating Woolf’s keen writing and reading across genres, Woolf scholars are increasingly turning their attention to Woolf’s understanding of a given genre and of generic interaction. Woolf explores a genre by expanding its frontier; training our attention on a single genre of Woolf’s work may clarify its terrain, but we must be sensitive and dexterous cartographers. The collection Trespassing Boundaries: Virginia Woolf’s Short Fiction (2004) exemplifies cartographic skill. The book’s contributors argue at once that Woolf’s short fiction demands critical attention and admiration and, as the book’s title suggests, that Woolf’s short fiction defies its genre to challenge the borders between short story and novel, fact and fiction, and experimental and popular literature. That is, the book promotes investigation of Woolf’s short stories while acknowledging that, for Woolf, the short story is not a neatly delimited form. The monographs of Christine Reynier (2009), Heather Levy (2010), Claire Drewery (2011), and the special issue on Woolf of the Journal of the Short Story in English (2008) further indicate that Woolf’s short stories merit study. And they are poised to receive more—especially since experimenting with short stories trained Woolf to write her innovative novels. In Christine Froula’s formulation here, within the development of British modernism, Woolf’s short stories were “on time” while her novels were tardy.

Woolf’s essays, as well, are receiving due attention. Since 1974, when Barbara Currier Bell and Carol Ohmann defended the exploratory quality of the Common Reader essays, several scholars have shown the impressionism of Woolf’s essays to be deliberate, playful and liberating (e.g., Mark Goldman, Sharma, Rosenberg and Dubino, Brosnan, Gualtieri, Koutsantoni). In addition, scholars have made clear that the book-length essay offered a form in which Woolf could articulate her feminism and socialism (e.g., Marcus 1987 and 1988, Black, Cuddy-Kean). Randi Saloman’s Virginia Woolf’s Essayism, published last year and reviewed in this issue, persuasively argues that both the short and long essay form permitted Woolf to experiment with voice and to relinquish authorial control, as she could not do in a novel. In the coming pages, Craig Morehead proposes that we see “Street Haunting” as participating in a subgenre of the essay, the London sketch, and J. Ashley Foster argues that Three Guineas must be considered not only as an essay but also as a mixed-genre work that continues the pacifist activity of Caroline Stephen, Woolf’s Quaker aunt.

Woolf’s mock-biographies Orlando and Flush, her earnest biography of Roger Fry, and her many reviews of life writing have informed consideration of her understanding of biography (e.g., Monk, Saunders). In turn, Woolf’s autobiographical work has come under critical scrutiny for its relation to Woolf’s fiction and for its ability to convey queer and female experience, record and repair trauma, and challenge linearity and the integrity of the self (e.g., Snaith, Johnston, Sullivan).

Together with the novel, the generic categories addressed here—short fiction, essay, biography, and autobiography—will continue to provoke fine scholarship on Woolf. In addition, genres in which Woolf wrote little but about which she thought much, such as poetry and drama, demand further attention. In the past few years, Jane Goldman has traced Woolf’s reflections on imitating impersonal Romantic poetry with The Waves and Steven D. Putzel has brought to light Woolf’s deep engagement with the theater. We are pleased to publish in this issue an interview with Putzel about his project; his recently published book is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. We offer as well a piece by Erin Kay Penner arguing that Mrs.
Dalloway counters the traditional English elegy, which was consolatory, Christian, and in verse. And we include a study by Bradley Bowers that examines Woolf’s use of ellipses to convey that which escapes all genres—the unsayable.

The fourth approach to Woolf and genre, examining written responses to her work, is necessarily the most recent, since it depends on the creation of those responses. But material is not lacking. Biography, of course, burgeons every year, and we are therefore grateful for the analysis of the pursuit offered in Hermione Lee’s self-reflective undertaking and by the order created by Mark Hussey’s survey, “Biographical Approaches.” Creative responses likewise abound, be they portrayals of Woolf’s life, adaptations of her work, or more divergent riffs on either: novels (e.g., Isherwood’s The World in the Evening, Cunningham’s The Hours, Hawkes and Manso’s The Shadow of the Moth), scripts for plays and films (e.g., Atkin’s Vita and Virginia, Potter’s Orlando, Ruhl’s Orlando), children’s books (e.g., Virginia Wolf by Maclear and Aresnault), self-help books (e.g., Simon’s A Life of One’s Own), and poems (e.g., Queyras’s Lemon Hound). Sometimes creative responses are more subtle, as when Rachel Wetzstein’s poetry alludes to Night and Day or when women playwrights cite Woolf’s feminism as an inspiration, a debt examined in Putzel’s conclusion to his book. Creative responses are often reviewed by Woolfians, in these pages and elsewhere, and scholars are beginning to analyze such work at greater length (e.g., Alley). The coming pages include a poem by Sandra Inskpee-Fox along with her reflection on why Woolf’s prose prompts her own poetry.

As this brief survey of work on Woolf and genre indicates, the question of Woolf’s relation to literary genre is not only one of aesthetics, but is also one of politics, psychology, and the just representation of reality. We hope this special issue, with its scholarly essays, interview, and poem, prompts yet more writing on the topic, in a variety of genres.

Emily Kopley, Stanford University
Sara Sullam, Università degli Studi di Milano

Works Cited
—. ed. Journal of the Short Story in English 50 (Spring 2009). Special Issue: Virginia Woolf.
The International Virginia Woolf Society is pleased to host its fourteenth consecutive panel at the University of Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1990. 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. Panel Selection Committee: Beth Rigel Daugherty Jeanne Dubino Mark Hussey Jane Lilienfeld Vara Neverov


As one audience member remarked, the title “Virginia Woolf Miscellany” was a truly apt name for the International Virginia Woolf Society panel at the Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture. Still, all panel presenters incorporated a unique perspective on the author and some of her popular works.

Beth Rigel Daugherty focused on Virginia Woolf when she was Virginia Stephen and writing reviews of novels for newspapers. Daugherty showed how that job was crucial to the writer Virginia Stephen became, because it allowed her to critically engage with the successes and limitations of her contemporaries.

Focusing on Woolf’s Orlando and Victorian dialogues about fertility, Aimee Armande Wilson connected representations of fertility with intellectual reproduction, rather than with commentary on gender roles. Wilson’s paper contemplated the connection between birth control and intellectual suppression, asking: “To what extent can intellectual reproduction be controlled?”

Emily Whitmore explored Orlando in the context of Victorian sexologists, demonstrating how Orlando challenges those views, particularly through clothing, as the characters use it to perform gender. This theme is likewise perpetuated through Orlando’s relationships, reaching an “orgasmic” moment when Orlando proclaims that the moor is her real mate.

Catherine B. Minder presented appetite control as connected to prohibition of class mobility, rather than simply internalization of sexual desire. Minder looked at To the Lighthouse to demonstrate how the female protagonist’s food consumption reinforces class-based social conventions. The presentations were captivated by lively, enthusiastic discussion, which included exchange of resources to help further the scholars’ work.

Michelle Lee Ann Day
M.A. student at the University of Louisville and panel chair

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, 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>

THE IVWS & VWS ARCHIVE INFORMATION

The archive of the VWS and the IVWS has a secure and permanent home at E. J. Pratt Library, Victoria University, University of Toronto. Below is the finding aid for the IVWS archival materials: <http://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/special/F51ivwoolfsoocietyfonds.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 upcoming Woolf conferences and recent publications from Cecil Woolf Publishers, go to: <http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/annual_conference_on_virginia_woolf.html>

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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/~neverowv1/VWM_Online.html>

Previous issues (Fall 1973-Fall 2002) are available in digital format through EBSCOhost’s Humanities International Complete and EBSCOhost’s Literary Reference Center. More recent issues are also available through ProQuest Literature Online (LION) and Gale Group/Cengage.

An Index of the VWM from Fall 1973-Fall 2011 is now available from Susan Devoe at <susan.devoe@gmail.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/~neverowl1/VWM_Online.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-Keanes, Past President of the International Virginia Woolf Society, who continues to oversee the site.

The VWollf Listserv is hosted by the University of Ohio. The list administrator is Elisa Kay Sparks. 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 VWOLLF 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 VWOLLF.

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

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

The Selected Papers 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/press/>).

Woolfian Resources Online

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

The Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf
Information about the history of the Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf is available at: <http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowl1/annual_conference_on_virginia_woolf.html>

The Three Guinea Reading Notebooks Online:
Contact Vara Neverow <neverowl1@southernct.edu> for more information about the site.

Facebook:
The International Virginia Woolf Society is on Facebook! You can become a fan—and you can friend other Woolfians. The Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain also now has a Facebook page. And Virginia Woolf has other multiple Facebook pages that are not related to specific societies.

Blogs:
Visit Paula Maggio’s “Blogging Woolf” at <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 <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://books.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 Bloomsburyan world with just a few keystrokes? Check it out! It’s simple, fast and very rewarding.

VWListserv
To join the VWListserv, please go to the IVWS home page at <http://www.utoronto.ca/IVWS> and click on the VWListserv link in the left column. Then, follow the instructions.
The Leonard Woolf Society will be holding a Symposium on Leonard Woolf
24 May at Room G37 Senate House, Malet St., London WC1
Time is 2.30 pm to 6.00 pm
The registration fee of £10 for the Symposium includes LWS membership for 1 year.

Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain Membership
<http://www.virginiawoolf society.co.uk/vw_membership.htm>
Membership of the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain entitles you to three free issues annually of the Virginia Woolf Bulletin, and the opportunity to attend member-only events such as:
- Birthday Lecture*—AGM with guest speaker—Summer Study Day*
- Reading Group meetings
- * (There is a charge for events marked with an asterisk.)
- Subscriptions for the year ending 31 December 2013 are £17 UK, £22 Europe and £23 outside of Europe;
- Five-year memberships (five years for the price of four) beginning in 2013 are £68 UK, £88 Europe and £92 outside Europe.
We are always delighted to welcome new members. If you wish to join the VWSGB and pay in pounds sterling (whether by cheque or via PayPal), please write to or email Stuart N. Clarke <Stuart.N.Clarke@btinternet.com> for a membership form:
- Membership Secretary Fairhaven Charnleys Lane Banks SOUTHPORT PR9 8HJ UK
- For members paying in US dollars, please request a membership form by writing to or emailing Professor Lolly Ockerstrom <ljsearose@gmail.com>
- Park University 8700 NW River Park Drive English Department, Box 39 Parkville, MO 64152 USA
- If you are interested in details of student, five-year or life membership, please write (as above) or email the Membership Secretary, Stuart N. Clarke <Stuart.N.Clarke@btinternet.com>
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Many thanks to the International Virginia Woolf Society for its generous and continuing support of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany.
On Time: 1910, Human Character, and Modernist Temporality

Shredding & slicing, dividing & subdividing the clocks of Harley Street nibbled at the June day indescribably accurately, until the authoritative & with uniformity, upholding authority, connections submissions & whispering that life, to be successful, must be orderly, <lived with a sense of> until the mound of time was so far diminished that a commercial clock, suspended in Oxford Street, announced, genially & fraternally, as if were a reply to plea.

—Virginia Woolf, “The Hours”

“On or about December 1910 human character changed,” Woolf famously proclaimed in 1924 while pondering the difference between an Edwardian and a Georgian novel. 1910 was eventful enough. The Adult Suffrage campaign, the Dreadnought hoax, the accession of George V, Black Friday, Bloomsbury’s annexation of Roger Fry, the first Post-Impressionist exhibition (a.k.a. “the Post I. & ourselves,” The Diary of Virginia Woolf [D] 5 160), not to mention such phenomena as Halley’s comet, rising suicide rates, the founding of the International Psychoanalytic Association: all these events precipitated from the innumerable raining atoms of modern experience the “change” in consciousness that Woolf saw manifest in new sympathies with tools: the experimental techniques of the essay, the “luminous halo” of consciousness; to take hold of “what we might venture to call life” and shape it like “a free man and not a slave”; to write what they choose, not what they think for our admiration (L1 438). Forster whiled away a decade not writing Howards End, bidding fair to become the Jane Austen of Bloomsbury. But as for contemporary “reality,” he and D. H. Lawrence had “spoilt their early work” by going about it with clumsy old tools (E3 433).

On Time: 1910, Human Character, and Modernist Temporality

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Thursday of 1904 with Proust’s search for lost time and the Russian
look much like the
du temps perdu
Mrs. Dalloway
not dampen her “excitement” about this work-in-progress (D2 248).

Eve...
If we go by Greenwich, the “Georgians” were not on time, but if, with Septimus, we listen to modern time—its ceaseless atomization and sub-atomization, coalescing, dissolving, precipitating in ephemeral events that endure hard as diamonds in memory—we may detect in 1910 and 1922 vibrations of fiction’s future: To the Lighthouse, cut through with “Time Passes”; Orlando’s centuries past, passing, and to come; The Waves’ diurnal chorus; Between the Acts—and Finnegans Wake’s—different soundings of the measureless spaces between. On or about December 1910, as King Edward shook with laughter, Virginia Stephen caught and rode the breaking wave of the future toward the new “reality”—nouvelle, novel—on the novel’s horizon.

Scanning our own horizon, it may seem that the rest is—witterature. If to be postmodern is to have no time to time, if clocks asseverate loud dominance over everyone’s labor and leisure while our psychic caves flatten out onto ever thinner screens, has human character changed again, and with it letters, readers, literacy, literature? Does the pixilated mediation of contemporary reality that bears news stranger than fiction every second of every day leave the novel in the dust? When future masterpieces bring news of the lives the soul now leads, enveloped in accelerating cyberspace, on this “pebble flicked off accidentally from the face of the sun,” how far, and how long, will letters carry the message (The Waves 165)? Has human character changed between December 1910 and now, as a posthuman future draws near?

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Woolf and Congreve: Speaking Parts

Woolf’s essays do not often treat the canonical male authors, the mainstays of traditional survey courses, and her approaches can seem indirect—“sidelong” was her own word (“A Sketch of the Past” 129)—to the point of quirkiness. Her late essay on William Congreve may not stand as an exception to the first rule, since Congreve’s comedies were rarely either published or performed through the whole Victorian period. Discussions among the critics went round and round on the “endless question of Congreve’s morality” (Archer 34), extending the culture wars of his own time, with Macaulay and Thackeray and Leslie Stephen issuing splendidly scornful pronouncements against his licentious women and triumphant matrimonial cheats. In 1908, in an early and private exercise in Bloomsbury liberation, both Stephen daughters acted comic parts by Congreve and his late Restoration contemporaries in Clive Bell’s play-reading group (Lee 248). But then by stages Congreve’s plays came back into general circulation, and Woolf, who had followed their course, supplied an introduction for common readers so full, practical, and engaging—if in some ways quite idiosyncratic—that it is still useful for student readers. When I have given students in my drama classes short collateral readings on the early London theater, it has been my single modern selection. For the teacher, Woolf’s essay draws students to hear with alertness and understanding the voices of Congreve’s characters. The Woolf scholar, meanwhile, may be led to see that this relatively privileged male author, in a masculine literary set, writing in a different genre, became in a small way one of Woolf’s “continuing presences” (A Room of One’s Own [AROO] 112) throughout her writing life.

When, in Night and Day (1919), William Rodney—at home with his books in his “small court of high eighteenth-century houses” (71)—brings out a volume of Congreve, he shows himself to be a modern young man unburdened by Victorian prudery and also privately a man of literary and antiquarian taste. His “well-burnished book” is from the Baskerville Congreve edition published at Manchester in 1761, and he remarks fastidiously, “I couldn’t read him in a cheap edition” (72). By 1923, Lyttton Strachey, writing in The Nation, offered his own passing tribute to “the perfect amenity” of the Baskerville Congreve but welcomed the arrival of a new annotated four-volume Complete Works: “Congreve now appears for the first time as he should have appeared long ago—as a classic” (56, 58). As Leonard Woolf pointed out in suggesting the review, however, this was a relatively expensive limited edition, not an accessible “cheap” one (283-84). Three short reviews by Virginia Woolf from the same years marked Congreve’s emergence for a growing public audience. Reviewing a production of Love for Love in 1921, Woolf compared the play’s language to good wine from a forgotten dusty bottle and relished its frank pursuit of love and money. In 1924, she wrote a short notice of two book-length studies, Edmund Gosse’s revision of his 1888 biography of Congreve—undertaken, Gosse explains, because of the current “very remarkable revival of public

1 After a book-shopping expedition in March of 1918, Woolf recorded her own “lust” to own two volumes of the Baskerville edition, and two volumes were found at Monk’s House after Leonard Woolf’s death (The Diary of Virginia Woolf [D] 1 126 and 128n).
interest” (vii)—and Bonamy Dobrée’s broader Restoration Comedy 1660-1720. In 1925, she hailed Dobrée’s Congreve’s Comedies, “a small cheap edition for ordinary hands and ordinary purses,” as the most “timely” and “necessary” of the Oxford World’s Classics reprints (The Essays of Virginia Woolf [E] 4 302, 301). (It is still widely available.) Woolf opens her much fuller 1937 essay for the TLS, published as “Congreve’s Comedies: Speed, Stillness and Meaning,” by saying that now that the four comedies can be owned in “very little space” and “bought very cheaply,” they are due for critical reconsideration (E6 114).

It does not hurt, of course, for students to find their assigned author praised by so widely admired a modern novelist, scattering terms like “immortal” and “superb genius.” (E6 114) Better yet, writing as a genial inclusive “we,” Woolf seems to stand very comfortably in their boots. Woolf starts by registering two “grievances” at what is especially mannered in Restoration comedy of manners, the single-humor characters with their “absurd names” and the incessantly and “artificially” witty talk (E6 114). We must listen to Congreve, she says, a directive that becomes a keynote of her essay. From Congreve’s letter “Concerning Humour in Comedy,” a rather labored effort to distinguish “humor” from wit, folly, and other allied qualities, Woolf plucks two short and simple statements. The distance of the stage, he says, requires that characters be somewhat “larger than the life,” while even the wittiest extempore talk drawn from real life would be flat and “coldly receiv’d.” For her third complaint, which is quite a common one, she offers no justification at all: nobody can remember or even follow Congreve’s plots. What happens does not matter much, Woolf says, but character should be revealed and deepened, not “squeezed” as in a “machine” (E6 115). Throughout this section, Woolf calls attention to the special conditions of drama as a genre: the restricted space of the stage, the playwright’s reliance on “the speaking voice” of characters as his “only instrument” (E6 114), and the immediacy and tension of the theater: “the curtain rises and they are in the thick of it” (E6 116). Her focus is invitingly simple: people, voices.

But Woolf is not bound by the playwright’s constraints, and she does some free descriptive scene-making that introduces her own point of view. “We” ordinary readers—at first reading rather distantly, in a flurry of stray impressions—find ourselves reminded of Shakespeare and earlier drama, though now in prose, and come to feel “something not merely dazzling in this world, but natural” (E6 116). Natural? Congreve? That is to shift the emphasis. What Lyttton Strachey, for example, praised in Congreve were “exquisite impersonality” and the “glittering delight” of comedy (56, 58); the editor he was reviewing saw a wit like “a dazzling tissue of gems” (Summers 64); Edmund Gosse emphasized “dazzling” wit and “the most exquisite artificial refinement” (173-74). The headnote to The Way of the World in the Norton Anthology of English Literature spells out the implied analogy: “Like an expert jeweler, Congreve polished the Restoration comedy of manners to its ultimate sparkle and gloss” (2359). Woolf offers a different view. As she turns to the social world on stage circa 1700, all is not sparkle and gloss. Drama has moved into the drawing room, with its finery and formalities, but from just outside the windows come the “roar” of drays, the “brawling” of “hucksters and tavern rioters.” For all the ceremony and formalities, but from just outside the windows come the “roar” of drays, and recognizable feelings that students can read and identify for themselves, with something like the ease that Woolf shows in her essay. This is apparently what Woolf herself thought the common experience of reading Congreve would be. “There is no need,” she had written in her 1925 review, “for the modern reader to put himself into a strained attitude in reading him. [...] To appreciate Congreve one need not be much different from what one is—only better” (E4 302).

In Woolf’s earlier novels, eighteenth-century literary culture had been a preserve of dogmatic young men—Rodney, St. John Hirst, Jacob Flanders, Peter Walsh—but after her reviews of the 1920s, slight reminiscences of Congreve can be traced here and there in her writings. Orlando becomes a woman just in time to mix in the salons of Queen Anne’s London and to revere its celebrated wits (John Dryden, Joseph Addison, Jonathan Swift, and Alexander Pope [124; 145], not really of an age but all friends and supporters of Congreve). What she discovers, several times over, is the absolute difference between the intoxicating buzz of social wit, which always proves largely illusory, or tiresome, or entirely nonexistent, and the authentic wit of Pope and other authors, found only on the page: Pope’s wit “in his published works” (148n), that of others “all in their books” (155). In A Room of One’s Own, Woolf lists Congreve’s Millamant among great heroines in men’s works, while the reaction to novelist Mr. A.’s fornication scenes—“But – I am bored!” (99)—elaborates her offhand dismissal in 1924 of Restoration indecency...
that was “harped upon” (E3 446). Less directly, in writing the 1911 chapter of The Years, Woolf draws on the sense of earthy bluntness, yoked to the body, that she saw as distinctive of English comic style in Congreve and elsewhere. As Eleanor Pargiter, just back from foreign travel, registers the unchanging rhythms of English country life, where it is “always the eighteenth century” (186), she also hears the native plainness of English speech, as in the unlovely factual sentence that opens and closes her evening, “Craster [had] won the pig” (189, 202) and in the literalism that punctuates some comedy-of-manners chat about bats getting “into one’s hair.” “But I haven’t any hair,” said Sir William (197).

Finally and very directly, at the end of the second chapter of Three Guineas, drafted soon after she had reread Love for Love for her essay, Woolf borrows the name of its heavy father figure, Sir Sampson Legend. Woolf loads him with letters, “O.M., K.C.B., LL.D., D.C.L., P.C., etc., etc.” (101), and makes him into a dignified professional brother arriving to open his sister’s charity bazaar for professional women. But whatever he may show of suavity and condescension, his name signals an age-old virile domination, and somewhere beyond his shoulder hovers his coarse forefather, Congreve’s bustling, belligerent old party who claims arbitrary rule over his son (“Are not you my Slave? Did I not beget you?”) and would sire a vast bibilical progeny with the heroine (“I am of your Patriarchs, I”) (Complete Plays 244, 298).

But of course it is later, in the mock-Restoration playlet in Between the Acts, that Congreve’s influence has long been recognized. Woolf’s conception of Congreve’s comedy is adapted in Miss La Trobe’s endearingly rough and cranky opus, though in so mixed and modified a fashion that it has not been closely traced. The opening quickly establishes what Woolf had identified as the basic contours of Congreve’s stage: the walls of a drawing room with all its “fopperies and refinements” (E6 117) and rich dress; the characters with absurd names—“What names for real people!” someone says (87)—with the more obvious stock types left out; a far-fetched, mechanical plot featuring, like some of Congreve’s plays, a legal document and an amorous aunt, but of so little human interest that its climax can be left to the program notes. Love in Between the Acts, in both novel and pageant, is an elemental force, not a contest of witty lovers, and money is seen within a sweeping “island history” (53) of national expansion. Moreover, Miss La Trobe’s vision of the English past is skewed by her reverse gender bias: no kings, no dominant fathers, no convincingly real male lovers, and women, though not powerful and often older, always taking the more active roles. But what is shown of Restoration comic style is adapted in Miss La Trobe’s proffered confidence, “I couldn’t read him in a cheap edition.”). She reflected on this as she was working on her essay: “I think writing, my writing, is a species of mediumship. I become the person” (D5 101). Because she quotes unconnected lines and puts such emphasis on Congreve’s speed and rapid changes—“Nothing is stressed; sentiment never broadens into sentimentality” (E6 119)—he comes to sound rather like a modern. Because she has gone through the plays gathering characters’ more heartfelt moments, he almost seems a flag bearer for modern openness. If there is “nostalgia” here, it is not for a lost elegance but for a vital directness of speech that, in a more rough and tumble age, nearer to Shakespeare’s, was once possible.

Moreover, Woolf’s view is not unconnected to her life and her feminism. As another diary entry shows, her essay was begun—and, I would say, for the most part carried through—in a spirit of opposition. Having reread Love for Love with “exhilaration,” pronouncing it “a masterpiece,” Woolf was brought up short by her father’s condemnation of Congreve: “How could L.S. in DNB. deny C. feeling,” she exclaimed, and fired back, “more in that one play than in all Thackeray: & the indecency often honesty” (D5 97). 2 It is a sharply aimed counterthrust. To Stephen, Congreve’s comedy was cold, repellent, catering to the cynical posturing of a small set of town gentlemen, especially about women and marriage, but he was devoted to Thackeray. Though usually

2 What Stephen actually wrote in the DNB was “real refinement of feeling” (8), though other comments are harsher, especially as he expanded his descriptions in English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century (1904), where he repeatedly finds “brutality.” According to Leonard Woolf’s text in A Writer’s Diary, Woolf wrote that Stephen denied Congreve “feeling, pain” (273), but there seems little real pain in these plays, and Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie give the conjectural reading “feeling, passion[?]” (D5 97).
very reticent in print about his former father-in-law, Stephen was moved to warm approval by Thackeray’s domestic ideals: “His writings seem to be everywhere full of the tenderest sensibility[,] [ . . . ] H[e] valued tenderness, sympathy, and purity of nature[,] [ . . . ] love of a wife and child and friend is the one sacred element.” Stephen’s final warning lesson from Thackeray is “above all to preserve the springs of tender domestic affection from all danger of defilement” (Writings of Thackeray 352, 354). To Woolf, of course, this protective space, free of “danger of defilement,” was the Victorian private house, with its terrible legacy of privation and repression and concealment, as she explored them in her own memoirs, in the imagined lives of women and men in The Years, in vignettes of historical women in the documenting and analysis of Three Guineas.3 “[A]nd there all those different people had lived,” is Martin Pargiter’s summary, “boxed up together, telling lies” (211). What was not allowed to anyone, especially to daughters, was, precisely, “natural” feeling, given quick and open expression. Bluntly put, Woolf wouldn’t have set about protecting women from degradation; Leslie Stephen had done that already. Both father and daughter believed in the shaping power of the times and the virtue of “honesty,” but she has utterly reconciled those terms and turned those standards against him.

At an MLA convention in the late 1970s, I heard Professor James L. Clifford recall finding his first book (Hester Lynch Piozzi [Mrs. Thrale], Clarendon Press, 1941) favorably reviewed by Woolf in what would be the last review she published. (The episode is described by Leonard Woolf in his Editorial Note to The Death of the Moth, by Hermione Lee in the closing paragraphs of her biography, and by Virginia Clifford in her brief scholarly account when her husband’s papers were donated to the Columbia University Library.) He had written gratefully asking the editor if there were a typescript he might keep, then read of Woolf’s death and gave up the matter; but some time later he received a bulky package from Leonard Woolf containing some eight or nine drafts that were left scattered among her papers. To the first draft, confided an amused Professor Clifford—himself by then a very eminent and famously benign editor, reviewer and mentor—he really could have given only some variety of C. But then came the new tries, new tacks. By about the seventh draft, he said, you could see the shape of a true Virginia Woolf lead review.

We do not know how Woolf composed the Congreve essay, amid many postponements and a few complaints about the hard work, over the difficult summer of Julian Bell’s death, but we can feel for the moment very close to her mind. The daunting number of true Virginia Woolf lead reviews can seem to form a kind of wall or block, generating lists and tabulations but resisting the kinds of analysis that readers give in such reviews can seem to form a kind of wall or block, generating lists and

3 In the first footnote to Three Guineas, on women’s enforced ignorance, Woolf takes note of one ironic consequence: Thackeray’s own complaint in the Preface to Pendennis that no writer after Henry Fielding could fully portray a man or, as Woolf says, reconcile what was called “virtue” with “virility” (146). Thackeray’s novels include many comments, always necessarily vague, on the freer manners of the earlier century.

4 The VWM editors have provided me with this reference to Virginia Clifford.

she knew better and cared for more, characters who move and live in a non-dramatic narrative setting that illuminates the formulaic or fearful or histrionic or spasmodic ways in which they speak, when they speak, and the breaks and hesitations when they think. That is, the characters and the problems that occupied Woolf in all of her more important final works.

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The relationship between the middlebrow and literary genre is difficult to pin down. There is no such thing as a “middlebrow genre,” per se. But we can say that the definitions of both terms, “middlebrow” and “genre,” are historically wobbly and overlapping. Recognizing the middlebrow’s “fluid” nature, Humble has recently suggested that “middlebrow and highbrow books are distinguishable, fundamentally, not by any stable intrinsic differences, but by how they are read” (“Sitting Forward” 42, 46). This focus upon reader reception is sustained also by those who find that the middlebrow serves as a useful descriptor of genres and writing styles that do not participate within the experimental aesthetic or narrative preferences of high modernism. The affinity of the word “middlebrow” to the word “genre” is evident when we consider “genre” to be, as Phyllis Lassner writes, “a narrative category [that] connotes not only a taxonomy of modes and forms, such as fiction and journalism, but uncomplicated accessibility, replete with formulaic plots and conventions” (180). The interwar literature deemed “middlebrow” is often marked with such accessibility, given its predominantly realist writing style, common use of satiric or comic tones, and popular plot conventions. So, “genre fiction” is often included within “middlebrow literature,” even as the terms “genre” and “middlebrow” assume meanings contingent upon time and context.

Woolf would have been well-aware of the complex relationship between gender and the middlebrow through her work with contributors to the Hogarth Press, such as Rose Macaulay and Naomi Mitchison, and with the feminist weekly Time and Tide. Indeed, in the years leading up to “Middlebrow,” Woolf had been grappling with how to reconcile her support for contemporary women writers with her distaste for certain elements of middlebrow culture emphasized or constructed by critics such as J. B. Priestley, Harold Nicolson, and even Leonard Woolf. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, debates over cultural hierarchies raged in the press, on the radio, and in novels, but definitions and distinctions were rarely concrete. Early in these debates, for Woolf and others, gender became an important determiner of cultural capital and a key way of understanding the middlebrow category. As Brenda R. Silver reminds us, middlebrow culture is “linked in our cultural topographies as the feminine” (71). Yet in the 1920s, when the initial debates over highbrows and middlebrows began, this linkage was not yet established.

In 1926, Priestley broadcast “High, Low, Broad,” on the B.B.C., and in the following year he published the essay in the Saturday Review and in Open House. Priestley sought to establish “broadbrows,” a term often preferred to “middlebrow” in the 1920s, as the only critical thinkers who appreciate art for art’s sake rather than follow prevailing trends (as, he argues, highbrows do) or strive for material gain (as, he argues, lowbrows do). He claimed that “both High and Low” were “the mere slaves of fashion, moving in herds” and “equally and hopelessly uncritical” (163-164). Priestley’s broadbrow sounds like Woolf’s highbrow in “Middlebrow” and also a Renaissance man who equally enjoys “Russian dramas, variety shows, football matches, [and] epic poems” (166). Much of Priestley’s essay portrays the broadbrow as a heterosexual masculine figure: for him, highbrows were often feminized (and homosexual) men from Bloomsbury or Oxford, the milieus he identifies. And he maintained this definition throughout the “battle of the brows.” As Stefan Collini records, Priestley’s 1932 BBC address “To a Highbrow” directs each listener to “be a man. Be a broad-brow” (as qtd. in Collini 118). Yet, even as, in 1926, Priestley attacked Woolf and her fellow highbrows, he provided a framework for Woolf to differentiate between the masculine middlebrow and the work of her female peers that fell within the middlebrow category.

By October 1932, when “Middlebrow” was penned, many of the stereotypes of the “battle of the brows” had reified both for writers

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“She was no ‘genius’”: Virginia Woolf and Women’s Middlebrow Fiction

In October 1932, Virginia Woolf wrote “Middlebrow,” a letter to the editor of the New Statesman that she never sent. In this attempt to organize and judge the shifting relationships among cultural capital, authors, and reading publics, Woolf depicts the middlebrow writer as by turns condescending to lowbrows and currying favor with highbrows. She describes the middlebrow as a “bloodless and pernicious pest,” while the highbrow is a person of “thoroughbred intelligence” and the lowbrow is a person of “thoroughbred vitality” (The Essays of Virginia Woolf [E] 6: 475, 470, 471). When the essay was first published, in 1942, David Burnham of The Commonweal claimed that “it sums up Virginia Woolf’s central intellectual position” (567). For many years, Burnham’s claim dominated the public’s perception of Woolf’s relationship to middlebrow culture. But such a claim limits Woolf’s varied work on cultural hierarchies and her complex understanding of the generic identity of the middlebrow and its relationship to gender. This limiting is particularly significant when we consider that there is no clear definition of middlebrow literature or clear distinction between middlebrow and highbrow authors. (Indeed, according to Melba Cuddy-Kean, “Middlebrow” was most likely written in the same month that Woolf completed Flush, a Book-of-the-Month Club selection [23]). Middlebrow literature is best understood as a “hybrid form,” to borrow Nicola Humble’s description (Feminine 4), and the designation of middlebrow was, as Faye Hammill maintains, “a productive and affirmative position for writers who were not wholly aligned with either high modernism or popular culture” (6). This hybridity and fluidity aptly describes the work of many of Woolf’s female contemporaries who neither fit within the modernist sphere nor were popular best-sellers.

As Erica Brown and Mary Grover demonstrate, the middlebrow “is a nexus for prejudice towards the lower middle classes, the feminine and the domestic, and towards narrative modes regarded as outdated” (1). These negative connotations often obscure the actual work done by writers historically linked to the middlebrow, but the range of connotations emphasizes how the middlebrow was linked to reading publics, content, authorship, and style. During the interwar period, middlebrow culture was often cast as inauthentic and aspirational by the media, as shown by Punch’s notorious description of it as a group of “people who are hoping that some day they will get used to the stuff they ought to like” (“Charivaria”). Yet as Q. D. Leavis notes, by the early 1930s, as evidenced by the success of the Book Society, “middlebrow taste” appeared to have “organized” (although she does not explain how) and many highbrows such as Leavis feared it was a direct threat to more intellectual or prestigious writing (270). Today, the middlebrow is still “difficult to define [. . .] because as a product of contested and precarious assertions of cultural authority, it is itself unstable,” and any attempt at definition must address the “historical contingency” of the term (Brown and Grover 2). As a cultural category, then, the middlebrow is heterogeneous and fluid, able to weave among styles, authors, and reading publics.

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1 For a discussion of Woolf’s effort to support middlebrow women writers through her work with the Hogarth Press, please see Sullivan, “The Middlebrows of the Hogarth Press: Rose Macaulay, E. M. Delafield and Cultural Hierarchies in Interwar Britain.”
and reading publics, as Cuddy-Keane has shown. Since the public’s understanding of the term “middlebrow” was more fluid in the 1920s than the 1930s, Woolf’s perceptions of it could have been more flexible and nuanced. The middlebrow writer may have infamously been “neither one thing nor the other” for Woolf when she penned “Middlebrow” (E6: 472), but it certainly presents a different face in “Three Characters” (1930) and A Room of One’s Own (1929). In “Three Characters,” the middlebrow writer is sketched as masculine and the middlebrow literary category one that no feminist could ever support. In A Room of One’s Own, the middlebrow writer is sketched as potentially feminine, and therefore detached from patriarchal literary preferences. Here, in this earliest of Woolf’s three pieces concerning middlebrow literature, Woolf’s understanding of the links between gender and the middlebrow is nuanced. Though she does not openly engage here with the “battle of the brows,” she does address how education, cultural capital, and finances impact women’s literary history—concerns that feature in the late-1920s discussions over cultural hierarchies. A Room of One’s Own is, in fact, one of Woolf’s most sophisticated theorizations of women’s middlebrow culture, yet this aspect of the essay is often overshadowed by its call for a rebirth of Shakespeare’s sister (112) and for more elite forms of women’s literature. When read together, “Three Characters” and A Room of One’s Own suggest that Woolf’s conceptualization of the middlebrow was based upon its relationship to gender, and suggest too that Woolf had a far more sympathetic perception of female middlebrow writers and their work than “Middlebrow,” composed later and posthumously published, would indicate.

In “Three Characters,” Woolf defines the lowbrow as the foundation of human society—industrious, with little concern for education and a propensity for fecundity. The equally hard-working highbrow believes in “genius” and is terrible at “games” (E6: 558, 559). Woolf’s broadbrow (she takes up Priestley’s preferred term for middlebrow) is a “parasitic” dabbler in writing, sport, or politics with a cunning ability to influence and entertain the public (E6: 560). This broadbrow prefers to entertain the public rather than create innovative art. Woolf writes of him, “‘I am one of those old fashioned people who believe that human nature is the same; who believe in the lasting things—love, honour, patriotism, I am old fashioned’ he says (and his book at once sells fifty thousand copies)” (E6: 559). Woolf’s broadbrow maintains innocently that he writes “for the ordinary man in the street,” upholds the relationship between traditional artistic forms and patriarchal culture, and supports a literary marketplace that values popularity over aesthetic ideals. When “his money rolls in […]” he buys a nice Queen Anne house and fills it with collies and little boys and girls and tends the garden and wears tweeds and writes [sic] and writes and writes” (E6: 559-60). The masculine “broadbrow” is thus associated with suburban sprawl and domesticity, and with a distastefully voluminous production of writing that corresponds with his growing family. Woolf’s decision here to assign the broadbrow (and the highbrow) exclusively masculine pronouns ignores middlebrow women writers and avoids casting judgment upon them. This decision is emphasized by the fact that the essay’s “lowbrow” is instead aligned with both the masculine and the feminine: “She—for he is also she” (E6: 557). Perhaps Woolf’s gendering of the broadbrow as masculine suggests that women writers associated with the middlebrow category are not to be aligned with this unpleasant figure.

A Room of One’s Own considers the tensions surrounding cultural hierarchies and gender in a more systemic fashion, tenuously offering a more redemptive understanding of women’s middlebrow culture. Thus, in this work, Woolf carefully avoided direct engagement with the “battle of the brows,” perhaps because relegating any of her female contemporaries to the middlebrow sphere would not have particularly pleased them, and would have thwarted her efforts to support the cultural capital of women’s writing. In addition, as Diane F. Gillespie argues about “Middlebrow,” Woolf likely realized that “the brow levels […] maybe proved too confining” (113), given the fluid cultural positions occupied by so many women writers at this time. Unlike Woolf, authors such as Rose Macaulay, Vera Brittain, Winifred Holtby, and Margaret Kennedy were privileged enough to attend university. Yet Woolf was, in her words, “the only woman in England free to write what [she] like[d],” while all others were forced to “be thinking of series & editors” (The Diary of Virginia Woolf [D] 3: 43) and thus had limited control over their work. This statement indicates that as early as 1925 Woolf understood that one could not consider taste or cultural capital without also considering gender, finances, and the publishing industry.

Writing about women’s literary history may have been easier for Woolf than writing about contemporary fiction. In A Room of One’s Own, she argues for the need for a future woman writer of genius, implicitly claiming that something is lacking from the work of her female contemporaries, including the writers mentioned above and others she saw socially or published with the Hogarth Press. Woolf does not ignore the presence of peers or of the generation of women writers who came before her, but she must speak of them carefully. A Room clearly states that while there are only “empty shelves” to mark the women writers of the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, or seventeenth centuries, women writers began to fill entire sections of libraries and bookshops during the eighteenth century (64). At the time of A Room’s publication, “there are almost as many books written by women […] as by men” (78). If Woolf were to have explicitly discussed the fiction of any of her female peers, ventriloquizing through her female narrator, she would most likely have had to criticize their work, as she does Charlotte Brontë’s (68-69). Woolf aims to explain how predominantly middle-class and well-educated women were prevented from attaining literary genius without directly casting them as lost souls who have “gone too far to be repaired,” as she once claimed about Macaulay (The Letters of Virginia Woolf [L] 3: 501-02). At the same time, Woolf does not seek to disavow the entire system of cultural hierarchies. So she insists that there is a boundary between middlebrow and highbrow writers and develops a tactic that enforces her literary standards without contradicting her feminist aims and criticizing contemporary women writers.

A Room of One’s Own posits that Shakespeare had a sister, Judith, whose literary gifts were thwarted by Elizabethan constrictions on women. Towards the essay’s end, the narrator picks up a book by a contemporary counterpart to Shakespeare’s sister, Mary Carmichael, a fictional writer who, as the narrator bluntly tells us, “was no ‘genius’—that was evident” (90). In fact, “she was no more than a clever girl whose books will no doubt be pulped by the publishers in ten years’ time” (91). Little else is known about Mary Carmichael’s position within the literary marketplace. Yet when we remember that she does not have £500 each year and that her novel is intriguing and entertaining yet ephemeral, we can assume that Mary Carmichael is neither a highbrow writer, nor a popular or lowbrow author creating formulaic romances or thrillers. Mary Carmichael is the link between the middle-class women writers of the eighteenth-century and Woolf’s predicted future woman writer of genius. But she also bridges the divide between Woolf and her middlebrow female contemporaries. Mary Carmichael emerges as a fictional innovative middlebrow whose work is a vital contribution to women’s literature, and as a portrait of how Woolf understood female middlebrow writers. This fictional case study becomes even more relevant to Woolf’s understanding of interwar middlebrow women writers when we consider that, as Jane Marcus argues, Mary Carmichael’s Life’s Adventure is quite possibly based upon Marie (Carmichael) Stopes’s Love’s Creation (1928) (175). This middlebrow novel, published under the surname of Stopes’s mother, resembles Life’s Adventure: Love’s Creation features a romance between male and female scientists, while Life’s Adventure features a relationship between two female scientists. The similar plot and middlebrow genres of Life’s

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2 According to Stuart N. Clarke, the holograph draft of “Three Characters” in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library is dated “11 December [1930]” (E6: 557). This dating would place both A Room of One’s Own before “Three Characters” and “Middlebrow.”
Adventures and Love’s Creation suggest that Woolf recognized a need for understanding the impact of contemporary women’s middlebrow fiction upon the reading public and literary history. When Woolf’s criticism of Mary Carmichael is read in relation to trends in middlebrow women’s literature of the 1920s, Carmichael is clearly positioned alongside authors such as Macaulay or Holtby. Like them, Mary Carmichael is “afraid of being called ‘sentimental,’” for she knows that too often literature by women is associated with the “flowery” and the domestic, and is thus confined to women’s traditional literary genres and styles (79-80). Based on this description, Mary Carmichael’s text seems to fit Humble’s understanding of the “feminine middlebrow novel,” with its interest in “Bohemian” or nontraditional lifestyles, the everyday, and “feminine aspects of life,” interests often relayed in an ironic manner (Feminine 11). Woolf seems to recognize the middlebrow literature created by her female contemporaries as a coherent tradition, even if she avoids any labels or definitions at this time.

Unlike in “Middlebrow” or “Three Characters,” where Woolf criticizes the work of the middlebrow or broadbrow writer, in A Room of One’s Own, Woolf does not disparage the work of the fictional Carmichael, even though it appears to be positioned outside of the highbrow sphere. Indeed, despite Mary Carmichael’s realist inclinations, Woolf admires her “tendency to the caustic and satirical, rather than to the romantic, in her treatment of the other sex” (91). Woolf adds, “there could be no doubt that as a novelist she enjoyed some natural advantages of a high order” (91). Even as the description of Carmichael recalls Woolf’s contemporary middlebrow women writers, by ascribing her “natural advantages” that echo Judith Shakespeare’s “gift [. . .] for the tune of words” (47), Woolf also positions Carmichael within “high” culture and further distinguishes her invented writer from the “broadbrow” in “Three Characters” or the “middlebrow” in the later “Middlebrow” by assigning Carmichael an authorial motive other than money. She does not merely write for the sake of sales; she is instead “devis[ing] some entirely new combination of her resources [. . .] so as to absorb the new into the old without disturbing the infinitely intricate and elaborate balance of the whole” (84). Mary Carmichael is purposefully participating in and refiguring women’s literary traditions, a project aligned with much of Woolf’s own work. Carmichael addresses the topic of female friendship, perhaps female romance: “Chloe like[s] Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature,” Woolf explains (81).

Woolf’s representation of Mary Carmichael and of her relationship to Judith Shakespeare thus exposes the tensions Woolf faced as a writer who valued genius and as a feminist who admired the significant strides made by her contemporaries, despite their insufficient funds, lack of personal space, and compromised publishing opportunities. Woolf had emphasized the deficiencies and limitations of the masculine broadbrow in “Three Characters” and of the middlebrow in her 1932 essay. In A Room, by contrast, Woolf de-emphasizes arguable deficiencies of middlebrow women writers and instead positions these writers as significant contributors to women’s literary history.

Woolf proclaims that Mary Carmichael “will be a poet [. . .] in another hundred years’ time” (93) and suggests that women’s middlebrow literature will come to share territory with highbrow literature. Mary Carmichael’s work is satirical and experimental, realist and progressive, and thus crosses middlebrow and highbrow divides, much like the work of many interwar women writers. When the narrator begins reading Mary Carmichael’s first novel, Life’s Adventure, she tells herself that, “one must read it as if it were the last volume in a fairly long series, continuing all those other books that I have been glancing at” (79). If “books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately” (79), then all books by women contribute to the long history of women’s literature—even those written by middlebrow women writers. Moreover, the middlebrow, for Woolf, becomes a space where women can experiment, despite the fact that they must consider “series [sic] and editors” and the fact that their work may be “pulped” in a decade. Rather than associate the middlebrow solely with the masculine, Woolf sees this (here unnamed) cultural sphere not as restrictive to women writers, but as advantageous to their work and to women’s literary history.

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Works Cited


“Rambling the streets of London”: Virginia Woolf and the London Sketch

Setting out to define the essay in “The Modern Essay,” Virginia Woolf conceives that she can only hint at a vague definition and trace its changing shape across time and authors. But she also lands on the insight that “its present is more important than its past,” and so goes on to offer her thoughts on the modern state of the essay (The Essays of Virginia Woolf[E] 4 216). Woolf admires the modern essayists, like Max Beerbohm, who can express an idea with conviction and personality in the face of the “contemporary dilemma” of trying to write for “a kind, tired, apathetic world” where “[b]eauty and courage are dangerous spirits to bottle in a column and a half, and thought […] has a way of spoiling the symmetry of an article” (E4 224, 223). What the essay must do to keep from spoiling, she says, is to offer the reader pleasure. This pleasure comes from the reader’s recognition of the purity of the writing—“pure like water or pure like wine, but pure from dullness, deadness, and deposits of extraneous matter”—where the purity communicates both the author’s “spirit of personality,” manifesting in “the triumph of style,” and also “some fierce attachment to an idea” (E4 217, 224). The modern essay, then, requires beauty, courage, thought, purity, style, and personality, but we get the sense that what Woolf too often saw was a “common greyness” as modern essayists shied away from being candid and bold, and became dispassionate and diluted (E4 223).

In other essays, Woolf writes about the desire for self-expression in essay form, tracing the origins back to Michel de Montaigne’s moments of self-revelatory inquiry and admiring and recommending Sir Thomas Browne’s writings on more than one occasion. Browne signifies, for Woolf, a writer who is “definitely himself” and who stamps his writing with his own personality as much as his imagination, so that there is detected in his texts “the form of a human being” behind them because he had not suffered from a lack of healthy “interest in himself” (E3 155-56). Woolf describes Browne’s “power of bringing the remote and incongruous astonishingly together” in a style where “[v]ast inquiries sweeping in immense circles of ambiguity and doubt are clenched by short sentences rapped out with solemn authority” (E3 370). It is these early essayists—Montaigne and Browne—who provide the model for the ways that Woolf thinks about the importance of expressing the self in the best modern essays: “I, I, I—how we have lost the secret of saying that!” (E3 156). Elena Gualtieri sees Woolf’s “approach to the history and to the nature of the genre” of the essay—ignoring Francis Bacon, and focusing on Montaigne, Browne, and Thomas De Quincey—as a self-conscious attempt to position herself in a tradition more aligned with autobiography, conceived as non-narrative and determined by “moments of perception and reflection” (49). Gualtieri writes that this “alternate version of the history of the essay,” which focuses on exploration and expression of the self interacting with personal insights and intimate thoughts rather than presenting bald facts and easy sentiments calculated not to ruffle readers’ feathers, “can thus be seen to unearth a submerged current of English prose writing which functions as a literary precedent for her own search for an antidote to narrative in the writing of fiction” (57).

The return to the assertion of the “I” foregrounded by Woolf in the modern essay goes against what she saw as the trend of essayists speaking for the “we.” “While ‘we’ are gratified,” Woolf writes, “I, that unruly partner in human fellowship, is reduced to despair. ‘I’ must always think things for himself and, feel things for himself. To share them in a diluted form […] is for him sheer agony” (E4 223). Woolf fears the dilution of the genre via the disavowal of self-expression and the negation of the “I,” and seeks to follow in the tradition of those essayists she identifies as writing personally and courageously about themselves in order to revive and revitalize a stagnating genre.

Woolf sees the modern essay requiring a “triumph of style” whereby an author “can make use in literature of [the] self,” while recognizing that the self is “essential to literature” but can also be “its most dangerous antagonist” (E4 221). Leila Brosnan argues that Woolf’s particular style in her essays is dialogic, which allows her “to reinvent the ‘I’ through dialogue with other voices” (122). For Brosnan, Woolf’s authorial “I” is “internally dialogic,” meaning that it is “born of dialogue,” speaking to both itself and to its audience, producing a “conglomerate ‘I’” (137). This multiple and fluid “I” eschews the “dominance” and “aridity” of the self Woolf identifies with the hypermasculine and authoritarian “I” in A Room of One’s Own, and conforms instead to her questioning of the “unity of the mind” and self (96). The mind’s capacity for “concentrating at any point at any moment” betrays its unity and points to her belief that the mind “seems to have no single state of being” (96). “Walking down Whitehall,” Woolf tells us, might initiate a “splitting off of consciousness” so that one is transformed from “being the natural inheritor of that civilisation” to being “outside of it, alien and critical” (96). Spontaneous or deliberate acts of concentrating one’s thoughts while rambling the streets of London instigates, for Woolf, a double splitting of the self: split from civilization and its naturalized or inherited perspectives, and also freed from its own unitary consciousness. The split self, therefore, is free to explore its own external and internal dialogic byways, ideally positioning the rambling “I” as the subject and author of personal and reflective modern essays.

At this point I want to pause and return to where I began, with Woolf’s admission that the essay as genre is not a fixed form, but rather has many iterations and varying lines of tradition and descent. Having briefly traced Woolf’s thoughts on the generic conventions of a certain kind of essay tradition she elevates at the expense of others, I now want to consider in more detail how she locates and uses recognizably specific subgenres within the essay form to further her own experiments within the genre. I will focus here on the subgenre of the London sketch. This essay form was popular in many press publications and variously collected in bound volumes, with early examples dating back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Increasingly popular from the mid-1800s on, the London sketch serves not only as simple guidebook, but also as ethnographic exploration, alternating between the past and the present, bringing into relief the many seen and unseen connections that make up daily life and the impressions of an increasingly cosmopolitan London.

The reason for the nineteenth-century rise of the London sketch is that the divides between East End London and West End London become more apparent and fixed in the popular imagination. “Slumming” the East End by upper- and middle-class writers and tourists became a way

1 In a similar vein, Pamela L. Caughie reads Browne’s influence of self-expressive writing in Woolf’s fiction, tracing the confluence of the complexities and “contrarities” (Browne qtd. in Caughie 4) of the self in Orlando.

2 Beth Carole Rosenberg and Jeanne Dubino recognize the many kinds of non-fictional writing Woolf pursued, including “essayistic criticism,” “essayistic memoir,” “essayistic travel writing,” “essayistic biography,” “essayistic fiction,” and “fictional essays” (13).

Woolf’s essays that comprise the series “The London Scene” (originally titled “Six Essays on London Life”), first published in *Good Housekeeping* from December 1931 to December 1932, are strong examples of the kind of London sketches that focus on an environment with which many people in London would not be familiar. These six essays trace the various invisible connections that bind Londoners to each other and to people around the world. “The docks of London” provides a chance, for instance, for Woolf to shed light on the global goods, people and vessels that the Thames brings to London ports. At the same time, the essay exposes the miserable working and living conditions of “a sinister dwarf city of workmen’s houses” and the “air of decrepitude” of the docks and warehouses lying next door to those Londoners who profit from the vast trade of the empire (E5 276). The place of a “thousand ships with a thousand cargoes” is reduced to bare “utilitarian” and “mercantile” value, which, Woolf implies, reveals the grimy exploitation of labor and land the docks come to represent at the heart of the metropolis (E5 278). This description gives way to reflection about one’s individual place within the system, so that, “The only thing, one comes to feel, that can change the routine of the docks is a change in ourselves” (E5 279). These essays typify the genre of the London sketch as they bring to light and to life a London that many Londoners—the middle and upper classes, including the readers of *Good Housekeeping*—might not know firsthand. And readers familiar with the places described might not have considered their sociopolitical relationships to the places and people the essays expose and explore.

“The London Scene” essays trade on a long tradition of the London sketch performing a didactic function for change and self-reflection by opening up the field of vision to the nearby unknown. One essay in this tradition is Elizabeth Helme’s *Instructive Rambles in London and the Adjacent Villages* (1798). Woolf’s reinterpretation of the London sketch, however, expresses a personal apperception of London’s myriad sites, conveying the author’s subjective impressions and private glances as she rambles the thoroughfares and backstreets of London. Woolf begins another of her London sketch essays, “Street Haunting: A London Adventure,” with the avowed “pretext” of buying a pencil as “an excuse for walking half across London between tea and dinner” (E4 480). This pretext allows for what Woolf calls “the greatest pleasure of town life in winter—rambling the streets of London” (E4 480). This essay, I suggest, follows the traditional use of the peripatetic, rambling narrator commonly found in the London sketch, and, furthermore, offers a place for Woolf to consider the role of the genre in relation to essay writing. Mateaux writes in the Preface to her own collection of London sketch essays that her intention is “to show [readers] fewer ‘outsides,’ and allow them at leisure to survey the ‘withins’” of the sights and locations of London (5). Similarly, Woolf in “Street Haunting” conducts an inquiry into the limitations of the street rambler and essayist’s ability to see “within.” She writes that part of the allure of rambling the streets of London is recognizing that the streets are “at once revealed and obscured” because they are seen by the eye, which is “not a miner, not a diver” into the heart of things (E4 481). There is a constant vacillation in the essay between the street spaces and the softly lit interiors as the narrator rambles from place to place, at one moment reflecting on the “bright men and women” in “all their poverty and shabbiness,” and the next noticing “the figure of a woman, accurately measuring out the precise number of spoons of tea,” substituting T. S. Eliot’s coffee spoons for teaspoons (E4 481-82). It is at this moment of looking in on this woman from the street that the narrator pauses because there is a “danger of digging deeper than the eye approves” and hampering the easy stroll “by catching at some branch or root,” which in turn will upset the rambler’s freedom to “be content with surfaces only” (E4 482).

The tension, here, between dallying on a fixed interior point and being swept along by the current of exteriors in the street recalls the dilemma of the modern essayist, who, for Woolf, as we saw earlier, often rambles too easily among external facts and impersonal anecdotes at the expense of mining the personal interior spaces for material and insights to write about in essay form. The “average unprofessional eye,” Woolf writes, cannot “bring out the more obscure angles and relationships” because the eye “rests only on beauty” (E4 482). Remember that one quality she admires in Browne as an essayist is his capacity to bring “the remote and incongruous astonishingly together.” In “Street Haunting,” Woolf implies that there is a tendency to want to be reassured and satiated with beauty, to gloss too lightly over the exterior surfaces to discover a common unity of London. This tendency doesn’t mean that one can’t or shouldn’t find the beauty in the sights and scenes encountered while “rambling the streets of London,” as Woolf often did, but that one must also be aware of the danger that as the eye gazes on beauty, the “brain sleeps perhaps as it looks” (E4 482). Therefore, we must also be on the lookout for “the humped, the twisted, the deformed,” and the ragtag cast of “derelicts” who make the streets their homes (E4 484). Confronting these sights causes the “nerves of the spine to stand erect” and induces a moment when “a question is asked which is never answered” (E4 484-85). Woolf doesn’t let on what the unanswered question might be, and I think there are a number of possible speculations as to what it could be, but what is important here is that the mind is engaged at these sights because it is not under beauty’s soporific effects. Woolf’s trained eye, then, does what the unprofessional cannot, in highlighting the obscure angles and relationships for her readers. In discovering and exposing the unseen connections to the city and its dwellers, she is carrying on a convention of the London sketch genre. At the same time, in writing from personal discovery, she is fulfilling her criteria for a good modern essay. Woolf’s practice of reading the street for alternating moments of external beauty and introspective inquiry, of wistful slumber in the tides of life and engaged critical mindfulness, reflects a balance that informs the kind of modern essay she admires and writes.

The most interesting feature of the London sketch genre is that London often takes a backseat to the personalities it houses and displays. London as a setting locates a recognizable time and place, such as Kew Gardens or the London docks, from which to observe and reflect on the common interactions between people and places, and on how people and places mutually shape each other.3 In “Street Haunting,” Woolf considers at the end of her sojourn across London that the greatest pleasure London offers is her people and the discovery one makes about oneself in relation to them: “And what greater delight and wonder can there be than to leave the straight lines of personality and deviate into those footpaths that lead beneath brambles and thick tree trunks into the heart of the forest where live those wild beasts, our fellow men?” (E4 490-91). From the forest of the city, Woolf carves out a space for self-reflection and self-expression, enlivening the modern essay.

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3 Woolf’s short story “Kew Gardens” could be read as a kind of fictional essay of the London sketch genre.
Subverting Genres and Virginia Woolf’s Political Activism: Three Guineas as Peace Testimony

Identified as a “communist manifesto for women” by Jane Marcus (Introduction), a “polemic” by Julia Briggs (120), and a “war pamphlet” by the author herself (The Letters of Virginia Woolf [L] 6 159), Virginia Woolf’s Three Guineas (1938) inhabits multiple genres. In collapsing the boundaries among peace pamphlet, political manifesto, letter, and essay-novel, Woolf subverts the divisions between private and public life, bringing the home and the family into the political arena and inditing the patriarchy in a war-making system. Responding to the question “How in your opinion are we to prevent war?,” Three Guineas articulates Woolf’s absolutist pacifist philosophy through a mode historically accessible and common to women: the letter. This cross between public letter and political pamphlet both models and reflects the trend of mixed-media projects that document the Spanish Civil War. It breaks through the genre of the letter and the genre of literature to perform its politics, modeling the modernist collapse between the boundaries of life and art and transforming Woolf from thinker and writer to political activist. Three Guineas is, I argue, Virginia Woolf’s peace testimony.

“Peace testimony” is a Quaker term that connects pacifist activism to spiritual worship. Caroline Emelia Stephen, the younger sister of Leslie Stephen, Woolf’s father, wrote about the Society of Friends’ peace testimony in her books Light Arising: Thoughts on the Central Radiance (1908) and Quaker Strongholds (1891), though she used its historical term, “testimony against war.” This term, according to Pink Dandelion’s The Quakers: A Very Short Introduction (2008), is “typically labeled the ‘peace testimony’ today” (14). Reading Three Guineas as peace testimony ties Woolf’s work to the Quaker beliefs of her aunt and situates Three Guineas as political activism.

In “The Niece of a Nun,” Marcus identifies how Stephen influenced the characterization of several of Woolf’s female characters, such as Sally Seale in Night and Day, Eleanor Pargiter in The Years, and Lucy Swinton in Between the Acts, and identifies too some of the ways in which Stephen influenced Woolf’s politics. Marcus reads the “intellectual chastity” necessary for inclusion in Woolf’s Society of Outsiders as a source of feminine power modeled by the chastity of Woolf’s aunt. Positioning Woolf and Three Guineas within “the female mystical/political tradition,” Marcus observes that, “Like the Quaker philosophy of Caroline Stephen, Three Guineas attacks war, the pompous dress of men in power, the university, the established church, and the professions” (135). Marcus recuperates the female mystical tradition in Woolf’s oeuvre, showing that Woolf’s feminism is deeply informed by Stephen’s conversion to Quakerism from the Clapham Sect of the Church of England. I will discuss, therefore, not the “rational mysticism” (a term used by Stephen and Marcus) of Quakerism, which Marcus has deftly analyzed for us, but the activist principles of the Quaker tradition, connecting Stephen’s beliefs to the peace testimony of Three Guineas.

The Quaker concept of “testimony,” central to the tradition of the Society of Friends, shifts religion from its purely idealistic, spiritual model and existentially situates living as a form of worship. Gathered together in a silent meeting, Friends wait in stillness to experience their “inner light,” or divine inspiration. There is no single minister or priest in “unprogrammed” silent meetings—everyone engages in communion with God. If one is moved by the spirit of God, one stands and offers “free ministry,” which is spontaneous and typically brief. It is not unusual to have several speakers proffer “free ministry” in one meeting, though it is also possible that no one speaks at all. Until one is “called” (i.e., moved by the spirit) to speak, one sits in silence, waiting for divine inspiration. In Light Arising, Stephen writes, “A Friends’ meeting,

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1 The 2010 exhibition The Mexican Suitcase: Rediscovered Spanish Civil War Negatives by Capa, Chim, and Taro, held at the International Center of Photography (ICP), brought to light one mixed-media approach to documenting the Spanish Civil War. The “Mexican Suitcase” is a collection of 4,500 negatives taken by Spanish Civil War photographers Robert Capa, Gerda Taro and Chim (David Seymour) that were housed in the back of a closet in Mexico for decades until they were returned in 2007 to Cornell Capa, Robert Capa’s brother and the founder of the ICP. Magazine spreads during the Spanish Civil War juxtaposed Capa, Chim, and Taro’s photographs with commentary to create a narrative of the conflict (see Dell). The catalogue of the exhibition, edited by Cynthia Young, reproduces these spreads as well as the contact-sheet negatives of the photographs. Another example of the mixed-media projects that represent the Spanish Civil War is the Spanish Pavilion of the Paris International Exhibition, 1937, where Picasso’s Guernica was first exhibited, hung facing murals constructed from political posters, newspaper articles, and photographs (Mendelson).

2 In both Quaker Strongholds and Light Arising, Stephen explains in detail the Quaker terms and specialized language of the meeting. In Light Arising, especially, she focuses on the language of testimony. However, Stephen does not coin these phrases; she draws on the vocabulary that originated in the early days of Quakerism, which informs all Quaker writing and worship.
however silent, is at the very lowest a witness that worship is something other and deeper than words, and that it is to the unseen and eternal things that we desire to fit the first place in our lives” (68).

Faith, for Quakers, is not enough. Faith must be lived and followed. Silent meeting is Quakerism’s primary testimony to the “inner light” that guides Quaker faith; the other testimonies, including peace, are a witness to living in the light. According to Stephen in Quaker Strongholds, “testimony” consists of “practices conscientiously adopted, inculcated, and watched over [ . . . ] with a jealous care which [ . . . ] has nevertheless moulded the very inmost springs of action” (120). She continues, “the essence of Quaker ‘testimony’ is witness-bearing—a lifting up in practice of the highest possible standard of uncompromising obedience to the teaching of Jesus Christ, both as recorded in the Gospels, and as inwardly experienced as light” (120). In essence, a “testimony” is an action that testifies to the conscience of an individual, a conscience informed by the divine spirit. Peace testimony, or “testimony against war,” is a collection of actions—most Quakers would argue a lifestyle—that manifests pacifist beliefs.

Therefore, when I maintain that Three Guineas is Woolf’s peace testimony, I am arguing that Three Guineas is a form of action. Reading Three Guineas as peace testimony positions the text within the peace activist movements of the Spanish Civil War and of the impending world war. This reading also recognizes Woolf as a voice of dissent in an intellectual environment that was moving away from pacifist beliefs in response to the violence against civilians committed during the conflict in Spain. The Spanish Civil War erupted on 18 July 1936, forcing to a crisis the tension that Europe had felt among Fascism, socialism, Communism, democracy, and capitalism. It also made the impending world war obvious to anyone with political acumen. As 1936 progressed into 1937, the English intellectual left, many of whom had been pacifists in the First World War, increasingly supported the war in Spain against General Francisco Franco. In the advent of an increased usage of the military technique “total war” (in which civilians become military targets), pacifists faced certain ethical and philosophical questions. They asked themselves, can we legitimately wage war under the sign of peace? And how do we stop the innocent slaughter of civilians in cases of genocide or total war? The fight in Spain, with the international involvement of Russia (on the side of the Republic) and Germany and Italy (on the side of the Francoist fascists), struck most politically invested artists as a fight of good against evil. Though some pacifist organizations, like the Quakers, continued their peace testimony and provided relief work throughout the Spanish conflict, the threat of an even more technologically advanced and bloody world war made it difficult for many individuals, including the poet Julian Bell, Woolf’s nephew, to sustain a pacifist philosophy.

In writing Three Guineas, Woolf maintains her peace testimony in spite of a cultural climate moving towards war. She addresses at once large-scale mobilization and, more personally, her nephew. Bell’s increasingly ambivalent position towards pacifism is summed up in a sentence from his introduction to the anthology We Did Not Fight (1935): “I believe the war-resistance movements of my generation will in the end succeed in putting down war—by force if necessary” (xix). Anticipating his involvement in the Spanish Civil War, this statement clearly indicates that Bell believes in war as a viable method of establishing peace. It is also representative of the shift away from his Quaker schooling and the values of Bloomsbury conscientious objectors. Wanting badly to volunteer with the International Brigades, Bell was talked out of enlistment as a conciliation to his pacifist mother; instead, he volunteered as an ambulance driver with the noncombatant organization Spanish Medical Aid (Stansky and Abrahams 263-64). On 18 July 1937, he was killed by a bomb (Stansky and Abrahams 278). After Julian’s tragic death, when Woolf was writing Three Guineas with all-consuming intensity to escape feeling the full effect of his absence, she wrote to Vanessa Bell, her sister and Julian’s mother, “I’m completely stuck on my war pamphlet[,] [ . . . ] I’m always wanting to argue it with Julian—in fact I wrote it as an argument with him. Somehow he stirred me up to argue” (L6 159). On the day Three Guineas was published, Woolf wrote in her diary, “I was always thinking of Julian when I wrote” (The Diaries of Virginia Woolf [D] 5 148). These statements suggest that Julian Bell is one of those not-so-invisible presences who haunt Three Guineas, as Emily Sharpe has recently argued. Notably, the genre blending of Three Guineas is a technique that Bell himself used in 1936 and 1937 to write three “open letters”: “On Roger Fry: A Letter,” “The Proletariat and Poetry: An Open Letter to C. Day Lewis,” and “War and Peace: Letter to E. M. Forster.” The last essay makes the statement to which Woolf’s letter implicitly responds—“1, and many more men of military age, have ceased to be pacifists” (336)—and expounds on Bell’s idea that some evils are worse than war—namely, Fascism. Soon after Bell wrote this open letter, he put his position into action by going to Spain. Woolf, however, contends throughout her peace pamphlet that any capitalist, militarized state will always lead to Fascism and that those ostensibly fighting Fascism will inevitably become much like their enemy. Three Guineas, therefore, is a peace pamphlet that says everything to Bell that Woolf never got to say. In this way, it could also be considered a text of mourning.

From another vantage point, one could see Woolf’s peace pamphlet as part of a larger trend within pacifist circles, a movement that tended toward “positive peace,” i.e., a pacifism that “argued that the peace movement must be constructive, not simply reactive, promoting social, political and cultural reform to eradicate the causes of war” (Brockington 2). Similar to the Quaker idea of “testimony,” “positive peace” must be manifesting in doing something to create a world without war. Within the early-twentieth-century pacifist community, producing pamphlets and writing against war was actually seen as one of the most important contributions to peace politics and political activity. In fact, the kind of work that Three Guineas does is precisely the kind of work Vanessa Bell, and indeed the entire Bloomsbury community, wanted Julian Bell to undertake. Instead of fighting in Spain, they argued to Bell, there was a more important fight against Fascism at home, to be pursued by, in Vanessa Bell’s words, “thinking, writing, speaking, planning” (qtd. in Stansky and Abrahams 239). This is the fight in which Woolf is engaged by writing Three Guineas, clear from the May 1938 musing in her diary, 3

3 As the pamphlet Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War (1937) makes clear, most of the intellectual left supported the Spanish Republic, sometimes sacrificing their pacifist beliefs for their fight against Fascism. For example, Rosamond Lehmann states: “Up till now a pacifist in the fullest sense, I have come to feel that non-resistance can be—in this case, is—a negative, a sterile, even a destructive thing” (21). This pamphlet records the short responses of 148 authors to the questions: “Are you for, or against, the legal Government and the People of the Republican Spain?” and “Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism?” (2). Out of the 148, only sixteen remained neutral and five supported Franco’s rebellion.

4 For more on ethics, total war, and Three Guineas, see Berman.

5 Mendlesohn highlights the importance of “the Testimony of Social Justice in the working out of the Quaker Peace Witness in the middle years of the twentieth century” (180). Since a peace testimony is defined as a series of actions testifying to an inner belief, it must be manifested or enacted in some way. Mendlesohn points out that one of the ways in which some Quakers enacted their testimony was to provide hunger relief on the ground in Spain and offer relief for Spanish refugees in Spain, France, Mexico and England.

6 See Woolf’s diary entry on 15 April 1937, where she records a dinner party that Bell attended: “Julian, KM [i.e. Kingsley Martin], Stephen [Spender]—all calling each other by Xian names. What is our duty? What is the responsible man like KM to do? Cant be a pacifist; the irresponsible can” (D5 79). Woolf makes it apparent that this conversation affected the writing of Three Guineas when she states: “I sat there splitting off my own position from theirs, testing what they said, convincing myself of my own integrity & justice [. . . ] Julian” [obscenely set on going to Spain—wont argue; tight; hard fistied [. . . ] we discussed hand grenades, bombs, tanks, as if we were military gents in the war again. And I felt flame up in me 3 Gs.” (D5 79-80).
"but as the whole of Europe may be in flames[,] [ . . . ] [w]e must attack Hitler in England" (D5 142).

The multimedia form and generic blending of *Three Guineas* allows the text to perform this “positive peace.” The book includes extensive footnotes that rely on women’s biographies, newspaper articles, propaganda pamphlets, and, as the author notes, “manifestoes and questionnaires” (203). Five photographs of powerful British men interrupt the text, as if to expose the source of war.8 Informed by the Spanish Civil War pamphlets that use literary imagery in order to make a political case, and by the Spanish Civil War journalism that breaks the mold of the objective, non-partisan recorder, *Three Guineas* is a Spanish Civil War text, participating in the generic blending that the war inspired.

Woolf’s allusive and epistolary form facilitates a breakage of boundaries that is both essential to and constitutive of her politics. *Three Guineas* models its feminism by citing reading material to which women who did not go to university might have had access, sources as diverse as Sophocles’ *Antigone* and the *Daily Telegraph*. Further, these letters invite Woolf’s readers to join in a conversation. As Gina Potts puts it, “Woolf espouses [ . . . ] a form of collective—undivided, or co-operative—thinking: thinking as ‘we’” (46). As Marcus points out, *Three Guineas* is a difficult text because the position of the reader is never stable (Introduction xlvi), thus forcing the reader to inhabit multiple points of view. Sometimes the reader is aligned with the writer; at other times the reader is aligned with any of the various recipients and addressees. This unstable subjective/objective positioning renders the readerly stance fluid. The reader is therefore able to suspend the “I” for the collective thinking of “We”—the same cognitive orientation necessary for a functioning Outsiders’ Society, the hypothetical society Woolf founds for the prevention of war (first mentioned on 126), composed of the daughters of educated men.

According to Potts, “In *Three Guineas*, a model for collective thought is found in the Outsiders’ Society” (50). Potts explains:

> by having no hierarchy of officers, for example, the society works on the basis of having no divisions, and thus no power struggles between members. Of course, there are difficulties that would arise for a society that held no meetings or conferences, or had no money, and, Woolf’s description of the Outsiders’ Society, therefore, seems an exaggeration. How would politically-active groups, like the WCG [i.e., Women’s Co-operative Guild], work for practical solutions to social and political inequalities without meeting or having funding for their work? (51)

What is the answer to Potts’s question? The model, I think, lies in the Society of Friends. Marcus, in “The Niece of the Nun,” observes, “the Outsiders’ Society could be the Society of Friends” (135). For details on how the Outsiders’ Society’s meetings might work, let us look to Woolf’s aunt. When Friends make decisions concerning governance (of themselves, of the meeting, or of “any question of special interest” [Stephen, *Quaker Strongholds* 81]), they hold meetings with a specialized intention, such as a Meeting for Sufferings or a Meeting for Business. These meetings, Stephen tells us in *Quaker Strongholds*, require consensus for any decision to be made, as “no question is ever put to the vote” (9). Governance occurs under “what may be called a practical unanimity” (9). In refusing hierarchy, granting each member an equal and necessary voice, and insisting on consensus of an issue before the meeting takes action, Quaker meetings concerning questions of special interest operate in the same spirit as Woolf’s Outsiders’ Society. The Outsiders’ Society also shares the aims of the Quaker community, which tries to create the world it imagines by living the testimonies of “integrity, peace, simplicity, community, and equality” (Historical Dictionary 340).

*Three Guineas* mirrors closely not only the Quaker testimony of peace but also the testimony of simplicity. This testimony appears in *Three Guineas* as a rejection of ceremonial dress. Disparaging the pompous display of military and academic uniform, which stratifies individuals into spheres of power, Woolf requires simplicity of dress of would-be members of the Society of Outsiders. Wearing plain clothing as a political statement against inequality is a part of the Quaker testimony of simplicity—hence the outfits of Quaker grey that are often associated with the Society. In *Light Arising*, Stephen connects the testimony of simplicity to the testimony against war, seeing greed and finery as a source of conflict: “This method of witnessing by personal plainness and simplicity against the source of wars has, moreover, the advantage of being open to all, at once and continually” (107).

When imagining a new society, Woolf, either deliberately or unconsciously, moves towards her Quaker roots. Writing is Woolf’s form of civic action, her testimony of peace. Inspired by her aunt’s beliefs and in rebuttal to her nephew’s volunteer work in Spain, Woolf composes a text that breaks the boundaries between letter and peace pamphlet, between literature and political manifesto. In doing so, she breaks down the boundaries between the I and You, thinking a world in which the ethical orientation is We, witnessing the possibility of peace. In the call-to-action that is *Three Guineas*, we find Virginia Woolf’s peace testimony.

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**Works Cited**


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7 The list of illustrations, after the cover page, reads as: “A General (25) / Heralds (29) / A University Procession (32) / A Judge (75) / An Archbishop (144).” One fact that Woolf does not name the individuals indicates to me that they are intended to transcend their specificity and represent men of their position and class. For identification of the photographs, see Staveley.

8 Particularly striking is Woolf’s use of Louis Delappré’s war pamphlet/journalistic account of the Spanish Civil War, titled “The Martyrdom of Madrid.” This pamphlet, quoted at length in footnote 15 of part III of *Three Guineas* (210), demonstrates the breakdown of journalistic convention during the Spanish Civil War.


Mapping the Search for Consolation in Mrs. Dalloway

Snatches of English poetry fill Mrs. Dalloway, as well as its precursor, the short story “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street.” But where another author might employ poetic allusion to tie modern-day London to the past, Virginia Woolf uses bits of Shelley and Shakespeare to distinguish her character’s lament from the modes of mourning available to poets of earlier eras. The elegy, Woolf suggests, demands a different approach in the twentieth century, as secularism swells and the Great War leaves its mark on the living as well as on the dead.

As she walks through London in “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street,” Clarissa Dalloway thinks of these lines from Shelley’s “Adonais”:

> From the contagion of the world’s slow stain
> He is secure, and now can never mourn
> A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain . . .

(Shelley 40.356-58, qtd. in part in The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf [SF] 154)

These lines enable Clarissa to mourn not only her “dear Jack Stewart” (SF 154) but also those who, like her, live to face their regrets and limitations as they age. These traditional elegiac themes give way to concern with the difficulty of mourning in the current age as Clarissa continues her walk to the refrain of “And now can never mourn, can never mourn” (155). One can “never mourn” again because the traditional modes of mourning are disintegrating.

Clarissa’s thoughts outline a rift in the elegiac tradition, from when “It used [. . .] to be so simple,” to now, when, she thinks, “simply one doesn’t believe [. . .] any more in God” (158). The burgeoning secularism of the twentieth century presents a problem for the modern elegist: poets less confidently conclude their mourning song by finding consolation in thoughts of life beyond death. Peter Sacks and Jahan Ramazani have sketched the arc of elegiac poetry from its origins in Greece through its modern English incarnations. Both critics set up their discussion along Freudian lines: Sacks sees traditional elegies as pursuing instead a resistance to consolation that looks a lot like Freud’s definition of melancholia in “Mourning and Melancholia” (xi).1 But this psychoanalytic distinction obscures another major difference between the poets of old and the modern elegists: whereas the former generally ended their elegies by offering up the dead to God or gods for immortality, the latter are far less certain that there is some means of offering the dead immortality other than through their own poetry.

Woolf compels her readers to witness the unraveling of poetic tradition that accompanies a loss of belief, an unraveling that appears to cost modern poetry its consolatory power. Clarissa observes: “For all the great things one must go to the past [. . .] the moderns had never written anything one wanted to read about death” (SF 155). Through Clarissa’s dismay, Woolf registers a failure on the part of modern poetry to address the needs of mourners who seek consolation and find only cynicism from poets such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. In her essay “On Not Knowing Greek,” which was published in The Common Reader the same year Mrs. Dalloway appeared in print, Woolf echoes Clarissa’s dissatisfaction with the elegiac poetry of her contemporaries in the face of “the vast catastrophe of the European war”: “The only poets who spoke to the purpose spoke in the sidelong, satiric manner of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. It was not possible for them to be direct without being clumsy; or to speak simply of emotion without being sentimental” (The Essays of Virginia Woolf[E] 4 48). Although Clarissa is by no means a stand-in for Woolf, the clear correspondence between the fiction and the essay suggests that more than a little of Woolf’s own frustration with contemporary elegy finds an outlet in Clarissa’s musings.

Woolf’s 1925 query, “I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant ‘novel’. A new — by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?” has generated a stream of scholarship on her novels’ elegiac tone (The Diaries of Virginia Woolf[D] 3 3 34). To the Lighthouse has long been the locus of discussions of Woolfian elegy,2 but Jacob’s Room, The Waves, and Mrs. Dalloway have more recently received their share of attention.3 Although Christine Froula has argued for a reading of

1There are, of course, a variety of opinions as to the form and function of elegy over the course of literary history. See “Elegy” in The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics for further references, particularly as regards the history of the elegy and its origins in classical Greek literature. Since the publication of The English Elegy in 1985, however, Peter Sacks has been the most widely cited expert on elegy in the English tradition, and his psychoanalytic reading has been extremely influential. Ramazani’s continuation of the study of English elegy where Sacks left off has brought more attention to the melancholic, rather than the mourning, side of the equation, but it has not fundamentally altered the terms of the discussion about mourning, melancholia, and elegy.

2See Greenwald, Knox-Shaw, and Stevenson and Goldman. Woolf’s suggestion of the term “elegy” in her diary came just as she was finishing To the Lighthouse. The novel also serves as a natural point of entry for discussions of elegy and Woolf because of its references to Woolf’s deceased parents and childhood holidays at St. Ives.

3In addition to the works discussed above, see Bradshaw, Clewell, Low, Moss, Smith, Smythe, and Wall.
Woolf’s work as consolatory elegy (87), it is precisely Woolf’s evasion of the consolatory thread in the elegiac tradition that makes Alex Zwerdling’s term for Jacob’s Room, “saturic elegy” (62), equally suited to Mrs. Dalloway. Jane de Gay has already begun the work of tying Woolf’s interest in the elegy to her skepticism of religion, reading To the Lighthouse alongside Leslie Stephen’s atheistic arguments in History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century and An Agnostic’s Apology: “For Woolf, as for Stephen, the elegiac question of how to make sense of a person’s non-existence was made more urgent by the absence of Christian consolations” (110). In this reading of Mrs. Dalloway, I explore the ways in which Woolf defines an elegiac lineage that suits her atheistic sensibility even as she charts the range of responses available to modern mourners who share her predications.

In taking up the elegiac tradition, Woolf takes part in a larger cultural shift that Ramazani outlines in his discussion of the modern elegy: As warfare was industrialized and mass death augmented, as mourning rites were weakened and the “funeral director” professionalized, as the dying were shut away in hospitals and death itself made a taboo subject, poetry increasingly became an important cultural space for mourning the dead. (1)

The mass nature of modern war losses deprives the public of its ability to mourn loudly and at length for any lost individual. As Woolf’s allusions to poetry remind us, much has changed from the time of earlier elegists, leaving the war survivors with the burden not only of mourning the dead, but also of creating a form in which that mourning can take place. For Woolf, the pursuit of an elegiac voice for the modern age takes place not in poetry, but in prose. In her 1927 essay, “The Narrow Bridge of Art,” Woolf envisions that “prose will be used for purposes for which prose has never been used before,” though she wonders, “Can it chant the elegy?” (E4 435-36). What prose allows is a polyphony of elegiac mourning that conveys modern individuals’ struggle to find consolation in a world in which many join Clarissa in no longer believing “anymore in God.” Woolf’s novel is titled Mrs. Dalloway, but it is the story of many individuals’ mourning. A few paragraphs into the novel, one reads:

For it was the middle of June. The War was over, except for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed; but it was over; thank Heaven—over. (4-5)

Over in one sense, but enduring in another, since the losses of the war resonate long after Armistice Day. The narrator parrots the post-war insistence on seeing the war as a historical event rather than a present crisis. The rest of the novel makes clear, however, that in a very real sense the war is not over, that the process of mourning continues, and that it does so with only limited help from the traditional elegy.

Although Woolf once named “Lycidas” as the poem to which she could return always “unsated” (D3 330), elsewhere she implicated Milton in the perpetuation of a belief in God, who is one of the many figures targeted by her dismissive phrase, “Milton’s bogey.” She challenges readers of A Room of One’s Own to relinquish religious belief in order to bring Judith Shakespeare to life:

if we look past Milton’s bogey, for no human being should shut out the view; if we face the fact, for it is a fact, that there is no arm to cling to, but that we go alone and that our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women, then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare’s sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down. (112)

Whereas abandoning religious authority will raise the dead body of Judith Shakespeare, elsewhere Woolf makes clear that the adoption of belief has equally powerful, if negative, consequences. The announcement of T. S. Eliot’s religious conversion prompted her to write to her sister Vanessa, “poor dear Tom Eliot, who may be called dead to us all from this day forward […] I was really shocked. A corpse would seem to me more credible than he is” (The Letters of Virginia Woolf [L] 3 457-58). Pericles Lewis reads Woolf’s vehemence as an indication of the significance of her atheism to her views about mortality (142). I would extend the line of thought; the passage points also to the significance of Woolf’s atheism in shaping her reading of elegiac literature.

Given the disappointment Woolf registers with contemporary elegists’ satire and cynicism in “On Not Knowing Greek” and “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street,” and her impatience with religious transcendence in elegies such as Milton’s “Lycidas,” it is not surprising that Woolf fashion her own path between the two positions as she rewrites the terms of elegy.

It is in drawing on Shelley, rather than Milton, that Woolf connects her search for alternative modes of mourning with an atheist strain of the English elegy. Shelley, whose pamphlet “The Necessity of Atheism” got him sent down from Oxford (xi), resisted the influence of religious belief on the English elegy. But he, too, ends his elegy for Keats by trusting in transcendence, concluding that Keats’s soul “Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are” (“Adonais” 55.495). It is this search for transcendence unconnected to Christianity that Woolf echoes in her portrait of Clarissa Dalloway.

In facing her lack of belief and her need for an alternative reason for continuing to bear the “slow stain” of her world, Clarissa forms a “transcendental theory” that, as Peter Walsh describes in the novel:

allowed her to believe, or say that she believed (for all her scepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death … perhaps—perhaps. (MD 149)

Although this theory is presented as the guiding principle of Clarissa’s life and it strongly echoes Shelley’s vision of Keats as being “made one with Nature” (42.370), Peter does note that “in those days—they had heaps of theories, always theories, as young people have” (MD 148-49), indicating that Woolf remains prepared to cast a critical eye on Clarissa’s choices. As Clarissa searches for a modus operandi, she makes little of

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4 Froula draws on Sacks’s account of elegy’s consolatory function for her reading (88).

5 In his provocatively titled monograph, Virginia Woolf’s Querrel with Grieving, Mark Spilka responds to Woolf’s generic proposal, offering instead the term “abortive elegies for our time,” since [Woolf] refuses in these books to deal with death and grieving in any direct or open way, and her elegiac impulse—by which writer and reader alike may normally work out grief through formal measures—is delayed, disguised, or thwarted—at best only partially appeased. (15-16)

Spilka turns away from a fuller consideration of Woolf’s elegies on grounds that doing so “would be to dwell on the evasions of a writer who is not wholly engaged with her immost problems” (10). Those “evasions,” however, are exactly what Rebecca Walkowitz has recently argued form the core of Woolf’s most acute social engagement (Cosmopolitan Style; “Virginia Woolf’s Evasions”), and thus it seems that in these elegiac evasions, these “abortive elegies,” lie some of Woolf’s most fertile literary and critical work.

6 Jane Goldman suggests that this shift is due to Woolf’s concerns about the stripping of emotion from modern poetry. Goldman points to a conversation among Woolf, W. B. Yeats, and Walter de la Mare that Woolf recorded in her diary. Woolf reports Yeats as speaking for both poets in claiming, “Most emotion is outside our scope,” to which Woolf retorted, “All left to the novelists” (D3 330; Goldman 54).

7 Goldman observes that the main argument of A Room of One’s Own unfolds through the narrator’s inability to get inside an Oxbridge college library to see the manuscript of Milton’s “Lycidas” (51). The work is, then, a merging of Woolf’s poetic loves and political criticism.
the living apparitions (the part of us which appears) in order to invest herself in the dispersal of the unseen other, a choice that may contribute to what Woolf called the “tinselly” quality in Clarissa (D3 32).

Clarissa uses Septimus’s death to fashion for herself a renewed connection to life, much as poets have traditionally launched themselves into literary fame by writing an elegy for earlier poets. When Clarissa hears of Septimus’s death she reads in his act the choice of “poets and thinkers. Suppose he had had that passion [. . .]?” (MD 180). Consideration of Septimus’s death provides Clarissa with the fortitude needed to find her way amidst the “chatter” she has invited to her home (MD 180). Sympathy Clarissa may have, but it is not for the Septimus who resisted becoming “the eternal sufferer” (MD 25), and the one who, even in his final moments, desired to continue living. Instead, her sympathy is for a martyr who dies so that others might be driven closer to the meaning of life. Through Clarissa, Woolf criticizes the opportunism of the elegist and the ways in which connecting oneself to the rest of the world so readily leads to the erasure of others’ subjectivity.

Just as Shelley introduces a number of mourners in “Adonais” whose mourning he finds insincere—particularly amusing is the woman who weeps over the body and then thinks that the dead man is also weeping, mistaking her tears for his—so too Woolf offers through Clarissa the picture of a mourner caught between modes and motivations. Clarissa mourns for death generally speaking, slipping easily between lost loved ones and her own waning future. But it is the death of a particular individual that Woolf, like so many other modern elegists, works to see recognized. She uses Shelley to ground her inquiry into secular elegy but she also, in the process, implicitly criticizes Shelley’s transformation of the dead for his own purposes. Shelley refashions Keats’s fate, as Clarissa does Septimus’s, to suit his own system of beliefs,8 illustrating the uneasy relationship that often exists between the elegiac subject and the elegist, as devotion to the dead and self-promotion come into conflict.

Clarissa is presented as Woolf’s elegist. Like a poet, she is moved to speak aloud (SF 154, MD 118) when she thinks of the dead. But when Septimus too speaks aloud, in Regent’s Park, he merely embarrasses his wife, Rezia. Trying to communicate with the dead, he reaches out, not to England’s great elegists, but to the Greeks. Or, one might say, the Greeks reach out to him:

A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus [. . .] [J]oined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death. (MD 24)

In a similar movement, Peter Walsh, whom Septimus mistakes for his dead friend, Evans, emerges from the bushes, seeming to confront Septimus with the ghosts of the war:

He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. They waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself—

“For God’s sake don’t come!” Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead.

But the branches parted. A man in grey was actually walking towards them. It was Evans! But no mud was on him; no wounds; he was not changed. I must tell the whole world, Septimus cried. (68)

In a war in which the only body to return to England was that of the Unknown Soldier (Trumper 1097) while the rest remained at the battle sites on the Continent, this return home of Evans’s body is notable, even if it occurs only as an act of mis-recognition. Unlike Clarissa, Septimus’s elegiac subject is dear to him but also a major impediment to his moving on with life—a far cry from an opportunity to gain a foothold in literary fame. When Evans/Peter Walsh appears to Septimus in Regent’s Park, Septimus must confront more than the loss of his friend; in Septimus’s vision, Evans is there to announce the return of the dead en masse. The elegizing of such a body is a task that cannot help but overwhelm Septimus. After he cries “I must tell the whole world.” Septimus “rais[es] his hand [. . .] like some colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone [. . .] he, the giant mourner” (MD 68-9). Septimus attempts to be the mourner large enough for that crowd of men, a burden of mourning larger than that of any prior elegist, but feels himself unequal to the task.

Through Septimus, Woolf offers a clear picture of the difficulty of elegizing in the modern world. Plagued by his own trauma, Septimus is filled with the responsibility of speaking not only for his friend but also for the legions behind him. And he is to speak to an England that does not want to hear any more of mourning, however much his grief is couched in the terms of Greek literature, which Woolf ranked so far above that of England in “On Not Knowing Greek.” Through Septimus, and not Clarissa, Woolf makes clear the charge of the elegist, one that cannot be sustained for the length of a full elegiac project. Septimus can only scribble on scraps of paper before subsuming his project to the nation’s larger post-war narrative of progress.

Rather than offer a single response to the problems of both traditional and modern elegies, Woolf focuses her attention on the contemporary search for consolation, a search that takes many forms and that, I would argue, does not always fit neatly into the Freudian categories of mourning and melancholia that have shaped scholarship on literary mourning in the past several decades. Clarissa echoes Shelley by turning outward in her grief; as another character puts it, “to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places” (MD 149). Both the novel’s form and Clarissa’s philosophy turn away from the usual search for religious transcendence in order to re-enliven the secular world with a deep sense of sympathy. Septimus explores classical means of mourning the dead that allow Woolf to sidestep overstuffed Victorian mourning practices and look boldly at tragedy, rather than hide it under post-war euphemisms and legislative bills. Woolf practices a selective elegiac inheritance, circumventing much of the English elegy and its traditional call for the dead to be lifted up by the God in whom neither she nor many of her contemporaries believed.

By illustrating divergent forms of modern mourning with the examples of Clarissa and Septimus, Woolf also captures the severe isolation of these individuals. They no longer trust the old words to capture the loss, and, as when Septimus stands face-to-face with what he thinks is a corpse, they have not yet forged a new poetic language to bridge their lack of belief. They are separated both from the dead and from each other because they lack a shared conception of death. In the process of tracing the quest for a new language of mourning, Woolf rewrites the modern elegy into prose, where the multiplicity of mourning voices speaks to the complexity and the isolation of the modernist search for consolation and belief.

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The Meanings of Ellipsis

In “*Phases of Fiction*” Virginia Woolf expresses a desire for a new way to write novels: “Better it would be, we feel, to leave a blank or even to outrage our sense of probability than to stuff the crevices with this makeshift substance” (*The Essays of Virginia Woolf* [E] 5: 48). So she begins to leave a blank . . . an ellipsis . . . to signify her meaning. Woolf is among the first modernist writers to use ellipses extensively; however, because she develops the ellipsis as a signifying space, in Woolf’s works it becomes a sign, but not of silence or mere absence. The ellipses are written with the intent of saying what she wishes not to say.

Her assertion of what is “better” than traditional narrative consists of two straightforward concepts: first, leaving a blank; second, outraging (or violating) a probable sequence of events. Narrative art, or “storytelling,” should convey truth, yet:

...the conditions of storytelling are harsh; they demand that scene shall follow scene, that party shall be supported by another party, one parsonage by another parsonage; that all shall be of the same calibre; that the same values shall prevail. If we are told here that the palace was lit by gas, we must be told there that the manor house was faithful to the oil lamp. But what will happen if, in process of solidifying the entire body of his story, the novelist finds himself out of facts or flagging in his invention? Must he then go on? Yes, for the story has to be finished: the intrigue discovered, the guilty punished, the lovers married in the end. The record, therefore, becomes at times merely a chronicle. Truth peters out into a thin-blooded catalogue. (*E5*: 47-48)

The inadequacy of language stifles the fullness of Woolf’s intentions: “Quality is added to quality, fact to fact, until we cease to discriminate and our interest is sapped under a plethora of words” (*E4*: 404). Elsewhere, she writes, “Moreover, a book is not made of sentences laid end to end, but of sentences built, if an image helps, into arcades or domes” (*A Room of One’s Own* [AROO] 76). This image of shapes arises in her earlier “*Anatomy of Fiction*” (1919) as she reflects on the art of Jane Austen: “Between the sentences, apart from the story, a little shape of some kind builds itself up” (*E3*: 44). She admires in Austen’s art “how exquisitely one incident relieves another” (*E3*: 44). Woolf elaborates with a suggestion that invoking truth into a narrative depends on the ability to avoid the reductive nature of words, as she says of Austen, “...so finely, by not saying something, she says it” (*E3*: 44; see also, Bowers, “Breaking” 3-4).

Woolf addresses the nature of ellipses in *A Room of One’s Own*, referring directly to the device as “those dots”: “Why, if it was an illusion, not praise the catastrophe, whatever it was, that destroyed illusion and put truth in its place? For truth . . . those dots mark the spot where, in
search of truth, I missed the turning up to Fernham. Yes indeed, which was truth and which was illusion, I asked myself” (15). Further on, she writes of the overwhelming obstacle that the British Museum presents in her “pursuit of truth”: she reports, “one opened a volume of the catalogue, and . . . . . the five dots here indicate five separate minutes of stupefaction, wonder and bewilderment” (26). According to Pamela Caughie, “those dots mark a turning point in modern feminist theory” (139). According to Caughie, in Woolf’s Three Guineas, an ellipsis “signals an alternative logic” that allows “entrance to unconscious structures of representation” and “becomes for her a symptom of patriarchal oppression and the site of political disruption” (139-40). Often in Three Guineas Woolf consciously invokes the ellipsis: “But . . . . . those three dots mark a precipice, a gulf so deeply cut between us that for three years and more I have been sitting on my side of it wondering whether it is any use to try to speak across it” (6); “But . . . . it seems that there is some hesitation, some doubt” (51); later, “prayer peters out into three separate dots because of facts again” (109). Caughie concludes that the ellipses “signal a falling back or turning away from the socially constructed opposition of truth and illusion within Western thinking” (124) and that “these nonverbal modes of expression counter patriarchy’s excess verbiage” (156).

Rachel Bowlby observes a similar strategy in a more fully realized form in Between the Acts, Woolf’s last novel:

The alternation in the dotted line of spots and white spaces is a graphic reproduction of the minimal sequence of time. As with the gramophone’s “tick, tick, tick” in Between the Acts, it leaves suspended the question of whether this alternation is repetition or progression, waves or procession—or whether such oppositions are themselves inadequate. (140)

She also draws attention to the function of the three dots in a passage in To the Lighthouse where the ellipsis usurps the masculine notions of orderliness and linearity:

It challenges the firmness of the solid black line, or points out the arbitrariness of a masculine line of progress, as in Mr Ramsay’s halled steps along the alphabet of intellectual attainment. At the same time, the absence of any line, of any assimilation to the prescribed directions of social and linguistic identity, would imply a chaos of pure dottiness. (140)

Dorothy Richardson uses the ellipsis to indicate “changes in the direction of thought, or where the interior monologue is interrupted,” according to M. B. Parkes, who says that “the novelist is trying to break away from conventions of punctuation to reinforce her message, but what she puts in its place is perhaps insufficiently clear to help the reader. The punctuation may contribute to a confused message, partly intended, a rather self-conscious message about the consciousness of self” (95). Citing Mrs. Dalloway, Parkes observes that Woolf, unlike Richardson, “exercises greater control over her readers’ responses by the use of punctuation” and that “the paragraph provides boundaries within which the reader is encouraged to accept a variety of linguistic or stylistic features as being mimetic of that moment in time” (95). Woolf embraces the idea of a silence that contains an essence of meaning; she believes that a person can communicate both clearly and effectively without speaking.

E. L. Thorndike credits George Meredith with introducing the ellipsis “to English fiction of high quality” (227). In his extensive psychological study conducted in 1947, Thorndike concludes that “among recent writers there has been a veritable mania for . . . .”; further, he admits that “what they mean by it and what it means to their readers I have not been able to discover” (223). Walter Wright observes that Meredith “continued to resort to dots to indicate that a mind had deserted the realm of articulate thought and entered that of the loose association of images” (3). In his 1894 novel Lord Ormont and His Aminta, Meredith’s narrative persona describes Aminta as “dotting” her thoughts, indicating a less than coherent stream of consciousness (Wright 202). Meredith’s narrative persona in The Tragic Comedians comments on the importance of these dots, and, interestingly, aligns the meaning of ellipses with the “unique expression of the female mind” (Bowers, “Postmodern” 22):

Dots are the best of symbols for rendering cardiosiphistical subleties intelligible, and as they are much used in dialogue, one should have now and then permission to print them. Especially feminine dialogue referring to matters of the uncertain heart takes assistance from troops of dots; and not to understand them at least as well as words, when words have as it were conducted us to the brink of expression, and shown us the precipice, is to be dull, bucolic of the marketplace. (66)

The omniscient narrator says of the troubled heroine, Clotilde, “Perhaps, for the sake of peace . . . after warning him . . . her meditations tottered in dots. But when the heart hungered behind such meditations, that thinking without language is a dangerous habit” (130). He then contrasts the dots with the dash. His illustration elaborates the evolving distinction of dots from dashes; soon the dash will no longer also be called an ellipsis. His explanation illustrates the meaning, or meaningfulness, which the ellipsis is acquiring. The narrator not only indicates that the ellipsis represents feminine thought, but he also suggests that the dash bursts in upon the bewildered damsel needing rescue from her own meditations:

for there will suddenly come a dash usurping the series of tentative dots, which is nothing other than the dreadful thing resolved on, as of necessity, as naturally as the adventurous bow-legged infant pitches back from an excursion of two paces to mother’s lap; and not much less innocently within the mind, it would appear. The dash is a haven reached that would not be greeted if it stood out in words. Could we live without ourselves letting our animal do our thinking for us legibly? [. . . ] For want of it, Clotilde’s short explorations in Dot-and-Dashland were of a kind to terrify her, and yet they seemed not only unavoidable, but foreshadowing of the unavoidable to come. (130-31)

Ellipsis by dots or dashes had its critics as well. Earlier, in 1889, Oscar Wilde, a fan of Meredith, observed that, “As a writer he has mastered everything except language: as a novelist he can do everything, except tell a story: as an artist he is everything, except articulate” (qtd. in Wright 3). Woolf likewise continued using ellipses to convey her intended meaning; her novels and her short fiction provide a record of her more frequent decisions “to leave a blank” and “to outrage our sense of probability” (The Essays of Virginia Woolf[E] 5: 48). Though she uses the device sparingly in The Voyage Out and Night and Day, she soon incorporates the ellipsis as a distinctive technique. Jacob’s Room contains more of the creative synapses, part of her desire “to invent a completely new form,” as she says in a letter to Clive Bell, adding that it’s “high time we found some new shapes, don’t you think so?” (The Letters of Virginia Woolf[LI] 2: 167).

One intriguing use of ellipsis occurs in her first novel The Voyage Out, when the narrator quotes Helen Ambrose’s letter wherein she discusses Rachel’s lack of knowledge on the subject of sex: “‘This girl, though twenty-four, had never heard that men desired women, and, until I explained it, did not know how children were born. Her ignorance upon other matters as important’” (here Mrs. Ambrose’s letter may not be quoted) . . . . . was complete” (86). Another time Woolf uses ellipsis in this novel, she puts it in the context of Rachel’s thoughts and their relation to her reading. Here Woolf also brings up the question of shapes; the metaphorical shape is a simple simile of words and wood, equating signs with concrete objects. Rachel was “reading with the curious literalness of one to whom written sentences are unfamiliar, and handling words as though they were made of wood, separately of great importance, and possessed of shapes like tables or chairs” (113). Rachel is overcome by the “dangerous habit” of “thinking without language”:

27
She was next overcome by the unspeakable queerness of the fact that she should be sitting in an arm-chair, in the morning, in the middle of the world. [. . .] She was overcome with awe that things should exist at all[,] . . She forgot that she had any fingers to raise[.] . . The things that existed were so immense and so desolate[,] . . . She continued to be conscious of these vast masses of substance for a long stretch of time, the clock still ticking in the midst of the universal silence. (114)

Woolf represents Rachel’s continuing conscious thoughts by the intervening signs, the ellipses, as she sinks into the inner awareness that Woolf brings into later novels such as The Waves (which has very few ellipses) and Between the Acts (another ellipsis-riddled narrative, like “The Mark on the Wall”). In the last narrative ellipsis in The Voyage Out, Miss Allen is engaged in an internal reverie, but the slow descent from exterior consciousness to the interior subconscious is abruptly broken by the ellipsis:

She turned her hands over and over in her lap and looked at them curiously; her old hands, that had done so much work for her. There did not seem to be much point in it all; one went on, of course one went on. . . . She looked up to see Mrs. Thornbury standing beside her, with lines drawn upon her forehead, and her lips parted as if she were about to ask a question. (336)

Later, since hard-of-hearing Mrs. Paley “did not catch a word” of Rachel’s death, Arthur tells her in a loud voice that “Miss Vinrace is dead,” twice to no avail. Similar to Joseph Conrad’s use of the dash in The Heart of Darkness to announce a death (“Mistah Kurtz—he dead”), Woolf has Arthur speak the unspeakable with dots: he “force[s] himself to repeat for the third time, ‘Miss Vinrace. . . . She’s dead’” (341).

In The Voyage Out, Woolf uses the dash as a standard form of punctuation to indicate a break in syntax, or a brief aside, but she also uses it occasionally in the same manner as the ellipsis. When Mrs. Thornbury closes her eyes to muse on the effects of Rachel’s early death, the dash indicates a brief diversion, but then functions as the ellipsis does elsewhere in the novel: “The dead—she called to mind those who had died early, accidentally—were beautiful, she often dreamt of the dead. And in time Terence himself would come to feel—She got up and began to wander restlessly about the room” (340). Another break consists of a double dash, illustrating an early meaning of the evolving ellipsis; in a similar instance in Night and Day, Woolf writes another extended dash. Katharine and Ralph Denham argue about the nature of love and honesty; Katharine’s long statement ends with the phrase “because the position is false—” and this evolving elliptical dash is then explained by the narrative voice: “Her reasoning suspended itself a little inconclusively” (354).

“The Mark on the Wall,” written only a few years after The Voyage Out, disrupts the sequence of words with a barrage of fifteen narrative ellipses in only five pages of text. Appropriately, the story itself is about a mark which refuses to signify any known word, an ambiguous mark which provokes passion and fancy, remembrances and conjectures, until the speaker’s companion silences the narrator by naming the mark: “Curse this war; God damn this war! . . . All the same, I don’t see why we should have a snail on the wall!” (83). Interestingly, this story, which marks a shift in Woolf’s narrative technique, is about a mark, “a small, round mark, black upon the white wall” (77), a dot which like the ellipsis defies being reduced to a single meaning by the narrator.

Woolf continues to rely on narrative ellipsis in Mrs. Dalloway, here using it to convey Elizabeth’s dismay, ironically signifying her realization that she is being reduced to words: “And already, even as she stood there, in her very well cut clothes, it was beginning. . . . People were beginning to compare her to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies, and it made her life a burden to her” (131). Clarissa, remembering her childhood friends, expounds on the meaning of leaving a blank “to explain the feeling they had of dissatisfaction; not knowing people; not being known” (149):

It ended in a transcendental theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe, or say that she believed (for all her scepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death . . . perhaps—perhaps. (149)

Nowhere in her fiction does Woolf come closer to articulating a theory of the unspeakable, unstated, ineffable part of the self. The most certain place Woolf still haunts is her texts, the ellipsis placed by Woolf’s hand “after death . . .” in hopes that “the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow.”

In “Craftsmanship,” an essay Woolf wrote for broadcast in 1937 for a series entitled “Words Fail Me,” she argues that “words are not useful” because “it is their nature not to express one simple statement but a thousand possibilities” (E6: 92). She suggests an alternative language based on the system of signs used then by writers such as the author of the Michelin Guide, the travel guide that evaluates hotels. No words are needed; they are “beside the point.” The writer “sticks to signs; one gable; two gables; three gables. That is all he says and all he needs to say” (E6: 92). In this “sign language,” she notes, three of the same sign indicates the best. Similarly, the writer of the Baedeker travel guide simplifies “sublime realms of art” using only stars: “when, in his opinion, it is a work of transcendent genius, three black stars shine on the page, and that is all” (E6: 93).

Woolf speculates that a new language will use arbitrary signs to indicate complex ideas, similar to linguist Ferdinand Saussure, who argues for signs as a purely contextual system, a “system of pure values which are determined by nothing except the momentary arrangement of its terms” (80). Saussure concludes that “a material sign is not necessary for the expression of an idea; language is satisfied with the opposition between something and nothing” (86). Likewise, Jacques Derrida’s concept of “deferred presence” epitomizes the ellipsis: “It is not absence instead of presence, but a trace which replaces a presence which has never been present” (295). Eileen Pollard observes the ellipsis being used in this way by present-day women writers, citing Anne Enright’s ability to bring “worry” nonverbally into the text of Making Babies: Stumbling Into Motherhood: “Because worry has no narrative, it does not shift, or change. It has no resolution. That is what it is for—not ending, holding on” (178). Pollard explains: “Worry here is suggestive of Derrida’s practice of troubling words or an aggressiveness that reads and re-reads the sentence until the nonverbal appears in the verbal” (25). Woolf avoids the reductive naming process similarly, by avoiding traditional words, by not naming, and by creating gaps that are stand-ins for what she chooses not to say. She explains in “Craftsmanship,” “You cannot use a brand new word in an old language because of the very obvious yet mysterious fact that a word is not a single and separate entity, but part of other words. It is not a word indeed until it is part of a sentence” (E6: 95).

Leonard Woolf often “corrected” his wife’s works; in his own words, he “punctuated them and corrected obvious verbal mistakes” (“Preface,” Death viii). He adds that he always revised Virginia Woolf’s manuscripts

1 Unlike the Harcourt edition, the Penguin edition (the copy-text of which is based on the first British edition) has no ellipses: “It ended in a transcendent theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe, or say that she believed (for all her scepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death. Perhaps—perhaps” (167).
“in this way” (viii). In his autobiography, in fact, Leonard always uses “correct” punctuation, and never, as far as I have found, finds the need for an ellipsis (except to indicate a literal elision in his quotations of his own and his wife’s diaries and letters).

But Leonard Woolf does find one remarkable use for the ellipsis. While quoting from Virginia’s diary, he “corrects” some of the punctuation. In an entry of January 7, 1923, he removes two full stops and regularizes other supposed aberrations. But his changes do not stop there. Virginia had used no ellipses, but she did use several dashes, a mark which Leonard found useful in his own work. One of Virginia’s dashes is simply removed. But two dashes function in her text to represent two things that she has chosen to leave out: “Arnold Bennett thinks me wonderful &—&–(these, no doubt, were elements in my hilarity)” (D2 223). The context of the entry is a description of a Bloomsbury social gathering, but in Leonard’s version the dashes have become ellipses: “Arnold Bennett thinks me wonderful and . . . and . . . (these, no doubt, were elements in my hilarity)” (Downhill All The Way 116). Leonard was led to use the ellipsis—was able to use the ellipsis—only to express what Virginia had chosen not to say (see also, Bowers, “Breaking” 26).

Leonard Woolf himself considered the ellipsis-ridden “The Mark on the Wall” to be the first significant manifestation of his wife’s emerging technique; Leonard saw in the short story “the first sign of the mutation in method which was leading to Jacob’s Room” and “a microcosm of all her then unwritten novels, from Jacob’s Room to Between the Acts,” linking that mutation of form directly to Virginia’s ability to evoke meaning from silence, “the same artistic genre or somehow that was to produce 12 years later Bernard’s soliloquy in The Waves and 22 years later the silent murmurings of Isa in Between the Acts” (Downhill 59-60).

The ellipsis subverts the rigidly linear and logical “conditions of storytelling” available to Virginia Woolf at the time. Because a writer does not need an ellipsis in her narrative (for if she wished to leave something out, she could literally leave it out), the use of an ellipsis means that something is simultaneously there and not there. In Woolf’s novels, the ellipsis is therefore not a masking but a making of meaning; it is, as she says of Jane Austen, “how definitely, by not saying something, she says it.”

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Works Cited


Interview with Steven D. Putzel on Virginia Woolf and the Theater

As we planned this special issue on Woolf and literary genre, we were keen to attend to the newly published Virginia Woolf and the Theater (Farleigh Dickinson UP, 2012), by Steven D. Putzel, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Penn State—Wilkes-Barre. We were delighted that the author readily agreed to conduct an interview over email. Emily wrote the questions and sent them to Steven, who emailed back his replies. The interview has been lightly edited and a bibliography added.

EK: At the opening of your book’s “Acknowledgments,” you explain that you came to the topic of Woolf and the theater by writing on the women playwrights whom Woolf influenced. What led you to the playwrights?
SP: When I was an undergraduate I was fascinated by the works of Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee, and Harold Pinter, and later I wrote a number of articles on Sam Shepard. At some point it dawned on me that there was something missing from modern and contemporary theater. Why were all the playwrights male? Of course they weren’t—though the canon suggested they were. In the eighties, season subscriptions to La Mama in the Village and frequent trips to BAM gave me the chance to see plays by Caryl Churchill. But it was my bi-annual trips to London, where there is more support for alternative theater—particularly women’s collectives—that opened my eyes to the fact that women create and produce theater in more collaborative ways, ways that are not always supported by the for-profit theater structures of Broadway and the West End.

EK: If you have written, directed, acted in, or reviewed plays, can you tell us how the experience informs this project?

SP: I am no playwright, and have always been too timid for acting—apart from playing the occasional tree or lineless soldier in grammar school productions. But I’ve seen a lot of theater, analyzed many plays, and done a lot of technical stage work, like helping to design and construct extravagant wagons for medieval pageants and stage-managing University of Toronto’s 1979 York Cycle. I also directed a University of Toronto Drama Centre production of Deirdre when I was working on my dissertation on Yeats. Knowledge of the way theater works, the collaborative effort involved, the mix of stage design, music, movement, and language certainly influenced my approach to Woolf. But it’s actually my experience as theater audience member, reviewer, and critic that informs the book.

EK: The Woolf works that have been most often adapted to the stage, according to your helpful chart (Table 5.1, 151-52), are those most and least concerned with interiority: The Waves and Orlando, respectively. What do you make of that?

SP: I think Woolf would have been intrigued and probably pleased by this fact. She was always experimenting with new ways to convey interiority and she was, of course, intrigued by the relationship among prose, music, dance, theater, and visual art. Directors who take on The Waves and Orlando consistently bend genre boundaries. Of course Woolf was as interested in film as she was in theater, dance, opera, radio, and live music, so when adapters, directors, and stage and sound designers cross the “narrow bridge of art” to convey interiority they can draw on Woolf’s own essays for their theoretical foundation. I suppose it’s ironic that theater is the LEAST interior art form, since it is based on mimesis.

EK: Your chart lists performances of adaptations of Woolf’s novels over the years. Woolf sanctioned no theatrical adaptations, and there were very few productions before the seventies. Since then, however, the number of productions seems to have increased exponentially. Why do you think this is?

SP: I think I have received more comments about this chart than about anything else. Readers find it useful and are fascinated that there have been so many adaptations. But they often recall productions they have seen that are NOT on the chart. Many small, regional professional theaters, community theater groups, and university theater programs have adapted and staged Woolf’s novels. That’s why I called my chart a “partial list.” The popularity of Woolf’s novels, both at universities and with book clubs around the world, is part of the reason why there are so many productions. But I think that there is another reason why more professional theaters are adapting her novels for the stage. The theater Woolf experienced was still dominated by proscenium stages, classical or Stanislavskian acting, realistic set design, and standard lighting techniques. If the theatrical techniques and technologies that exist now had existed in Woolf’s time, she just might have written for the theater or at least she might have enthusiastically supported adaptations for the stage. Video and sound effects, as well as amazing lighting capabilities, dance and movement techniques, and smaller, more intimate theaters provide adapters and directors with more options, more ways to convey interiority and to integrate the mimetic (action and dialogue) with the diegetic (the narrative). I’m sure that in a year or two there will have been so many new theatrical adaptations of Woolf’s work that I’ll have to amend my chapter on adaptations with an article.

EK: Woolf is a very resistant audience member! Repeatedly in your book we learn that she much preferred reading plays to watching them. As a young woman, she favors Shakespeare on the page to Shakespeare on the stage (20). As a member of the Play Reading Society she often selects for reading aloud verse plays and closet dramas, forms that, as you say, “foreground language rather than theatrical effects” (46). And as a mature reviewer of plays, she always compares a play’s performance unfavorably to the play in her mind (as, for instance, in the reviews “Twelfth Night at the Old Vic,” “The Cherry Orchard,” and “Congreve,” on Love for Love). Watching a play seems almost for Woolf an act of submission. Do you think it’s possible that Woolf associated the theater of her day, even unconsciously, with aggression and authority, perhaps even fascism?

SP: Woolf was, of course, a resistant reader as well as a resistant audience member, and certainly an “authority” on the page or on stage can be aggressive, even quasi-fascist—especially male authority. This is clear in A Room of One’s Own and even more so in Three Guineas, though we can see her questioning of the male canon as early as The Voyage Out and Jacob’s Room. Reading, though, is a solitary act, while experiencing theater is communal. It is partly the communal aspect of sitting in a theater that so intrigues and intimidates Woolf. Her letters, diaries, and essays are filled with references to theatrical productions. At times she attends the theater two or three times in a week. She even attends rehearsals of some of Edie Craig’s plays. So her “resistance” is more in keeping with William Iser’s or Patrice Pavis’s theories of “reception.” No one is dragging her into the theater. Of course there are many differences between reading a book and watching and hearing a play that gave Woolf pause. The face and voice of an actor playing Viola or Madam Ranevsky clash with the face and voice that the reader has conjured. The set design, lighting effects, blocking, and even facial expressions and gestures impose the will of actors and director on a captive audience. All of this excites, engages, and sometimes enragés the solitary reader. Woolf was fully aware, however, of the ways authors manipulate readers. Narrative “authority” attempts to direct and restrict a reader’s response. Perhaps, like all novelists, Woolf was a bit of a control freak, and so giving up control to directors and actors was just against her nature.

EK: We don’t usually think of Woolf as a great writer of dialogue. But you call attention to her repeated transcription or adaptation of real-life dialogue in her diary (120-23), her staging of the 1920 review “A Talk About Memoirs” as a dialogue (126), and her fine use of dialogue and of narration approaching stage directions in a scene of The Years that recalls The Cherry Orchard (133). A lot of scholarly attention has been paid to how Woolf conveys inarticulate thought, but perhaps we might pay more attention to how she conveys what her characters really say. Do you have ideas for future inquiries into her dialogue?

SP: Sure. Though Woolf will continue to attract narratologists, many scholars, such as Jane Marcus, Grace Radin, and Jane Wheare, have already examined her dialogue. I’ve always felt that we should take our lead from Woolf herself. That’s why I am so fascinated with those snippets of dialogue recorded in the diaries and letters. With Woolf’s experience in mind, I tell my students who are trying to learn how to write dialogue to pay attention to the bits and pieces of conversations they overhear in a restaurant or walking down a street. As early as “Kew Gardens” Woolf mixes such “overheard” dialogue with narrative. Later she will attempt to replace at least some of the narration with dialogue. Future inquiries would do well to turn to theatrical dialogue theory.
particularly feminist approaches such as Erica Fischer-Lichte’s many books and articles and Jane de Gay and Lizbeth Goodman’s Languages of Theatre Shaped by Women. Hermione Lee called Woolf “a pioneer of reader-response theory” (89). Woolf’s own experiments with dialogue and her many discussions of drama and theater show her to be a pioneer of dramatic reception theory as well. The theories she helped spawn might be a productive starting point for examinations of her use of dialogue.

EK: Similarly, we don’t often think of Woolf as funny—well, Woolfians might, though the public certainly doesn’t. But she is a riot, and often thanks to inspiration from the theater. You point out that that she borrows the techniques of “comic banter, slapstick action, silly mock-romantic songs, and choruses” (18-19) from the music-hall performances she saw in her youth. Why is Woolf, the resistant audience member, attracted to theatrical humor? Is eliciting laughter a way of closing the gap between performer and audience, of approaching Woolf’s romanticized vision of the Elizabethan theater?

SP: Woolf’s early draft essay “The Dramatic in Life and Art” explores the relationship between life and art. We need to remember that Woolf was also an accomplished conversationalist. Imagine what it would be like to be a fly on the wall in a room with Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Maynard Keynes, and Virginia Stephen. At times, life for them was a Cambridge skit. Again, we can get some idea of the fast-action wit from the diaries, letters, and testimonials of others present. So, as I suggest in the book, much of the dialogue and especially humor stems from the consciously dramatic and comic interaction of these strong personalities and self-styled wits. But, as your question suggests, Woolf demonstrates in her many essays on Elizabethan literature and especially in her late, unfinished essay “Anon” that she imagined a golden age when no authority came between audience and performance.

EK: You write, “Plays in performance were a kind of throwback for [Woolf], their power lay in their pre-literare root. She felt that with the passing of Anon, the anonymous playwright who gave voice to the audience, theater began to lose its immediacy” (110). Woolf thought that the reader killed the audience. This survival-of-the-fittest understanding of literary form seems suspicious to us today, with our more informed view of literary history. Do you think Woolf’s view retains any objective merit?

SP: Yes, according to Woolf, the author created the reader and in the process killed or at least subdued the audience. Of course the rising prices of theater admission after the Restoration and the falling cost of books created a class of theatergoer different from that of Shakespeare’s day. Woolf’s knowledge of theater history was no better or worse than that of her contemporaries. Recent studies by the likes of James Shapiro, Stephen Greenblatt, and Stephen Orgel provide a much more balanced view of early modern authorship and its effect on the audience. That said, Woolf’s imaginative reconstruction of an atavistic, unbridled, spontaneous audience hearkens back to a time when theater was just familiarly and safely entertaining, unchallenging, and unreflective, there is still plenty of experimental and environmental theater demanding audience complicity and intellectual engagement.

EK: One of the most fascinating passages in your book analyzes Woolf’s 1935 notes for a play to be titled “The Burning of the Vote: A Comedy” (71-73). You point out that the notes allude to rousing patriarchal lines of Rudyard Kipling, statements by C. E. M. Joad and H. G. Wells doubting women’s political power, and the 1913 protests by the Women’s Social and Political Union. It sounds like Woolf was planning a feminist, anti-fascist burlesque. She ends up rendering similar ideas in the far more serious Three Guineas. Why do you think Woolf abandoned the lighter approach?

SP: Wouldn’t it be great if Woolf had penned such a feminist, anti-fascist burlesque! Unfortunately, I don’t think Woolf ever seriously considered writing the play. There is simply no evidence in the diaries, letters, or other manuscripts. The fragment was more likely a form of reading notes in response to Wells’s suffragette rally scene in The World Set Free. We should probably consider “The Burning of the Vote: A Comedy” alongside all of the newspaper clipping, images, and “thinking on paper” notes that Woolf amassed in preparation for Three Guineas. If Woolf were to run with the idea for the play, she might have included a description of the play or woven the play fragment into the fabric of a novel.

EK: You quote Woolf repeatedly comparing the drama to poetry and finding drama wanting. In her reading notes on Hedda Gabri, she identifies “poetry in the midst of prose” (98) and when Leonard tells her that George Bernard Shaw changed middle-class morality, she replies, “I say the human heart is touched only by the poets” (99, The Letters of Virginia Woolf [L] 2 529). Can you say more about how Woolf viewed the relation between drama and poetry?

SP: I think to approach this question we have to remember the distinction between drama and theater—that is, the distinction between the language of drama, poetry, and prose and the language of the stage. Certainly in Woolf’s own novels there is both drama and poetry “in the midst of prose.” The lyrical lead-ins to the sections of The Waves...
or the “Time Passing” section of To the Lighthouse could be typeset as poetry just as some of the dialogue in The Years and other novels could be typeset as play scripts, as I did with the dialogue between Sara and Maggie. But your question also brings to mind Woolf’s problematic relationship with “poetic drama.” She felt that the distractions of following plot and action, the very mimetic qualities so essential to theater, undercut the language, and that the language of poetry distracted from the mimetic nature of theater. Woolf later was highly critical of T. S. Eliot’s verse plays, commenting that the words “thin out” when emanating from “live bodies.” With friends like Woolf critiquing your play, who needs the hostile theater critics? Curiously, published reviews of Murder in the Cathedral were far more laudatory than Woolf’s comments about her friend’s play.

EK: Even though Woolf seems to esteem poetry over drama, she writes of poetry too as an outdated form, one that began dying with Anon. How much of Woolf’s resistance to theater is a bid for the form on which she concentrates, the novel?

SP: The easy answer is that she CHOSE to write novels, short stories, and essays rather than poems or plays. Even as a child writing for the Stephen family broadsheet The Hyde Park Gate News, she wrote stories and essays. It’s natural to privilege what WE do best over what others do. Poetry and drama, as well as painting, sculpture, dance, film, and music fascinated Woolf—but these were the arts that others pursued. It may be most productive to see Woolf’s interaction with both poetry and drama in the context of her interaction with these other arts, as in Diane Gillespie’s The Multiple Muse of Virginia Woolf, Sally Greene’s special issue of Women’s Studies, or Maggie Humm’s Virginia Woolf and the Arts. Woolf saw her prose as a convergence of the arts, and for her the whole (the novel) was more than the sum of its parts.

EK: Much of your research occurs in archives, such as the British Library, the Monks House Papers at the University of Sussex, and King’s College Library at Cambridge. Can you describe how archives inform or reflect your scholarly questions? (Are archives chicken, egg, or both?) Do you have an archive M.O.?

SP: Archives contain chicken and egg as well as recipes for omelets, roasts, stews, and soufflés. They are inspiration and reward, they are beginnings, middles, but, alas, they are never the ends. If only they were. Obviously we cannot start with archives. We first have to have that all-important working thesis as well as some idea of what is in the archive and what might be relevant to our thesis. But of course we can never be sure what we will find. For me, the investigation is the fun part. In fact, I spent far too many years following leads and searching through archives. At times I would forget that the investigation was the process not the end. Besides, travelling to archives means travelling to interesting places and meeting interesting people, in addition to making interesting discoveries. The digital age is both blessing and curse for the twenty-first-century scholar. Blessing in that archival material is often available over the Internet or on disks. Curse in that archival material is often available over the Internet or on disks. Such access often eliminates the need to travel and so the opportunity for grants to travel. What is really disheartening is when we travel to an archive only to be handed a disk and escorted to a computer terminal. The reality is that some archival work CAN and SHOULD we done digitally. Yet we so want and need to touch those manuscripts that Woolf once held in her hands, to see the underscoring, strike-throughs, watermarks, and ink spots. Luckily, not everything we need to see has been digitized, and often what has been photographed is out of order or incomplete. Many times an examination of paper or watermarks have shown me that pages have been copied and preserved incorrectly.

EK: Tell us about a moment of discovery in the course of your research.

SP: With scores of Woolf scholars combing through archives for seventy years now you’d think it would be unlikely that there is much left to discover. Yet as Stuart N. Clarke’s fifth and sixth edited volumes of Woolf’s Essays and the many notes in the Virginia Woolf Bulletin, Woolf Studies Annual, and Virginia Woolf Miscellany demonstrate, letters still turn up and scholars still discover anonymous or ghost-written essays that prove to be Woolf’s. My “discoveries” have been more modest. Among Lydia Keynes’s papers at King’s College, Cambridge, I came across a partial typescript of a skit featuring Vanessa Bell as a character. In Leonard’s notebooks at Sussex University I discovered evidence that Virginia had accompanied Leonard to many plays not mentioned in her diaries and letters. More recently, I found a letter from the actor/director Lewis Casson demonstrating that he and his wife Sybil Thorndike were aware of Leonard’s 1938 Christological play The Hotel and expressed an interest in a production. But there are also pitfalls to archival research. It is addictive, and at times I have spent hours perusing manuscripts only peripherally pertinent to a research project, taking time that would be better spent writing. For example, I was intrigued by an anonymous letter to Virginia Stephen purportedly by a young man romantically interested in Virginia who took her to a production of John Galsworthy’s Strife. Hermione Lee and others have also commented on this letter. I spent far too much time trying to track down who actually wrote the letter, and in the end could only speculate that it may have been Lytton Strachey or another of the Cambridge Apostles perpetuating the playful letter exchange of 1909. Researchers need to stay focused, but it is so tempting to play detective.

EK: When you shared your work on this project with your students in your Virginia Woolf seminar, how did they respond? Could you describe a particular lesson?

SP: Our students are still often amazed that their professors actually pursue research and writing. Some just think we’re crazy to spend so much time in dusty libraries getting excited about scribbled scraps penned by some long-dead writer. But students in my Woolf seminars usually share my enthusiasm. When teaching Between the Acts I bring in copies of the alternative endings in manuscript and typescript form, complete with struck-out text and notes in Woolf’s hand. This makes the writing process real for the students and it humanizes Woolf. After sharing these manuscripts and my reception-theory approach to the novel, one student said he couldn’t believe that the novel has not been made into a film. He wanted to write the screenplay. As far as I know, he still hasn’t done so. But someone will.

EK: I understand you’re now pursuing further research on The Hotel. What can you tell us about this new work?

SP: My interest in The Hotel is a great example of the serendipitous nature of research. I had been working on Woolf and the Theater for many years before I stumbled upon Leonard’s play. In fact, Virginia led me to it with her cryptic remarks about “L.’s play” in her letters and diaries. So I first read his play with Virginia’s attitudes toward theater in mind. I still think it would be great to do a new scholarly edition of Freshwater together with a reissue of The Hotel. But after years of concentrating on Virginia and seeing Leonard as little more than her “helpmeet,” I’ve always been intrigued and impressed with his Fabian Society and Labour Party work, particularly with his reports on International Relations that proved crucial to the formation of The League of Nations, with his post-colonial re-visioning, and with his analysis of the Spanish Civil War as a harbinger of pan-European catastrophe. Right now I continue to examine the publication history and the unsuccessful attempts to produce The Hotel. But I am also reading the play in the context of the endless conferences on non-intervention in the mid-thirties, and in the context of letters demonstrating that Leonard had helped Julian Bell secure the ambulance driving position in the war that cost Julian his life.

EK: Your book joins other recent scholarship that focuses on Woolf and a particular literary genre, as well as scholarship that focuses on
other authors' work in genres for which they are not well-known (e.g. David Kurnick’s *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel*). Just as scholars are now questioning periodization, they seem also to be questioning the genres with which we associate certain writers. What do you think the result of these questionings might be?

**SP:** These questionings may help scholars and critics catch up to where Woolf was seventy-five years ago. For years, we literary scholars have had specialties within specialties and all the solipsistic jargon that goes with it. I’ve heard a really bright academic refuse to comment on a poet because, as he put it, “I do narrative.” As your question indicates, however, inter- and multi-disciplinary studies are no longer rare, we are beginning to redefine “fields” of study, and the barriers between genres continue to blur.

**EK:** Would you have any advice for young literary scholars, and scholars of Woolf in particular?

**SP:** We are experiencing yet another crisis in higher education. Tuition is rising, federal and state funds for education are dwindling, jobs in all sectors of the economy, including university teaching, are harder to find and to land. Public institutions seem to be privileging science and engineering at the expense of liberal arts in general and the humanities in particular. So the young scholars of whom you speak may soon be on the endangered species list. Gatherings with graduate students over drinks more often focus on job-hunting horror stories than on the merits of the latest critical theory or their own recent research breakthroughs. Still, my first advice to aspiring scholars is, in Joseph Campbell’s words, “follow your bliss.” Do what you love. But do it with eyes wide open. There is a proverbial silver lining under the gloom. When I meet young Woolf scholars at conferences I realize that the best have self-selected. There are fewer graduate students, but they are smart, resourceful, multi-talented, and have as much to teach us old-timers as we have to teach them. Literary scholars, now, in addition to being voracious and critical readers, are often experts in new technologies, not only using databases but creating them. They have mastered statistical analysis, and many are IT trained. They need to be prepared for new multi-disciplinary academic positions, and they need skills that can lead to careers beyond the ivory towers. My advice to young Woolf scholars comes from the actions I’ve already seen from so many of them. Go to conferences. See the way folks both inside the academy and outside the academy are approaching Woolf and her circle. If you are interested in the novels, read all of the diaries, letters, and essays. If the essays are your thing, read the novels. There is, indeed, a “Bloomsbury Industry,” and it’s now almost impossible to keep up with it all. The Woolf community, however, has always been generous, sharing their own discoveries, and steering other scholars toward essential sources and correlates.

**Bibliography**


An old poet reads the instructions & not a minute too soon

“And while you write the first stanzas of the
dance are being fastened down . . .”

—Virginia Woolf, A Letter to a Young Poet

I concentrate as far as page 14.
“She actually did tie this knot,” the irrupting knot
Is recess and excuse for an ogling
Self-talk, gathering the committee of my mind for some
Brainless conversation.
Just moments before I stood at the window
Breathing in taxi fumes &
The sweetness of daffodils
& came to terms (almost) with all my 70 years
And how infrequently the whole of the great world
Had come together, was only one thing:
That pinpoint intersection of knowledge
And understanding
Where 10,000 angels could dance to
Septimus’ Madness, a giddy and determined ballet.
But then, how to blend earth & flower
Caught up as I am in the Zumba frenzy, trying out new moves
In such a small space?
How to feel the quivering rhythm of all 10,000
And not slip over the edge? She cautions
Against despair, she says to listen to Gladys,
Third angel from my left, chewing her gum
In a fascinating disregard for propriety
And to stop worrying about missing a beat.
Pay attention, she tells me, everything
Even the knot
Is poetry.

We invited Sandra Inskeep-Fox to append to this poem a few sentences on how her poetry responds to Woolf’s prose and more broadly on why Woolf’s prose often prompts poetry. Here is what she wrote in reply.

A Few Lines About Why

You ask me to write a few lines to explain why Virginia Woolf so often is a poet’s muse, and this has lead me to a month of theorizing about obsession and its counterpart, compulsion, but I am nowhere nearer to a clear answer. My first poem about Virginia was really more about Leonard. It was in 1987 and I was deep into her diaries and letters. I was trying to write in the midst of life, a life similar to what she describes without committing oneself or one’s audience” (18). Though familiar

Randi Saloman’s Virginia Woolf’s Essayism is a lucid, concise contribution to the ongoing important work on Woolf’s essays as literature. Saloman takes the term “essayism” from Robert Musil—“a way of simultaneously exploring different angles and paths of inquiry without committing oneself or one’s audience” (18). Though familiar with scholarship on Woolf, the essay, and theories of reading, Saloman mostly avoids unnecessary jargon. Close readings of texts such as “Street Haunting” and “The Pastons and Chaucer” help us read them with fresh eyes. Like Judith Allen in her recent book, Virginia Woolf and The Politics of Language, Saloman looks through the lens of the essay to reveal Woolf’s subversion of genre and boundaries; both scholars investigate the rhetorical uses of indeterminacy. Saloman intelligently explores the tricky topic of voice—essential to any discussion of essays. She shows how thin the boundary is between fiction and non-fiction and how eagerly Woolf welcomed the possibilities that the thin line created. Finally, Saloman investigates Woolf’s use of the essay to bridge the gap between reader and writer.

In her first chapter Saloman reads “Street Haunting” as an example of Woolf’s freedom to combine fiction and non-fiction in what Saloman calls “anti-novelistic fictionality” (23). Saloman’s close reading of “Street Haunting” reveals Woolf’s narrator moving from a room with familiar objects to the streets of London where “the essayist may imagine herself in any environment, surrounded by whatever objects or furnishings she chooses, all subject to change at her will” (29). In the section about a dwarf buying a pair of shoes, the dwarf’s sudden shifts in mood parallel “the subjective lens of a momentary impression” (31) through which the essayist views the world. Saloman argues that this

FROM THE BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

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Here Ends the Special Issue on Woolf and Literary Genre

Sandra Inskeep-Fox
Poet and Independent Scholar

Here Ends the Special Issue on Woolf and Literary Genre
shifting in the narrative voice and in the content of the essay represents a freedom that Woolf does not allow herself in the “controlled and deliberately paced narrative” (35) of novels such as Mrs. Dalloway. Saloman may push her point about passive reading of fiction too far, but she makes astute observations about the active reading of essays.

In her second chapter Saloman looks at the essays collected in the two Common Readers, which also are part of Woolf’s “ongoing inquiry into the nature of writing, fiction, and the author-reader experience” (47). As a common reader addressing common readers, Woolf “incorporates and takes advantage of the many possibilities that the dialogic aspects of the form invite” (60). Saloman considers several essays such as “The Pastons and Chaucer” and “Two Parsons” to show Woolf engaging her readers while she considers writers engaging their readers.

In the third chapter, Saloman argues that in A Room of One’s Own Woolf adopted the essay’s “power to hold multiple potential realities simultaneously and to allow for reflection and analysis” to portray and encourage the changes women in her audience were themselves experiencing (80). The story of Judith Shakespeare (“a character who is both wholly fictional and entirely plausible” [91]) results from the essayist’s freedom to seek truth “from pieces of historical fact” while acknowledging “the gaps and fissures present as the result of both unrecorded and unknowable aspects of individual lives” (92). For a different audience in Three Guineas Woolf chooses the epistolary form with its many essayistic characteristics because she does not want to present “a static or predetermined position” (94). Woolf’s recent loss of her nephew Julian Bell in the Spanish Civil War leads Woolf to reconsider his arguments in favor of war, “a lens to which she did not have access [and which] troubles her” (102). She cannot, therefore, offer “a moral imperative” or a “final statement” (104). Her familiarity with the essay means that she can create texts that acknowledge multiple interpretations.

Now Saloman turns to the novels. The two early novels The Voyage Out (1915) and Night and Day (1919) profit from a narrative voice “open to contemplation, revision and alternative possibilities” (120) and characters who know they are in an indeterminant world. Rachel Vinrace and Terence Hewet are “essayistic figures, unwilling to play the game according to the rules that the others have devised” (114). Katharine Hilbery is a “character who is no clearer to herself than she is to us” (118). In Jacob’s Room (1922), Woolf’s narrator “contains the essayistic elements” and “assumes clear narrative control of Jacob’s story” (124). In To the Lighthouse (1927), Woolf uses the characteristics of the essay—“fragmentation, stream of consciousness and interior portraits of characters’ thoughts” (125). “But the voice is novelistic; the reader loses the sense of identification and genuine affinity that the earlier books offer” (133).

In her final chapter, Saloman reads The Pargiters, Woolf’s unpublished attempt “to confront openly the division between the novel and the essay” (138). Woolf cannot bring together the essayistic voice and the more controlling novelistic voice because she “refuses, ultimately, to surrender the authority of the novelistic in this work” (155). But rather than seeing a failure, Saloman celebrates Woolf’s realization as a sign of her “investment in the essayistic” (143). And Woolf does finally produce “a unique kind of fictional truth” in The Years (165) that evolves from The Pargiters. Saloman’s reading of the Antigone myth in the novel is particularly succinct and interesting.

We owe Randi Saloman thanks for shooting all of us off on the adventure of Virginia Woolf’s Essayism.

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Work Cited

review

Leonard and Virginia Woolf: The Hogarth Press and the Networks of Modernism

This collection of nine lively, well-written essays presents a view of the Hogarth Press as a network where authors, publishers, and editors worked together, and Virginia and Leonard Woolf participated as publishers, mediators, and innovators. Drawing on work in the “life-cycle” of the text, or the “literary field” (11), the volume corrects the view of the press as important mainly for publishing the work of Virginia Woolf, Sackville-West, and Freud. In this sense it takes a different approach from J. H. Willis’ history of the press (1992), which focused on the role of the Woolfs. The Southworth volume presents an image of the Hogarth Press as it made the transition from a small press that printed mainly the work of friends to a commercially successful press whose books appealed to a readership with broader tastes.

In the first of three parts (“Class and Culture”), Mark Hussey in “‘W. H. Spender’ Had a Sister” examines the relationship to the press of Joan Adeney Easdale (1913-98) a very young poet whom Woolf championed and the critics praised, but whose work has been largely dismissed as “peculiar” or “dross” (30). In supporting her work, he argues, Woolf was attracted to the beauty and impersonality of Easdale’s voice, which he compares to the character of Rhoda and the relationship of the self to the object world. Not only did Woolf resist John Lehmann’s dismissive view of Easdale’s poetry, but she went to bat for the work of middlebrow writers like Rose Macaulay and E. M. Delafield, who could not find an outlet for their academic work among mainstream publishers. Melissa Sullivan in “The Middlebrows of the Hogarth Press” argues that, although Woolf was personally ambivalent towards middlebrow writers, she used her cultural capital to create support for them as well as for avant-garde writers.

Diane F. Gillespie studies the category of religious books published by the press in the 1920s and 30s in “The Woolfs in Sheep’s Clothing.” Although neither Leonard nor Virginia was religious, they published Logan Pearsall Smith’s Stories from the Old Testament, R. B. Braithwaite’s study of a questionnaire on religious belief, and Rose Macaulay’s Some Religious Elements in English Literature.

Part Two looks at “Global Bloomsbury,” particularly the extensive list of Hogarth authors who wrote against imperialism. Anna Snaith, for example, in “The Hogarth Press and Networks of Anti-Colonialism” emphasizes the Woolfs’ relationship with C. L. R. James, who wrote The Case for West Indian Self-Government, and Mulk Raj Anand, who wrote extensively about his life in Bloomsbury. His memoir, Conversations in Bloomsbury describes his meeting with Virginia and her interest in Hindu mysticism. The press, Snaith says, was “a crucible for identities fractured by colonialism” (120) and an opportunity for the development of emergent ideas and vocabularies.

In “William Plomer, Transnational Modernism, and the Hogarth Press,” John K. Young analyzes the reputation of the writer, who spent his early years at the Hogarth Press. The press published Plomer’s best-known work, Turbott Wolfe, as well as Sado and I Speak of Africa, and a commercially successful novel, The Case is Altered, which brought in the kind of money that enabled the Hogarth Press to publish experimental works. After a sketch of Plomer’s career, Young notes that Turbott Wolfe “informs the representations of coloniality in Woolf’s later
Jean Mills’ “Revaluation of the Radical Politics of the Hogarth Press” sees the publication of the earliest autobiography written in Russian, The Life of the Archpriest Avvakum, by Himself, translated by Jane Harrison and Hope Mirrlees and with a preface by D. S. Mirsky, as an opportunity to rethink the engagement of the press in revolutionary politics. To see Woolf reading the Russians through the work of Harrison and Mirsky is to “mark a shift away from the ‘Slav soul’ and away from what was essentially a French construction of mostly nineteenth-century Russian texts” (157) to a broader and more politically informed understanding of Russian literature and language.

In an essay on “The Woolfs, the Hogarth Press, and Working-Class Voices,” Helen Southworth studies the inclusion of these voices in the Hogarth list. Although Woolf was reluctant to speak for the working class, the press gave her and Leonard an opportunity to create a world “without classes and towers” (Woolf qtd. by Southworth 206) to use her words from “The Leaning Tower.” Publishing works written in the impoverished north made the press a point of entry for working-class writers onto the London scene. Southworth analyzes Hogarth books on the General Strike of 1926, the coal industry, the textile industry, as well as works by servants and the wives of miners.

Stephen Barkway examines “The Woolfs’ Professional Relationship with Vita Sackville-West,” showing how for seventeen years they carefully negotiated a commercial relationship with a friend. Vita was delighted to be published by Hogarth, and Virginia was delighted by the added income that came from publishing a best-selling novelist: “But think of your glory; and our profit!” (Letters 3 284). The Edwardians (1930), as it turns out, sold three times as many copies as had Orlando, and made more money than any other book on the list, with the result that the Woolf’s income shot up from a few hundred pounds per year to more than four thousand (£4053, to be exact). Leonard’s letters make it clear that in seeking a publisher Vita was never constrained by their personal friendship. However, after publishing sixteen of her books, when Leonard refused Grand Canyon (a book about which Vita herself had doubts), the commercial relationship fell apart.

Although Freud is mentioned briefly, I would have welcomed an essay on the contribution to the press made by the publication of the translation of his work. Nevertheless, the essays are far ranging, and demonstrate that the Woolfs’ shared decisions led the press into the international world of publishing.

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Works Cited

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to resist the seduction of the goblin-ugly market. Simpson takes the argument further, in the context of the 1930s, suggesting that Woolf felt repulsion toward “the gobbling greed she saw as insidiously pervading Britain” (191) and acknowledged her own complicity. I find this line of argument speculatively provocative; readers interested in a more fully documented analysis might wish to look at Simpson’s 2008 study: Gifts, Markets and Economies of Desire in Virginia Woolf.

Jocelyn Rodal (“Virginia Woolf on Mathematics: Signifying Opposition” [202-08]) and Makiko Minow-Pinkney (“Virginia Woolf and December 1910: The Question of the Fourth Dimension” [194-201]) open significant avenues by asserting Woolf’s intellectual affinities with mathematical questions of her time. Rodal acknowledges that “Woolf depicted mathematics as the contrary of literature, constructing an ongoing opposition between literary ambiguity and mathematical consistency” (202), and yet, paradoxically, mathematics and literature are also seen as parallel in Woolf’s fiction. As Rodal succinctly notes, Jacob (Jacob’s Room) aspires to become a mathematician and Katharine Hilbery (Night and Day) prefers mathematics to literature. Hilbery is a character inspired, Rodal argues, by the 1920s modernist mathematician David Hilbert. Exploring David Hilbert’s formal symbolism in mathematics, Rodal sees, specifically in Night and Day, parallels with Woolf’s meta-representation in literature. Although this essay focuses on Night and Day, a footnote suggests that Rodal is in the midst of exploring mathematics as a formal symbol in To the Lighthouse, The Waves, and Mrs. Dalloway. Minow-Pinkney notes there are a “surprising number of mathematicians” (197) in Woolf’s novels: Mr. Bentley in Mrs. Dalloway, Andrew in To the Lighthouse, and Katharine Hilbery in Night and Day. Minow-Pinkney does not mention David Hilbert’s work, but she does mention the 1910 publication of Henry Parker Manning’s The Fourth Dimension Simply Explained. She then links mathematics and art; specifically, Minow-Pinkney sees the influence of the mathematical theory of the fourth dimension on cubist painting and, through Fry’s 1910 Post-Impressionist Exhibition, the impact on Woolf’s modernist construction of character. While acknowledging that there is “no explicit mention of the term ‘fourth dimension’ by Virginia Woolf” (197), Minow-Pinkney does quote Bertrand Russell’s 1904 review of Charles Howard Hinton’s book, The Fourth Dimension, speculating that the fourth dimension would stimulate the imagination. Did Woolf read Russell’s 1904 review or discuss it with him? Minow-Pinkney states, “it would be interesting to know” (199). Direct influence is not definitively demonstrated, and yet the appeal of Rodal’s and Minow-Pinkney’s work is that they invite us to analyze more closely the intellectual context for Woolf’s experimental fiction.

The delightfully stimulating essays by Judith Allen (1-10), Michael H. Whitworth (11-22), Lois J. Gilmore (66-73), Maggie Humm (74-81), Amber K. Regis (82-87), Jeanne Dubino (150-57), and Derek Ryan (159-65) lead to new reflections on Virginia Woolf’s many contradictions. Just as conference attendees must choose among many attractive paper titles, within the limits of time constraints, so any reviewer must choose a few among the abundance of excellent essays in which she revealed, as a reader. Woolf’s uncommon readers will certainly choose their own favorites.

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Work Cited

**REVIEW**

**AMERICANIZING BRITAIN: THE RISE OF MODERNISM IN THE AGE OF THE ENTERTAINMENT EMPIRE**

Both books under review concern Virginia Woolf’s responses to the arts, particularly to popular entertainment, but Genevieve Abravanel and Steven D. Putzel have very different approaches to the topic. Abravanel’s focus on British responses to the reverse colonizing influence of America’s “Entertainment Empire” makes a broad and compelling case for a transatlantic anxiety of influence between America and Britain. Putzel’s beautifully researched book on the influence of theater on Woolf has a more specific focus, but his archival discoveries documenting which plays, operas, and pantomimes Woolf saw and when she saw them offers an invaluable contribution to future scholarship. Although these books use different lenses, they are equally thought provoking.

Moving from a wide-angle lens to a close-up view (and back out again), I begin with Genevieve Abravanel’s Americanizing Britain: The Rise of Modernism in the Age of the Entertainment Empire. This book is a part of the Oxford University Press “Modernist Literature & Culture Series,” edited by Kevin J.H. Dettmar and Mark Wollaeger. As such, it offers a cultural studies perspective on the influence of transatlantic modernism on British national identity, and thus surveys a broad range of authors and institutions. Woolf is one writer among many discussed in this book whose work responds to the idea of America and more specifically to American mass culture, although Woolf perhaps “gets it” better than most. In her 1938 essay, “America, which I Have Never Seen…” Woolf answers the somewhat silly question the American magazine Cosmopolitan posed to her – “What interests you most in this cosmopolitan world of today?” – by turning the mirror on the audience: “America is the most interesting thing in the world today” (46, italics in original). To know what America means, Woolf argues, we simply need to use our imagination; the idea of America is the interesting thing.

In this,Woolf encapsulates Abravanel’s argument. Early 20th century “Americanization,” defined as a sort of standardization or “leveling down” (4) in the wake of the movement of American mass entertainment into British and European markets, was an idea that threatened British national identity and culture. The popularity in Britain of American jazz and Hollywood movies, and the virial spread of American English, was a reverse imperialism striking just as the sun was setting on the idea of the British Empire. Through her notion of the Entertainment Empire, Abravanel argues that America “coloniz[es] the future” (5) through its popular culture, prompting an intriguing redefinition of Britain’s self-

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1 See Woolf 128.
conception; Abravanel sees the idea of the British Empire collapsing into a “little Englandism” (6) as a rearguard defense against American influence. “Englishness,” she argues, “becomes a kind of consolation prize for the anticipated loss of imperial supremacy” (6). If so, does the popularity of Downton Abbey in America mark a new chapter in these transatlantic culture wars?

The popularity of America jazz in Britain was one way Americanization seemed to lay siege to British identity. What would, W. H. Auden asked in a 1936 poem, “the Duke of Wellington / […] say about the music of Duke Ellington” (58)? Clive Bell, for one, found the nation’s obsession with jazz outrageous and distasteful in the way it mixed up highbrow and lowbrow, white and black, the Sistine Chapel and the Savoy nightclub. Virginia Woolf’s own response to jazz was more nuanced in Between the Acts. While much of the novel is about Englishness – the village pageant, the country house – Woolf uses jazz to mark the passage into modernity. In Abravanel’s reading, the audience’s response clearly puts them in the Clive Bell camp – American jazz is a disruptive affront to the pageant of English history – and yet Woolf’s style mirrors the rhythmic fragments of the music itself. Woolf harnesses the power of jazz towards her own modernist ends.

Film lies at the heart of the Americanization threat, here understood as a kind of “Hollywoodization” (my term). In the 1920s, 85% of the films shown in Britain were products of Hollywood, a “semiotic invasion” (88) that prompted John Maynard Keynes (only slightly ironically) to call for “death to Hollywood!” (85). In this chapter, Abravanel focuses mostly on the film journal Close Up, written and edited by the “avant-gard film collective known as POOL” (89), an international grouping of Bryher, H.D., and Kenneth MacPherson. Close Up was pro-silent film, and very much anti-“talkie,” and Abravanel shows how this response emerged from an anxiety about American English displacing the Queen’s English. In fact, Alfred Hitchcock’s Blackmail, Britain’s first talking picture, was advertised with this tag-line: “Hear English as it should be spoken” (88). Because this linguistic anxiety responds to the first American talkie, The Jazz Singer, a film that raises crucial issues of race and culture, it seems a missed opportunity that Abravanel chooses not to analyze actual films in this chapter. While it makes sense to focus on the aesthetic criticism of Close Up as a source for British and European attitudes towards American film, a reading of The Jazz Singer and/or POOL’s own Borderline might have generated a richer discourse about Americanization and race, a somewhat submerged line of argument here.

Turning our lens from the macro to the micro, we turn now to the archival delights of Steven D. Putzel’s Virginia Woolf and the Theater. The product of ten years of scrupulous research, my favorite part of this book is its appendix, which contains a complete (or nearly so) list of every pantomime, spectacle, play, and opera Virginia Woolf saw between 1891 (Maskelyne and Cooke’s Magic Show at the Egyptian Hall) and 1940 (“village plays,” written by “the gardener’s wife” [211]). Such an appendix is a bounty for future researchers, and the fruit of careful scholarship – so it pains me to point out careless proofreading in its title, “Chart of Plays Wolf Attended” (199). I can only imagine how the author felt at discovering this infelicity, a pain compounded for this reader when Maynard Keynes kicked “up his heals” (xxvi). I mention these proofreading errors at the outset, since they were the first thing I noticed upon browsing through the book, but its otherwise well-documented scholarship and compelling interdisciplinary focus soon won me over.

The first part of Putzel’s book focuses on the role of plays and theater going in Woolf’s biography. The first chapter, on Virginia Stephen’s early responses to music hall spectacles (as recorded in the Hyde Park Gate News) offers a fascinating prologue to Woolf’s lifelong critical interest in the theater. As Putzel demonstrates, Woolf was always a skeptical audience member, highly attuned to the context of the play (stage, audience, actors) and never quite taken in (even as a child) by its illusion. Putzel shows how Woolf almost always preferred to read drama rather than to see theater; she was a “resistant reader” (21), constantly contrasting the written dramatic text to its theatrical production (21). In some cases, this was because of bowdlerization; the way Shakespeare was edited and shaped for the stage by Victorian and Edwardian conventions. But it also concerned Woolf’s resistance to the way an actual production onstage seemed to forestall the “imaginary stage” in the mind (21). But as Putzel points out, even Woolf can be enchanted by an illusion that works on multiple levels, as when she reviews a production of Chekhov’s The Cherry Orchard and finds herself immersed by the “atmosphere” (105) of Russia.

Putzel has a knack for using archival fragments to rich and evocative effect. Saxon Sydney Turner’s entries in the “Playreading Society Minute Book” offer a subtle view of “Old Bloomsbury” and a window into the role of private performance for the Bloomsbury group more generally. A note to Virginia Stephen, “from an unidentified admirer” (105), suggests the performative aspects of a “letter game” (105) between herself and Lytton Strachey. Brief discussions of the Dreadnought Hoax and Strachey’s aborted theatrical career round out a chapter that goes on to focus on Woolf’s Freshwater. The earliest 1923 version of Freshwater seems to have been inspired initially by Woolf’s acquaintance with theatrical producer Edith Craig, daughter of Ellen Terry. Although the plays created by Craig’s feminist theatrical group, the Pioneer Players, were not influential on Woolf, her observance of their rehearsals seems to have been influential stylistically. Putzel uses a diary entry Woolf writes in dramatic form to show how Woolf’s lifelong interest in the theatrical context – players, stage set, director and the like – begins to be reflected by her literary style, as well as in her developing preoccupation with the relationship of player and audience, writer and reader, that emerges most forcefully in Between the Acts.

Putzel’s book balances its tight archival focus by opening out into contemporary theater in its final compelling chapter. Looking at both theatrical adaptations of Woolf’s work, and women playwrights influenced by Woolf, Putzel demonstrates the continued challenge of adapting Woolf to a theatrical context. Fittingly perhaps, given Woolf’s own preference for reading plays over seeing theater, contemporary adaptations of Woolf are a mixed bag, most successful (as Putzel argues and I’d agree) when the flux of consciousness is captured by layers of new media surrounding actors and words with light, sound, and images, as in the Berkeley Repertory’s recent production of To the Lighthouse.

Through their respective lenses, both Genevieve Abravanel and Steven D. Putzel beautifully contextualize Woolf within the complex cultural and aesthetic streams of her time and ours, and both books are highly recommended.

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<susan.devoe@gmail.com>

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At the 2013 MLA in Boston, once again charged and challenged by keen insights on and through Woolf, I felt that buzz of happy energy from the productive meeting of the past, present & future in Woolf studies. MLA is always such a melodramatic mish-mash: fly by greetings (scholarly reunions as speed dating)—kids in a candy store at the book exhibit. This year the flu and family emergencies provided their own scripts of approach avoidance; some members were sidelined and could not make it to Boston; others flew to Boston and flu home. But it was worth it. The sessions at Boston were thrilling (not, I think, too strong a word). The sessions—and the Ca$h Bar—were abuzz with seasoned and emerging scholars sharing ideas with members of the Conrad Society of America, Doris Lessing Society, Katherine Mansfield Society and many others asking questions, trading insights, exchanging email addresses. It struck me that the IVWS and Woolf studies remain alive and well, endlessly renewing, and that the energy of the fresh questions did not negate previous questions or answers, but added to them.

“Everyday Woolf,” organized by Tara Thomson (who had to miss the convention due to a family emergency), was dynamic and rich! Adam Barrows turned time around in new ways, with Lefèbvre’s concept of rhythmanalysis, & Sean Mannon dazzled with his reading of Woolf and “the modern blessing of electricity” by the light of (sorry) the avant-garde, the Futurists, and modern advertising; Kayla Walker Edin brought fresh questions to the diverse workplaces behind the façade of Talland House, including the boat as a mobile stage. Such innovative and stimulating papers promise well for the future of Woolf studies.

If anything approaches the magic of the camaraderie of Woolf studies, it is the delight of collaboration between the IVWS and other societies—and the Boston MLA foregrounded collaboration in two panels: allying with the Katherine Mansfield Society and the Joseph Conrad Society of America—and through our on site Ca$h Bar where we partied with members of the Doris Lessing Society, MSA, and more.

The Woolf and Mansfield panel, chaired by Elleke Boehmer, explored “New Approaches for Comparative Studies.” It was wonderful to catch up with Patricia Moran who considered ways Woolf and Mansfield responded to psychoanalysis; her title, taken from a KM letter, “The Sudden ‘Mushroom Growth of Cheap Psychoanalysis,’” captivated and she ended her paper (on the cusp of beginning another paper no doubt) with the evocative juxtaposition of two wave quotations from Woolf and Mansfield. Bret Keeling explored masculinities and alternative masculinities in Mansfield’s “At the Bay” and in Woolf’s The Voyage Out. Kathryn Simpson, waylaid by the flu, gifted us with her paper, “Gift Enough: Gifts and Desire in Woolf and Mansfield” a paper that considers the gift-economy and gift theory put forward by their contemporary, Marcel Mauss in his 1925 study, The Gift; her paper opened up suggestive new insights in Mansfield’s “A Cup of Tea” and Woolf’s “Mrs Dalloway on Bond Street,” both written in 1922. The panel inspired me to buy a backbreaking number of Mansfield books for the flight home.

“Conrad and Woolf: Crossing the Boundaries of Fiction,” arranged by the Joseph Conrad Society of American and IVWS was a daimante panel to a good crowd—alas, Kathryn Simpson was kept in the UK by the flu and was unable to preside, but Debra Romanick Baldwin provided thoughtful introduction to the topic of exploring boundaries—and a stimulating response. Aaron Percich examined cross-constructive selfhood in The Voyage Out and Conrad’s The Shadow Line, suggesting that these relatively contemporaneous works use untapped resources and unsaid things to rewrite British colonialism. Susan Cook gave a compelling paper on their uses of modernist lighthouses—combining the new physics and optics with her complication of the status of light (refracted) that does not enlighten and light as both symbol and material substance. Rachel Hollander’s complex interrogation of indifference, autocracy and war put in play Conrad’s extreme pessimism and Woolf’s guessing and obscurity in Three Guineas.

The IVWS Cash Bar was a wonderful opportunity to mingle with members of other societies and to relax together after an ambitious round of sessions. At the business meeting, we decided to give a memorial gift to the Charleston Foundation in honor of Angelica Garnett. In email business meetings, we voted to support Vara Neverow’s request for $1000 to fund the copyright permissions for Three Guineas Reading Notebook website. Because the IVWS will provide this funding, all members who wish to use the materials would have free access. This IVWS-supported access will be particularly helpful for international members. To gain access to the Three Guineas Reading Notebook website, contact Vara at <neverowvl@northernct.edu>.

Off we sped to our lives, reinvigorated by the rich panoply of ideas, the generation & renewal of friendships, stimulated to dream up new panels. At the business meeting, we opted to support Vara Neverow’s request for $1000 to fund the copyright permissions for Three Guineas Reading Notebook website. Because the IVWS will provide this funding, all members who wish to use the materials would have free access. This IVWS-supported access will be particularly helpful for international members. To gain access to the Three Guineas Reading Notebook website, contact Vara at <neverowvl@northernct.edu>.

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See you soon in British Columbia! —Leslie