

# Virginia Woolf Miscellany

NUMBER 84

FALL 2013

## To the Readers: Woolf and Animals

Twenty-first century Woolf scholarship has seen a surge of interest in Woolf and the natural world. *Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature*, by Christina Alt (2010); *In the Hollow of the Wave: Virginia Woolf and Modernist Uses of Nature*, by Bonnie Kime Scott (2012); *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World: Selected Papers from the Twentieth Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf*, edited by Kristin Czarnecki and Carrie Rohman (2011); the "Eco-Woolf" issue of the *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, edited by Diana Swanson (2012); and *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory: Sex, Animal, Life*, by Derek Ryan (2013), are among works exploring the myriad aspects of nature and the environment found throughout Woolf's oeuvre. As Swanson points out, for instance, "Ecocriticism and ecofeminism are relatively new theoretical and methodological approaches in Woolf studies but have already proved to be fertile avenues into her work" (1). In addition, the issue of *Deleuze Studies*, "Deleuze, Virginia Woolf, and Modernism" (7:4 2013), includes two essays on animality: Carrie Rohman's "A Hoard of Floating Monkeys: Creativity and Inhuman Becomings in Woolf's Nurse Lugton Story" and Derek Ryan's "'The reality of becoming': Deleuze, Woolf and the Territory of Cows." These works are just a few of many.

Indeed, animals play a vital role in Woolf's life and writing. From the lighthearted animal nicknames she shared with her family to the disturbing animal imagery in *Between the Acts*, creatures great and small roam among Woolf's letters, diaries, short stories, novels, and essays. This special *Miscellany* issue on Woolf and Animals highlights the innovative ways Woolf perceived and represented the nonhuman other. These contributions are grouped on the premise of the living beings that are discussed, and the perspectives focus on a range of beings including insects, snails, toads and snakes, fish, birds and four-legged creatures including rabbits and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's animal companion, Flush.

Jeanne Dubino's article, "Virginia Woolf's Dance-Drama: Staging the Life and Death of the Moth," combines a very close reading of Woolf's essay, "The Death of the Moth," with the recent developments in the field of nonhuman animal studies. She positions the argument in the context of our increasingly rapid planetary mass extinctions. She also pairs the demise of this single moth, which is entirely due to natural causes, with Monica Youn's poem, "Against Imagism," which illuminates the annihilation of millions of

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### Virginia Woolf Miscellany

Editorial note: While previously published work may be submitted for consideration, the original publication must be acknowledged at the time of submission.

### Guest Editors & CFPs Issue #86—Fall 2014

**Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield**  
Articles on the topic may include Woolf's and Mansfield's writings, friendship, rivalry, shared interests; different ways they interconnect; literary experiments; modernist agendas; engagements with social, political, economic concerns; attitudes to empire, nationality, cultural belonging. We also welcome critical perspectives such as constructions of self and identity, sexuality, ecology, critical animal studies, commodity culture and the marketplace, the visual arts. Send submissions of no more

than 2500 words to:

Kathryn Simpson

<kathryn.simpson88@gmail.com> and

Melinda Harvey

<melinda.harvey@monash.edu>

Deadline: **March 1, 2014**

### Issue #87—Spring 2015 "1930s Woolf"

This issue of VWM seeks contributions that explore Woolf's relationship to the canonical literature of the 1930s, such as but not limited to Auden's poetry, Isherwood's Berlin fiction, Auden's and Isherwood's plays, Spender's commentary, and Waugh's comedic novels. In addition, this issue encourages responses to the following questions: How does Woolf scholarship, if at all, engage with the critical study of 1930s literature? How does Woolf's modernism disrupt or complement the critical understanding of 1930s literature? What can Woolf's late fiction and essays reveal about the 1930s and its literature that the common scholarly narrative conceals or overlooks? Send submissions of no more than 2500 words

to: Erica Gene Delsandro

<ericadelsandro@gmail.com>

Deadline for submission:

August 1, 2014

**For information or questions about  
the Virginia Woolf Miscellany  
contact Vara Neverow  
<neverow1@southernct.edu>**

night insects killed by contemporary bug-zapper technology.

Alison Lacivita's "'diamond-cut red eyes': Insect Perspectives in *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts*" investigates the viewpoints of insects in two of Woolf's novels, examining Woolf's descriptions of what ants or bluebottle flies or butterflies experience in tandem with or through indifference toward the human presence.

Becky Tipper, in "Moments of Being and Ordinary Human-Animal Encounters," takes a sociological and ethnographic approach when she considers how Woolf's concept of moments of being "offers an eloquent and evocative way to understand" human-animal encounters. After discussing several of Woolf's own examples of moments of being, Tipper recounts in-depth interviews she held with people about their highly affecting experiences with the non-human other. She finds that "in such moments of being, humans might indeed appreciate 'what it is like' to be a creature" and that "people may experience interspecies 'fellowship' or intimacy."

Sandra Inskeep-Fox's poem, "The Snail and the transcending time," is the first of several contributions concerning Woolfian snails. Her poem adopts the snail's perspective from "The Mark on the Wall" while integrating the human observer's perceptions as well. "She is watching me," the snail states, "taking notes. / She wants to sink deeper, / [...] Only / I know that to look is not to see."

E. D. Kort's "The Snail in 'Kew Gardens': A Commentary on Ethical Awareness" offers a meticulous investigation of the ethics of the snail and its various endeavors. The snail's diligence and intentionality contrast with the humans who wander randomly through the snail's environment, preoccupied only with themselves. She argues that Woolf "has drawn a careful contrast between the snail's world on the one hand and the insincerity, awkwardness, and self-absorption of humans on the other."

Katherine Parker-Hay in "Reading a Woolfian Sexuality in the Poetry of Marianne Moore" considers representations of sexuality in *Mrs. Dalloway* and Marianne Moore's poem "The Paper Nautilus." Noting that critics have found both women avoiding sexuality in their texts, Parker-Hay sees Woolf and Moore drawing upon animal imagery to "expand beyond the trappings of the classic sexual metaphor." Both writers take up the image of exterior protective armor, such as Clarissa's party dress, Doris Kilman's defiance, and the paper nautilus, in considering women's autonomy over their sexuality, domesticity, and maneuverability in patriarchal spaces.

“‘The curious phenomenon of your occipital horn’: Spiraling around Snails and Slugs in Virginia Woolf,” by Elisa Kay Sparks, provides a thorough overview of snails and slugs throughout Woolf’s writings. At times, they signify “cozy self-sufficiency” as when Woolf wonders in her diary whether a “dark dry little house [...] a little snail shell of a place [...] could be made habitable for the summer.” Snail shells also serve as “metaphors for human endeavor” and “houses of fiction,” while exploring the world from a snail’s viewpoint yields fresh insights into both animal and human subjectivity. Sparks finds “that, as with many of [Woolf’s] natural references, there is a lifetime of observation, emotional resonance, and symbolic elaboration underwriting the many tenors of these miniature vehicles.”

In “‘Like Snake that Swallows toad’: Woolf and Male Cultural Power,” Jim Stewart begins his argument by noting that Woolf, in setting out to read Andrew Marvell’s entire *oeuvre* during 1921, the poet’s tercentenary, was also engaging in “a subterranean resistance [...] to [T. S. Eliot’s] ‘magisterial’ (D2 292) paternalistic cultural authority.” Stewart aligns a contested passage in *The Loyall Scot*, a political poem by Andrew Marvell, with the grotesque episode of *Between the Acts* in which Giles Oliver stomps on a snake choked by the toad it has ingested. As Stewart observes, Marvell associates the toad-devouring snake motif with “The Anglican bishops’ swollen ambition to impose episcopacy on presbyterian Scotland.” He also highlights Woolf’s exposé of the Anglican male culture “as the text and plates of *Three Guineas* show.”

Mark Hevert’s “As Fish to Wanton Boys: Animal Suffering in *To the Lighthouse*” aligns Woolf’s novel with Shakespeare’s depiction of divine cruelty in *King Lear*. Hevert offers a detailed analysis of the ways living creatures are tormented by humans in the novel—Jasper Ramsay delighting in shooting crows, Lily Briscoe thoughtlessly disturbing with her brush the red ants going about their ordinary lives, Nancy Ramsay intentionally terrorizing minnows by casting a shadow over their tidal pool, and Macalister’s boy cutting a square piece of flesh out of a mackerel before throwing it back into the sea. Woolf, using the bracketed comments in “Time Passes,” reveals that, like all other creatures, humans die randomly and for no reason. As Hevert contends, “[Woolf] and Shakespeare ultimately offer the same opinion: despite perceived extreme shifts in popular intellect and the growing devastation of war, people have and will continue to suffer and die as inexplicably as animals.”

Andrew Phelps’s essay, “Something Fishy: [Sniffing Out] The Shape of Trauma and Transformation in *To the Lighthouse*,” focuses even more closely on the hard-edged brackets, studying the sharply right-angled chunks and squares that the bracketing generates. Phelps argues that Lily Briscoe’s canvas (with its obvious right angles) invokes “art’s potential to, if not vanquish, at least contain despair, giving it shape, and with shape, boundaries.” But Phelps also contends that “Woolf utilizes the same form to mark other sites of trauma. Taken together, these ‘squares’ form a mosaic that illuminates the gendered nature of these cuts.” As the title suggests, the argument relies on keen slices of pain defined by the squared brackets.

Filiz Kutlu’s “The ‘Vital Lie’ in Virginia Woolf’s ‘Lappin and Lapinova’” takes a strongly feminist but tragic stance in the interpretation of the main character, Rosalind, and her fate. Kutlu, using Henrik Ibsen’s concept of the “vital lie,” a falsehood that enables survival, scrutinizes the ways that Rosalind compensates for her dismay over her marriage—hating her new last name, hating her husband’s given name, hating the patriarchal system that controls women’s lives—by renaming herself and her husband as animals—she being Lapinova, a white hare, and he being Lappin, the King of the Rabbits. When her husband informs her that Lapinova has been killed in a trap, and Rosalind’s “vital lie” perishes with her alter-ego hare, their marriage unravels. Kutlu contends that with the rupture and failure of the lie, Rosalind loses everything.

“What Does Power Smell Like? Canine Epistemology and the Politics of the Pet in Virginia Woolf’s *Flush*” by Anna Feuerstein considers how canine epistemology in the novel “disrupts the dominant empirical epistemology of the period, allowing readers to experience animal alterity as a non-empirical mode of knowing.” In doing so, she counters “the dominant critical belief that the novel’s use of anthropomorphism discounts the possibility of animal alterity.” Relying primarily on scent, *Flush*’s canine epistemology opposes Victorian empiricism while also highlighting “the troublesome power relationships associated with pet keeping” and “the ‘smelly’ side of gender oppression in Victorian England.”

In the same vein, Jamie Johnson, in “Virginia Woolf’s *Flush*: Decentering Human Subjectivity through the Nonhuman Animal Character,” cites studies that emphasize Woolf’s anthropomorphizing of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s dog and a critique of Victorian mores as the novel’s principal tropes. Johnson, in turn, sees *Flush* showing the “complex workings of human-animal relationships with an existential emphasis on canine perspective.” Woolf largely avoids anthropomorphizing *Flush*, Johnson believes, and strives to replicate a dog’s consciousness in order to decenter human subjectivity and provide “a view of the nonhuman animal for its own sake.”

Pamela Caughie’s article, “Dogs and Servants,” addresses the parallels between dog and servant in *Flush*, both of whom are subjugated beings compelled to abide by the customs and restrictions of the families that harbor them. Her article also considers why Woolf seems better able to access the mind of a dog than that of a servant. While the assumption exists “that in refusing to identify with servants, Woolf fails to give them their due,” Caughie explains how “[n]ot writing from the Other’s point of view, not making the Other speak, can itself be a responsible act”—what Caughie calls an ethics without identification.

The articles in this issue take various approaches—decentering human subjectivity, countering human hubris, calling for empathy with animals—but all are in keeping with Virginia Woolf’s anti-patriarchal perspectives and each offers a worldview appreciative of the interconnections and relatedness among all life forms.

**Kristin Czarnecki & Vara Neverow**

**Georgetown College Southern Connecticut State University**

#### **Works Cited**

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

### MLA in Chicago in January 2014

**Thursday, 9 January 7:00–8:15 p.m.**

183. Woolf, Wittgenstein, and Ordinary Language

Belmont, Chicago Marriott

Program arranged by the International Virginia Woolf Society

Presiding: Madelyn Detloff, Miami Univ., Oxford; Gaile Pohlhaus, Miami Univ., Oxford

1. “Woolf, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense: *The Voyage Out* as Therapy,” Megan M. Quigley, Villanova Univ.

2. “‘Stand Roughly Here’: Woolf, Keynes, and Ordinary Language in the 1930s,” Alice Keane, Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor

3. “Dumb Colloquy: The Aesthetics of Conversation and Conversational Aesthetics of *To the Lighthouse*,” Erin Greer, Univ. of California, Berkeley

For abstracts, contact [detloffmm@miamioh.edu](mailto:detloffmm@miamioh.edu).

**CaSh Bar: Thursday from 8:45 p.m.-10 p.m. in the evening.:**

Chicago IX, Sheraton

All IVWS members are invited to attend the SHARP cash bar on Thursday, [SHARP = Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing]

**Friday, 10 January 5:15–6:30 p.m.**

398. Virginia Woolf and Book History

McHenry, Chicago Marriott

Program arranged by the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing and the International Virginia Woolf Society

Presiding: Leslie Kathleen Hankins, Cornell Coll.

1. “A Library of Her Own: Virginia Stephen’s Books,” Beth Rigel Daugherty, Otterbein Univ.

2. “An Experiment in Form and Content: Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf’s ‘Monday or Tuesday,’” Amanda Miller, Duquesne Univ.

3. “Blank Spaces: The Hogarth Press and ‘Lost’ Women Publishers,” Alice E. Staveley, Stanford Univ.

Respondent: Karen V. Kukil, Smith Coll.

For abstracts, visit <http://www.sharpweb.org>.

**Saturday, 11 January 3:30–4:45 p.m.**

609. Virginia Woolf and London’s Colonial Writers

Belmont, Chicago Marriott

Program arranged by the International Virginia Woolf Society

Presiding: Elizabeth F. Evans, Univ. of Notre Dame

1. “Virginia Woolf, the Hogarth Press, and South African Modernism,” Laura A. Winkiel, Univ. of Colorado, Boulder

2. “Virginia Woolf, Mulk Raj Anand, and the Novel of Political Transition,” Jeannie Im, New York Univ.

3. “Virginia Woolf’s Caribbean Connections,” Mary Lou Emery, Univ. of Iowa

For abstracts, contact [evansef@gmail.com](mailto:evansef@gmail.com).

### LOUISVILLE CONFERENCE 2015—CALL FOR PAPERS

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

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](mailto:kristin_czarnecki@georgetowncollege.edu)> by

Friday, September 12, 2014

Panel Selection Committee:

Beth Rigel Daugherty

Jeanne Dubino

Mark Hussey

Jane Lilienfeld

Vara Neverow

### International Virginia Woolf Society Louisville Conference Panel 2014

Chair: Lauren Short, University of Louisville

Presenters:

Denise A. Ayo, University of Notre Dame, “Staging (Self-)Censorship: Virginia Woolf’s ‘Women Must Weep’”

Kristina Reardon, University of Connecticut, “The Body of Word and Image in ‘Kew Gardens’”

Illya Nokhrin, University of Toronto, “Experiments with Virginia Woolf’s ‘Own Voice’: Narrative Style in the Manuscripts of *Night and Day*”

Audrey M. Lehr, Kent State University, “Disability Aesthetics and ‘The Human Apparatus’ in *To the Lighthouse*”

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](http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/VWM_Online.html)> and at <[virginiawoolfmiscellany.wordpress.com](http://virginiawoolfmiscellany.wordpress.com)>

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<[http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/VWM\\_Online\\_Fall1973-Fall2002.html](http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/VWM_Online_Fall1973-Fall2002.html)> and at <[virginiawoolfmiscellany.wordpress.com](http://virginiawoolfmiscellany.wordpress.com)>

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 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](mailto:susan.devoe@gmail.com)>

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](http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/annual_conference_on_virginia_woolf.html)>





## Call For Papers

The 24th Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf, co-sponsored by Loyola University Chicago and Northern Illinois University, will take place in Chicago, USA, 5 – 8 June 2014. “Virginia Woolf: Writing the World” aims to address such themes as the creation of worlds through literary writing, Woolf’s reception as a world writer, world wars and the centenary of the First World War, and myriad other topics.

We invite proposals for **papers, panels, roundtables, and workshops** on any aspect of the conference theme from literary and interdisciplinary scholars, creative and performing artists, common readers, advanced undergraduate and graduate students, and teachers of Woolf at all levels. Possible themes include but are not limited to:

Woolf as a world writer, including reception and/or influence of her work

Writing as world creation

Globalization of Woolf studies

Feminist re-envisionings of the world

Lesbian, gay, and/or queer worlds

Living worlds

Natural worlds

Cosmology, physics, different kinds of worlds

Geography(y)(ies) and/or mapping the world

“First” and “Third” worlds

Postcolonialism

The centenary of World War I

The World Wars

Peace, justice, war, and violence

Feminist writers of 1914 and/or suffragettes and WWI

Pacifist and conscientious objector movements

Class and/in Woolf’s world(s)

Writing the working class

Socialists “righting” the world

Expatriate worlds

artistic worlds

Inter-arts influences, including painting, cinema, music, and journalism

The publishing world

Transnational modernisms and postmodernisms

Woolf and/on international relations

Imperialism and anti-imperialism

Teaching Woolf in global contexts

Teaching Woolf outside of the traditional 4-year college classroom

Woolf and the new global media

Woolf and Chicago connections/reception

For **individual papers**, send a 250-word proposal. For **panels** (three or four papers, please), send a proposed title for the panel and 250-word proposals for EACH paper. For **roundtables and workshops**, send a 250- to 500-word proposal and a brief biographical description of each participant. Because we will be using a blind submission process, please do not include your name(s) on your proposal. Instead, in your covering e-mail, please include your name(s), institutional affiliation (if any), paper and/or session title(s), and contact information. If you would like to **chair a panel** instead of proposing a paper or panel, please let us know.

**Deadline for proposals: 25 January 2014.** Email proposals by attachment in Word to [Woolf2014@niu.edu](mailto:Woolf2014@niu.edu). For more information about the conference, including the keynote speakers, go to [www.niu.edu/woolfwritingtheworld/](http://www.niu.edu/woolfwritingtheworld/).

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**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>



**Virginia Woolf Miscellany**  
GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS  
AND EDITORIAL POLICIES

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

*The Miscellany considers work that has been previously published elsewhere; however, the editor(s) and guest editor(s) must be notified **at the time of submission** that a similar or closely related work was published originally elsewhere. The prior publication must also be explicitly cited in the newly published submission. Any permissions to republish must be provided by the author.*

**CFPs**

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

**Miscellaneous Submissions**

*Even when individual issues are themed, the **Miscellany** accepts submissions unrelated to the theme. Such submissions should be sent to the **Managing Editor, Vara Neverow** (rather than to the **Guest Editor**) at:*

<neverowv1@southernct.edu>

**Guidelines for Submissions**

*Submissions should be no longer than 2500 words at maximum and shorter articles are strongly preferred. Articles should be submitted electronically, in .doc or .docx MS Word format and in compliance with the style of the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the MLA Handbook (not the 7th edition published in 2009). For a copy of the current **Miscellany** style guide, please contact Vara Neverow at <neverowv1@southernct.edu>. Editorial note: While previously published work may be submitted for consideration, the original publication must be acknowledged at the time of submission (see above).*

**Editing Policies**

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

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

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## Woolfian Resources Online

### Virginia Woolf Miscellany:

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<[http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/VWM\\_Online.html](http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/VWM_Online.html)>.

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### The Three Guineas Reading Notebooks Online:

<<http://woolf-center.southernct.edu>>

Contact Vara Neverow <[neverowv1@southernct.edu](mailto:neverowv1@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/](http://bloggingwoolf.wordpress.com/)> for a broad range of valuable information such as key Woolfian resources, current and upcoming events, and an archive of Woolfian doings now past.

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

### Scholarly Resources

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

### E-books

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

### Woolfian Alerts

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

### VWListserv

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

## A Brief Overview of Resources for Woolfians

The *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* is an independent publication, which has been sponsored by Southern Connecticut State University since 2003. Founded in 1973 by J. J. Wilson, the publication was hosted by Sonoma State University for 30 years. The publication has always received financial support from the International Virginia Woolf Society. Issues from Spring 2003 (issue 63) to the present are available in a PDF format at <[http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/VWM\\_Online.html](http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/VWM_Online.html)> (see also <[http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/VWM\\_Online\\_Fall1973-Fall2002.html](http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/VWM_Online_Fall1973-Fall2002.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-Keane, Past President of the International Virginia Woolf Society, who continues to oversee the site.

The VWOOLF Listserv is hosted by the University of Ohio. The current list administrator is Elisa Kay Sparks. Anne Fernald oversaw the list for many years. 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](mailto:listproc@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu)>. In the body of the email, you must write: subscribe VWOOLF Your first name Your last name. You will receive a welcome message with further information about the list. To unsubscribe, please send a message \*from the exact account that you originally subscribed with\* to the same address: <[listproc@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu](mailto:listproc@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu)>. In the body of the email, write: unsubscribe VWOOLF.

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](mailto: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](mailto:mhussey@pace.edu)>. Each annual conference is organized by one or more individuals associated with the host institution. The host institution finances the event and uses the registration fees of attendees to offset the costs of the event. The Annual Conference has no formal association with the International Virginia Woolf Society or the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain or any other Woolf society. For information about the history of the Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf, go to <[http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/annual\\_conference\\_on\\_virginia\\_woolf.html](http://www.home.southernct.edu/~neverowv1/annual_conference_on_virginia_woolf.html)>.

The Selected Papers from the Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf 2001-present (excluding 2004) are published by Clemson University Digital Press under the auspices of Wayne Chapman. The editors of the publication vary from year to year. The electronic version of the Selected Works from the 2002 and 2004 Woolf conferences are available to view at the Woolf Center at Southern Connecticut State University: <<http://woolf-center.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>>).



### How to Join



### The International Virginia Woolf Society



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

To join, update membership or donate to the International Virginia Woolf Society, please either: download the membership form from the IVWS website and mail to the surface address provided or use the PayPal feature available online at the IVWS website.

#### Regular membership:

a 12-month membership (\$20)

a 5-year membership (\$95)

#### Student or not full-time employed membership:

12-month membership (\$10)

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



### THE IVWS & VWS ARCHIVE INFORMATION

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

<[http://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/collections/special\\_collections/f51\\_intl\\_v\\_woolf\\_society/](http://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/collections/special_collections/f51_intl_v_woolf_society/)>

The archive of the VWS and the IVWS has a secure and permanent home at E. J. Pratt Library, Victoria University, University of Toronto.

Below is the finding aid for the IVWS archival materials:

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

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

With regard to such items as correspondence, memorabilia and photographs, contact the current Archival Liaison,

Karen Levenback,

either at <[ivwsarchive@att.net](mailto:ivwsarchive@att.net)>

or by surface mail:

Karen Levenback, Archival Liaison/IVWS Archive,  
304 Philadelphia Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912.

### Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain Membership

<[http://www.virginiawoolfsociety.co.uk/vw\\_membership.htm](http://www.virginiawoolfsociety.co.uk/vw_membership.htm)>

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

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

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

Subscriptions for the year ending 31 December 2014 are £18 UK, £23 Europe and £26 outside of Europe;

Five-year memberships (five years for the price of four) beginning in 2013 are £72 UK, £92 Europe and £104 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:Stuart.N.Clarke@btinternet.com)>



••••• The Leonard Woolf Society will be holding its next meeting •••••  
••••• on 24 May 2014 at the University of Sussex. •••••

••••• Program follows as soon as possible. •••••

••••• Surendra Paul, Chair, LWS,UK •••••

••••• <[surenspaul@hotmail.com](mailto:surenspaul@hotmail.com)> •••••

••••• Nathan Sivasambu/London/UK •••••

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# Special Issue: Woolf and Animals

Edited By  
Kristin Czarnecki & Vara Neverow



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## Virginia Woolf's Dance-Drama: Staging the Life and Death of the Moth

...wet  
and dry zones of a firefly's  
chitinous body  
fuse in a blue spark . . .

Monica Youn, "Against Imagism"<sup>1</sup>

Insects crawl and flutter and alight in and out of the pages of Virginia Woolf's writing: flies, butterflies, and moths. In her most famous essay on lepidoptera, "The Death of the Moth," Woolf stages the death of a single moth, whose lingering demise, preceded by an energetic dance, contrasts against the flash of light emitted by, and then the sudden zinging of, Youn's firefly. What unites "The Death of the Moth" and "Against Imagism" is the attention their writers pay to that most other of creatures, a single insect—ever the quest, at least as far back as 77-79 CE, when Pliny the Elder tried to justify paying so much attention to an insect in his encyclopedia *Natural History* (Brown ix). With their focus on the death of the insect, both the essay and the poem convey a sense of loss. In an era of the world's sixth largest species extinction, it is hard to talk about non-domesticated creatures, insects included, in spite of their vast numbers, without thinking of loss and impending death. Youn's haiku-like poem tersely highlights the explosive, even nuclear, violence that, it seems, is intentionally, and even gleefully, exerted by humans against insects like fireflies. "Against Imagism," also, of course, indicts technology—bug zappers—and reminds us, with a spark of dark humor, of the increasing light pollution that draws fireflies to their death.

In "The Death of the Moth," on the other hand, Woolf attributes the moth's death to universal forces. Neither technological advances nor deliberative human agency lead to its end; as a day moth, its life is destined to be short, and though it flies in front of a window, it does not fly against it. In other words, it is not drawn to the window because of light pollution. The "energy" that sends Woolf's moth "fluttering from side to side of his square of the window-pane" (4)<sup>2</sup> is a cosmic force, a descendent of the ancient Greek meaning of the word, *energia*, or kind of spiritualized power. Rather than pursuing the way light pollution increases the migration of moths and other insects toward their untimely deaths, Woolf's narrator laments the death of a single one. And unlike Youn, whose poem starkly portrays what happens at the boundary

where insects collide (smash, even) against human-made devices, and vice versa, Woolf's essay, with its emphasis on the energy that suffuses all life, from the moth to the narrator, dissolves the limits between the nonhuman and human worlds. While "The Death of the Moth" is an intensely lyrical and poignant essay that attends, in almost microcosmic detail, to the delicate body of the moth, it also, as I will show, hints at the kind of explosive, nuclear potential present in Youn's "Against Imagism."

The moth in Woolf's essay may be the sole focus, but not because it is unusual or romantic enough to evoke "that pleasant sense of dark autumn nights" (3) like the moths she sought out in her childhood and early adulthood. Rather, Woolf immediately takes pains to show its ordinariness. As such, this moth is the Mrs. Brown<sup>3</sup> of moths, a short-lived day moth, neither "gay" like a butterfly nor "sombre" like its night cousin, but a "hybrid," rather, even a mutt (3).<sup>4</sup> Yet while its wings, "hay-coloured," are far from dazzling, making the moth so nondescript as to blend in with its surroundings, the addition of the "tassel" fringes gives him a touch of decoration (3). With the use of the pronoun "he"<sup>5</sup> we see how Woolf anthropomorphizes the moth, and in that vein she continues the metamorphosis from "specimen" to a being who "seemed to be content with life" (3). He is not just a representative of a species; he is an individual. The reader can see how the narrator's appreciation of the moth intensifies within the course of the first sentence describing his physical appearance. And, within the first paragraph of the essay, we move from the speaker's lack of enthusiasm ("Moths that fly by day [...] do not excite" [3]) to her delight in his flight ("a tremendously exciting experience" [3]).

Critics from Harvena Richter on have noted Woolf's attention to "small phenomena" (Faris 82) like the moth. Woolf was not alone among modernists to be so attentive; Rachel Sarsfeld notes that "modernist literature practically swarms with insects" (88; see also Burstein, Alt, and Henry). Sarsfeld, following Richter, particularly emphasizes the ways lepidoptera, including butterflies, have figured throughout the oeuvre of Woolf's writing as a metaphor for art, the writing self, and the imagination (Richter 13; Sarsfeld 87, 88). The moth in "The Death" also most obviously represents life, but what makes Woolf's essay extraordinary is the detailed consideration she gives to the moth not only as a symbol of art and life, but to the life of the moth himself. In "The Death of the Moth," Woolf reminds us of the connection between biography and biology. Her close and sustained attention to the day of a life of one moth, this moth, transforms her essay, in part, into an ethology.<sup>6</sup> As critics recognize, Woolf's biological accuracy stemmed from the many lepidoptera-hunting expeditions of her youth,<sup>7</sup> and in her earliest writing, we can see, as Sarsfeld remarks, her early and "faintly morbid fascination with the moth's demise, making this probably the earliest record of Woolf's later obsession with netting 'life' in print" (90). Sarsfeld goes on to trace the many ways that Woolf nets and pins down lepidoptera throughout her writing. In "The Death of the Moth," however, we see that she represents both the death and the life of the moth. As Eric Brown, referring to Pliny's *Natural History*, writes, "the detail required to shape the intricacies of the insect demands an artist" (ix). In her ethological essay, Woolf is among writers who have, as Brown notes, "cross-pollinated the entomological and literary fields" (x).

<sup>3</sup> See "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (94).

<sup>4</sup> And also, possibly, a pest. Given her description, Woolf's moth may belong to the *Tortricidae* family, a very common one, some members of which are known for their pest-like behavior.

<sup>5</sup> Rather than "it": with a moth this size, it is very difficult to detect gender differences; this moth may even be a "she."

<sup>6</sup> See Alt, who writes about Woolf's shift in this essay from a "taxonomic perspective" toward a more ethological one that focuses on the behavior of the organism as an end in itself (147).

<sup>7</sup> See Bell 33-34; Sarsfeld 89; Richter 15; Henry 126.

<sup>1</sup> For the full poem, and for those who can access a subscription to *The New Yorker*, go to <[http://www.newyorker.com/fiction/poetry/2012/07/23/120723po\\_youn](http://www.newyorker.com/fiction/poetry/2012/07/23/120723po_youn)>. See also full citation below.

<sup>2</sup> All references are to "The Death of the Moth" unless otherwise indicated.

Woolf, the artist, displays the craft of nature itself as she stages the final scene of the moth's life.<sup>8</sup> Brown comments on the way "Pliny positions humans as the spectators to a kind of insect theater—we observe, detached, this other world unfolding before us, but we ourselves are kept somehow beyond" (ix). Throughout "The Death of the Moth" the narrator frequently reminds us of her position as a spectator who is drawn to the moth as, one might say, a moth is proverbially drawn to a flame: "One could not help watching him" (4). She is also a director who, it seems, stages first a dance, and then a drama of death, with the moth as the star performer. First, she sets the drama: it is "a pleasant morning, mid-September, mild, benignant, yet with a keener breath than that of the summer months" (3).<sup>9</sup> There is a feeling of repleteness, with the fields having recently been harvested; one might imagine the unnamed crops to include hay, and be reminded of the moth's resemblance to it, with his color and his tassel. Were that the case, we have a hint of foreshadowing, with the hay having been mowed down (3). Enhancing the visual is the auditory, with the nearby rooks emitting "the utmost clamour and vociferation" (3) and building up a sense of anticipation. The narrator next directs the reader's attention to the backdrop, one square of what one imagines to be a multi-paned window framing the moth's flight. Within this "compartment" the moth, flying back and forth, becomes "something marvellous" (4). The creative power of the "enormous energy of the world" (4) transforms him into a ballet dancer<sup>10</sup>; in a costume reminiscent of a swan—he is decked "as lightly as possible with down and feathers"—he sets about "dancing and zigzagging to show us the true nature of life" (4). The true nature of life may be like the moth, and like the dance: ephemeral.<sup>11</sup>

The moth's ephemerality, and especially his frailty, elicit not only frequent attention from the narrator, but also, from the beginning of his flight, repeated expressions of pity ("One was, indeed, conscious of a queer feeling of pity for him" [4]). The Aristotelian components of drama—pathos, heroic struggle, chorus, and awe—are intensified in the long death scene. Eventually tired by his dancing, the moth settles, much like Septimus had just before his death (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 226), "on the window ledge in the sun" (5). But unlike Septimus, the moth tries to resume his dancing, but fails, "either so stiff or so awkward that he could only flutter to the bottom of the window-pane" (5). As he is endeavoring to regain flight, it is as if his soul has left his body; he is compared to a "machine" that continues to stop and start (5).<sup>12</sup> After his "seventh attempt" he falls to his back, but even from this impossible position he persists, and eventually rights himself, only, finally, to "kn[o]w death" (6). As Kelly Sultzbach writes, Woolf's "depiction of the moth's fierce love of life, even its own tiny portion of it, gains universal status; its fight becomes just as valiant and tragic as that of any human hero" (74). Accompanying the moth's near operatic death scene are "[s]tillness and quiet," with the birds having departed and the horses standing still (5). Also accompanying the moth's futile struggle is the voice of the narrator, functioning like a chorus, both admiring the moth's valiancy ("It was superb this last protest" [6]), and evincing an Aristotelian, tragic sense of awe ("this minute wayside triumph of so great a force over so mean an antagonist filled me with wonder" [6]).

<sup>8</sup> See Brown, who writes, "nowhere else does the *craft* of nature so prevail as in the miniature world of the insect" (ix).

<sup>9</sup> Stuart Clarke suggests the date of composition to be September 1927 (Woolf, E5 444 n1), and I concur; see also Woolf D3 155, 5 September 1927.

<sup>10</sup> Many have written about Woolf's lifelong interest in dance, and here I will cite one of the latest, Janet Winston, who acknowledges the work of other critics in her article.

<sup>11</sup> One can see why Stephen Pelton choreographed a dance based on it; as Pelton writes, it "seemed written to be choreographed" (36). But it also, as he writes, "immediately resonated for [him] as a story about AIDS" (36)—a story, that is, about death.

<sup>12</sup> One is reminded that the Woolfs had acquired their first car, a Singer, in July 1927, a few months before this essay was probably written (see n8 above). One can envision them trying to crank up its engine. See also Martin.

The mean antagonist, the "power of such magnitude" (6), is not, in this case, the human, as it is in Youn's poem. As a day moth, Woolf's moth is not drawn to artificial light. He does not run up against the human technology of the window-pane; he is already inside.<sup>13</sup> The window-pane functions as the backdrop and not the source of his death. If it did, the struggle would be reframed in terms of human vs. nature, but that is not the case here. If anything, the moth dances himself to death. In any event, as a day creature, the moth's life was destined to be a short one, and his death, as the narrator emphasizes again and again, is inevitable. No amount of help from the narrator, who is clearly eager to assist with her pencil, will save the moth (5). Eventually she acknowledges that it "was useless to try to do anything"; "nothing, I knew had any chance against death" (6). The enemy in this dramatic struggle is too cosmic and overpowering and "could, had it chosen, have submerged an entire city, not merely a city, but masses of human beings" (6).

In portraying this drama, of a "frail and diminutive" moth (4) against "indifferent, impersonal" forces (6), Woolf was engaging in the "astronomical discourse" (Henry 122) of her day. Modernists like Woolf were keenly interested in the brevity of the life of the insect, and in nature, with "masses of human beings" ("Moth" 6) included, in relation to the "cosmological eons" (Henry 128). As Henry writes, "The analogy for humans becomes clear: our short-lived existence on our tiny grain of sand, the earth, must be seen in the larger context of the vast expanse, and long eons, of the interstellar wastes" (128).<sup>14</sup> But brief as this life is, Woolf, making use of the ancient "association between life and lepidoptera" (Sarsfield 90; see also Brown xi-xii), choreographs an essay in tribute to its form of the moth, himself a distillation of "pure life" (4).

The moth is not just a symbol and embodiment of life; he, like all of nature, and the writer herself, is suffused with life: "The same energy which inspired the rooks, the ploughmen, the horses, and even, it seemed, the lean bare-backed downs, sent the moth fluttering from side to side of his square of the window-pane" and, Woolf adds a few sentences later, drove "its way through so many narrow and intricate corridors in my own brain and in those of other human beings" (4). One is reminded of Chaucer's *Prologue*, with the arrival of spring both generating the growth of flowers and inspiring people to go on pilgrimages. Energy breathes through the nonhuman and human worlds alike, and, as Kelly Sultzbach writes, "in a contiguous community of interaction—a world occupied by a variety of pulsing life forms that collide, interact, and sustain each other on a daily basis" (73-74).<sup>15</sup> In addition to being a unifying force, energy is a leveler as well; Woolf, as she has so often elsewhere in her writing (see Swanson 95), decenters the human; the narrator is as affected by the energy "rolling in at the open window" (4) as the moth is. This surge impels her to see the moth's flight as a marvel, as a vision of "the true nature of life" (4).

In Youn's poem there are two sources of energy: a fusion of positive and negative ions from the firefly itself, and the suggestion of an explosion resulting, it is imagined, from the impact of two hard surfaces, of a bug zapper against the hard, chitinous body of the bug. The energy from the bug zapper, a popular form of technology, would destroy the marvel of the firefly, itself in the form of its radiant light a producer of energy. In Woolf's lyrical essay, energy itself is a mysterious force, both suffusing the moth and embodied in the moth. "[S]o simple a form of

<sup>13</sup> As a creature who co-exists with humans, and whose life span is already foreordained, the moth would not necessarily be saved if the narrator had transferred him to the natural world, outside the window.

<sup>14</sup> One of Woolf's first biographers, Aileen Pippett, entitled her book *The Moth and the Star* because she saw Woolf as "fragile as a moth and enduring as a star" (Pippett viii).

<sup>15</sup> Working with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Kelly Sultzbach interprets "The Death of the Moth" through an ecophenomenological approach to show how it displays a "reflexive interchange between one's own tactile experience and the reciprocal sensory reaction of surrounding forces and objects that form the basis of our ability to know ourselves within the world" (71).

the energy,” a “tiny bead” (4), Woolf’s moth is like an electron bouncing about in an electron cloud. Insects’ very size, as Brown writes, “presents a clear indivisibility—as if [it] [...] represent[s] some division prior to themselves” (xii). Brown notes that entomology has the same root as atom, which “once denoted something so small as to no longer be subsected” (xii). An insect, something “so small as to be indestructible,” has a “formidable integrity” that grants it “superheroic strength” (Brown xii). But Woolf’s moth, of course, cannot withstand the “oncoming doom” of death, powerful enough to submerge not only an “entire city” but “masses of human beings” (6). This is an ominous image, one suggestive of another figuration of the atom, the atom bomb and, indeed, Holly Henry notes that by “the early 1930s, the possibilities of splitting the atom, and harnessing atomic power in weaponry, were no longer considered the stuff of science fiction” (130-31).

While “The Death of the Moth” represents a harmonious and reciprocal relationship among the human and nonhuman worlds, with a focus on that of the insect, it does hint at the annihilating potential of human technology. “Against Imagism,” on the other hand, portrays in explosive and cartoonish terms—the poem ends with “SHAZAM!”—the destruction occasioned by the human-insect encounter. Both Youn and Woolf laud their creatures’ formidable integrity within the small space of their own compositions. Given their brevity, it is perhaps easy to fail to attend to these texts in the kind of detail that each writer grants to the insect she is observing. “The Death of the Moth” has served as a prompt for high school and college compositions, but it has not merited an essay or book chapter on its own; it is generally used as a springboard from which to jump to other works by Woolf or is treated as part of a group of other essays. Woolf herself, notably, did not publish this essay. Recognizing its power, Leonard, I believe, included it as the first essay in the first collection of essays he published in 1942, the year after Virginia’s death. Even if Woolf herself insisted that the newspaper essay (and most of her essays were first written for newspaper publication) was as transitory as the crocus, whose bloom lasts only a day (E4 214)—similar, that is, to the day moth—her own essay, ultimately, contains, sustains, and generates the *energia* that drives the moth, the writer, and life itself.

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*Old Paper With Butterflies by Anusorn P nachol from freedigitalphotos.net*

#### “diamond-cut red eyes”: Insect Perspectives in *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts*

Woolf’s knowledge of insects was partially a result of the fascination of the eldest of her two brothers, Thoby, with natural history, as well as the more general Victorian fascination with entomology. In *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts*, insects provide alternative means of perception, allowing a reimagining of the way in which both the artistic subject and historical narratives are represented. The specificity of insects in both *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts* strengthens the depiction of the passage of an old order through its disturbance of the natural species hierarchy.

Additionally, the violence inherent in the act of specimen collecting also influences the way Woolf conflates the imperial impulse with the



maintenance of women in the domestic sphere and the way in which this old order is queried. The term “specimen” often appears in a negative context, implicating something static, lifeless, and incapable of movement, something frozen in time or place. For example, Bonnie Kime Scott describes a 1916 book review Woolf completed of Eliza Heywood in which Woolf refers to Heywood as a “faded and antique specimen of the domestic housefly” (qtd. in Scott 57). Charles Tansley is also described as a miserable “specimen” in *To the Lighthouse* (10), his attitudes frigid and outdated. Fixing an insect on a display board is a symbol for what Woolf sees as Victorian sterility.

Woolf’s sensitivity to the insect world and exploration of the perception of the nonhuman appears in “The Mark on the Wall,” wherein Woolf puts herself in the position of a tree, wondering:

how cold the feet of insects must feel upon it, as they make laborious progresses up the creases of the bark, or sun themselves upon the thin green awning of the leaves, and look straight in front of them with diamond-cut red eyes. (“Mark” 82-83)

She imagines how the tree must feel as insects slowly ascend it, or walk out onto its leaves, or look at it with their “diamond-cut red eyes.” The eyes that Woolf specifies reveal a much different image of the tree to the insect, providing a very different version of the reality of the tree. This foray into nonhuman ways of perception, particularly the eyes evoking the compound visual structure of insects, contributes to the aesthetics of perception throughout Woolf’s work. For example, in *To the Lighthouse*, Lily Briscoe’s realization that “One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with” (161), or, in *The Waves*, Bernard’s meditation on the six characters coming together “to make this one thing, not enduring—for what endures?—but seen by many eyes simultaneously” (127), imply such an alternative access to the subject.

Before Lily makes her statement of wanting “fifty pairs of eyes,” the reader is introduced to “red, energetic ants” which Lily describes as “rather like Charles Tansley” (161). This negative connection between Tansley and the ants softens, and she begins to think of Tansley from a Mrs. Ramsay-esque perspective, looking for the good points in Tansley (“He was educating his little sister [...] It was immensely to his credit” [161]). Following this thought, Lily concludes that in order to deal properly with Tansley in her art, she must look at him through Mrs. Ramsay’s eyes, and subsequently “raised a little mountain for the ants to climb over” (161). Lily watches their confusion at the new obstacle, and then, with new sympathy for both Tansley and the small creatures, she “smooth[es] a way for her ants [...] she [had] disturbed with her brush” (162). For Lily, the answer to her aesthetic difficulties can be found in an adjustment of perception, of striving to see the world through eyes other than her own, whether those of Mrs. Ramsay, of the ants, or of Tansley.

In addition to the ants, Woolf uses the complexity of a butterfly’s wing to further describe the necessary balance Lily must strike with her art:

The whole mass of the picture was poised upon that weight. Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly’s wing; but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron. It was to be a thing you could ruffle with your breath; and a thing you could not dislodge with a team of horses. (141)

This description implies the complex structure and development of a butterfly’s wing as well as the delicate scales that cover the wing (the scales determine the wings’ coloration; the colors are usually not created by pigments, but by the crystals in the scales, and these give off the effect of being soft and downy). In Woolf’s description of the balance Lily must strike with her art, Lily must create an image that appears as delicate as the scales of the butterfly’s wing, but such an image must be firmly rooted in the complexity of how this delicate wing is formed. The slightest breeze can indeed ruffle the individual wing of a butterfly, but

the endurance of the butterfly’s wings, the permanence of these colors that melt into one another, is hard-wired by nature, which is, for Woolf, the beauty most capable of enduring.

The balance between the complexity and fragility of the butterfly wing is closely connected to the larger structures of balance present in nature. Renée Dickinson argues that *Between the Acts* displays a “parasitic inhabitation of the land” (16), meaning that one entity exists by feeding off of another. In *Between the Acts*, the symbiotic relationships between decomposers and decomposing organic material and between predator and prey work together to comment on the inescapability and necessity of violence inherent in nature (relating back to the image of the “specimen”) as well as the passage of the older order. On the very first page of the novel, there is a “daylight bird, chuckling over the substance and succulence of the day, over worms, snails, grit, even in sleep” (3). This “daylight bird,” active in the summer evening, is feeding off of decomposers (worms), and this image sets the stage for the historical eras feeding off of one another in Miss LaTrobe’s play.

With the description of Pointz Hall that shortly follows, this image of decomposition continues with “the old families who had all intermarried, and lay in their deaths intertwined, like the ivy roots, beneath the churchyard wall” (7). Mrs. Swithin speaks to William Dodge while giving him a tour of the house, and her vein is likened to a worm, connecting her with the ghosts of previous generations, decomposing as she eventually will: “She touched her bony forehead upon which a blue vein wriggled like a blue worm” (73). The elderly Mr. Bartholomew Oliver’s daydream of his time in India contains the image “a bullock maggot-eaten in the sun” (17); following the death of Mr. Bart Oliver’s generation is the death of Empire and of an older English way of life. In a sentiment echoed throughout the novel, it is the maggots that will endure, feeding off the ruins of civilizations, long after conquests have ended and the conquerors have receded into the ground. Combined with the above discussion of the need for a shift in perception, the emphasis on decomposers further contributes to this need to look at a more holistic history, one that encompasses the cycles of the natural world as well.

As the novel transitions to the pageant, a description of the area beyond the lily-pool that is dominated by butterflies further develops the theme of the passing of generations and eras by noting the popularity of the area for amateur lepidoptery. The butterfly species presented here are specific to this region of England and this time of year (June) and provide a very specific moment in time that also extends backward and forward over the generations:

It was always shady; sun-flecked in summer, dark and damp in winter. In the summer there were always butterflies; fritillaries darting through; Red Admirals feasting and floating, cabbage whites, unambitiously fluttering round a bush, like muslin milkmaids, content to spend a life there. Butterfly catching, for generation and generation, began there; for Bartholomew and Lucy; for Giles; for George it had begun only the day before yesterday when, in his little green net, he had caught a cabbage white. (56-57)

The next paragraph declares that this butterfly-filled “dip of the ground” (56) was, to Miss La Trobe, “the very place for a dressing-room” (57). However, Woolf specifies that when Miss La Trobe had visited, it was a “winter’s day” (57), and thus, no butterflies would have been present, only a treeless, open space. Miss La Trobe has neglected to take into account the time of year and what that means for the vegetation and wildlife when imagining how to portray her idea of English history.

When the time comes for the pageant to be set up, Woolf turns to the scene in the dressing area, describing the clothes strewn about and the butterflies circling:

There were pools of red and purple in the shade; flashes of silver in the sun. The dresses attracted the butterflies. Red and silver, blue and

yellow gave off warmth and sweetness. Red Admirals gluttonously absorbed richness from dish cloths, cabbage whites drank icy coolness from silver paper. Flitting, tasting, returning, they sampled the colours.

Miss La Trobe stopped her pacing and surveyed the scene. "It has the makings..." she murmured. For another play always lay behind the play she had just written. Shading her eyes, she looked. The butterflies circling; the light changing; the children leaping; the mothers laughing—"No, I don't get it," she muttered and resumed her pacing. (62-63)

The first paragraph further presents Woolf's specific knowledge of both butterfly species and their behaviors. During Woolf's lifetime, significant research was conducted on the extensive range of vision possessed by butterflies (some of this would have been first published in 1919 by Harry Eltringham [Rutowski 9]). In the above passage, the butterflies are attracted to colors that will help them absorb more warmth and to those that resemble flowers from which they drink nectar (and in turn, aid in pollination). The actions of the butterflies here are a captivating example of insect instinct, evolution, and sensory perception, but Miss La Trobe, though she does have an intuition, cannot see the value in the unexpected actors (despite, even, their implication with the costumes, which merges their own "clothing" with that of the players).

The second paragraph, heavy handed as it is, displays Miss La Trobe trying to find another level of meaning in the scene between her actors, their costumes, and the butterflies. The butterflies, the blossomed chrysalises, represent the same cycle as the mothers and their children, the constantly changing light as day turns into night, and the passage of generation to generation. This reading then takes on a certain sadness when connected with the aforementioned generations of children who caught butterflies in the same area. In that sense, the butterflies' attempts to both eat from and pollinate pieces of brightly colored paper and fabric also suggest stagnation, an infertile, unproductive creative act. Either way, both butterfly and human are mutually implicated in this scene, and the reader sees the passing of generations and the outline of history through the children, the actors, and the butterflies alike. Later, Miss La Trobe thinks that she had not made the audience "see," and Woolf's narrative turns to butterflies again: "Her vision escaped her. And turning, she strode to the actors, undressing, down in the hollow, where butterflies feasted upon swords or silver paper; where the dish cloths in the shadow made pools of yellow" (98). Here, the butterflies seem to be Woolf's way of saying that Miss La Trobe had not failed at all, only that she was defining success incorrectly.

Earlier, during intermission, everyone files to the Barn. The Barn, the "Noble Barn," had been built "over seven hundred years ago" and "reminded some people of a Greek temple, others of the middle ages" (99), but when the reader first enters, its patrons are all nonhuman: mice, swallows, and "countless beetles and insects" burrowing in the dry wood. Woolf zooms in on a blue-bottle, gorging itself on cake, and notes a butterfly, who "sunned itself sensuously on a sunlit yellow plate" (100). With this line, Woolf suggests that the butterfly finds different values in different things for different reasons than the human; for the audience, the plate will be a vehicle for carrying food; for the butterfly, it is a source of warmth.

When Mrs. Sands enters the building, her lack of awareness of the life that swirls around her is clear; she sees the open door of the Barn, "[b]ut butterflies she never saw; mice were only black pellets in kitchen drawers; moths she bundled in her hands and put out of the window" (100). Like Miss La Trobe who cannot "see," Mrs. Sands is blind to possible alternative paths to understanding. Introduced to the Barn and its inhabitants before the entry of Mrs. Sands, the reader is presented with a microcosm for Woolf's larger point; the nonhuman world is always with the human, and as it exists before the human, so will it after. When Mrs. Sands enters the Barn, "the butterfly rose and the blue-bottle"

(102) in a way that suggests the insects themselves choose to depart, having little time for the woman who cannot see beyond herself.

Earlier in *Between the Acts*, as Mrs. Swithin and Mr. Bart Oliver are speaking, he tries to conceive of the way Mrs. Swithin understands divinity. The idea he forms is an animist one as he thinks of her "prayerable being" as "more of a force or a radiance, controlling the thrush and the worm; the tulip and the hound; and himself, too, an old man with swollen veins" (25). Though he seems to understand her faith, he nevertheless attacks it when, in the following paragraph, he thinks of it as "superstition" (25). In this context, the elderly man pushes away the possibility of the existence of other ways of "knowing," which in this case is Darwinian instinct, dictated, of course, by biology.

In *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts*, the physiology of insects and their role in the ecosystem provide suggestions of alternative means of perception and understanding. The interest in specimen-collecting offers a way for Woolf to comment on the outdated view of England, and the constant presence of the insect world (composed of so many more occupants than the human world) serves as a way for Woolf to decenter the centrality of the human narrative. Insects in Woolf's work are determined by their specificity to the English countryside, and by their particular physiologies that provide them with a much different way of relating to the world. Lily Briscoe's butterfly provides a suitable description of how Woolf incorporates insects into her work: "feathery and evanescent" on the surface, but "clamped together with bolts of iron." What may appear to some as a passing mention of an everyday creature is in fact a complex and sustained engagement with the discourses of biology, ecology, and entomology.

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"Stag Beetle" by Phiseksit from freedigitalphotos.net



*Columba grisea* = *Columba argentina* Silver Pigeon  
by John Gerrard Keulemans (1893),  
via Wikimedia Commons

### Moments of Being and Ordinary Human-Animal Encounters

In his classic essay “Why Look at Animals?” John Berger characterizes the human-animal encounter as one in which each species gazes at the other across an “abyss of non-comprehension” (5). The question of this interspecies abyss has long occupied philosophers. For instance, as Thomas Nagel famously asked, can humans ever overcome the profound Otherness of animal physiology to understand *what it is like* to be a bat? (Or indeed, a cat, or a bird, or an insect?) Is it ever possible for humans and animals to connect in friendship, sociability, or what Mary Midgely calls interspecies “fellowship” (115)? And how should we view and respond to animal suffering? Although for some writers this is an abstract ethical issue, Ralph Acampora asserts that the question can only be addressed if we first consider how compassion for others’ pain is *felt* in one’s own body; for Acampora, empathy is fundamentally a visceral sensation that directly bridges the species abyss. Furthermore, is it the case, as theorist Donna Haraway argues, that interspecies relations always *already* blur and muddy Cartesian binaries? Perhaps, as Haraway writes, social life is best understood in terms of the irreducibly interdependent “co-constitutive relations” (12) between the human and nonhuman, where humans and animals perpetually and intimately inform and shape one another, and where nature and culture are not easily conceptually separated.

Such questions span various philosophical traditions, yet all attempt to broach the question of how we can conceive of, and perhaps reach across, the space between ‘human’ and ‘animal.’ How do people find connection, common ground or authentic understanding with animals? What possibilities and incommensurabilities dwell in the meetings of species? In this paper, I will explore how Virginia Woolf’s writing offers a way to think through how humans can, and do, sometimes bridge Berger’s abyss.

Although much of Woolf’s work touches directly on animal lives and human-animal engagements, I want in this paper to trace connections between Woolf and animals somewhat more obliquely. Approaching these issues as a sociologist of human-animal relations, my focus is not Woolf’s literary representations of animals, but rather the question of how people ordinarily live with animals and how they make sense of these relations. Namely, I will explore what Woolf’s concept ‘moments of being’ might bring to thinking about interspecies encounters, and

suggest that this concept offers an eloquent and evocative way to understand such lived experience.<sup>1</sup>

My sociological research takes an interpretive, ethnographic approach, which draws from anthropological traditions. This kind of social science can be understood, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz writes, “not [as] an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning” (5). This search for ‘meaning’ involves immersing oneself in a group, culture or society, observing and participating and listening to the ways that people talk about and account for their own social lives and experiences. Although for anthropologists the site of study is often an unfamiliar society, ethnographic research can also be done closer to home. As such, it becomes an exercise of examining the relations, experiences, social structures and meanings that make up ordinary life, and of attempting to ‘make the familiar strange’ through looking afresh at what seems natural, normal or is usually taken for granted. It entails taking notice of and listening to the subtleties of what sociologist Les Back refers to as “life passed in living” (160).

My own ethnographic research explored people’s everyday experiences of encountering animals, taking as a case study a neighborhood in an English town. Over a period of fifteen months, I engaged in participation, observation and in-depth interviews, seeking to understand how people lived with, understood and related to a range of animals (including neighborhood pets/companion animals, animals resident in the local park, backyard wildlife, and those creatures often defined as domestic or garden ‘pests’).<sup>2</sup> Specifically, I wanted to explore how people, in the course of their daily lives, approached the sorts of questions that philosophers and theorists have grappled with. How did they look across—and perhaps sometimes begin to bridge—the abyss between human and animal?

Woolf’s writing on ‘moments of being’ offers a useful way to begin to think about such issues. In the essay, “A Sketch of the Past,” she reflects that amid the “nondescript cotton wool” of ordinary life (84), certain “exceptional moments” (84) might stand out as more real and vivid than the “many more moments of non-being” (83) that surround them. These moments of being may feel epiphanal and, although brief, can be remembered for years—as Woolf notes of her own experiences, “I often tell them over, or rather they come to the surface unexpectedly” (84).

Woolf recounts three of her own experiences of such moments. She recalls a childhood incident where she had been fighting with her brother Thoby but felt at once profoundly disturbed by the absurdity and futility of hurting another person. She writes, “I remember the feeling. It was a feeling of hopeless sadness. It was as if I became aware of something terrible; and of my own powerlessness” (84). On another occasion, while observing a flowerbed, she was struck by the thought, “‘That is the whole’ [...] and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth [...] and that was the real flower, part earth; part flower” (84). In a third example, she describes over-hearing the news that a family friend had died and subsequently “being in the garden at night and walking on the path by the apple tree. It seemed to me that the apple tree was connected with the horror of Mr. Valpy’s suicide [...] I stood there looking at the grey-green creases of the bark—it was a moonlit night—in a trance of horror” (84).

Woolf describes these moments of being as “sudden shocks” (85), where there seems to be a “revelation of some order [...] that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art [...] And I see this when I have a shock” (85). The epiphanal sense of scendent. As the

<sup>1</sup> My interest here is in what this concept can contribute to an understanding of human-animal relations. However, as Benjamin Hagen explores, ‘moments of being’ certainly offer insights into the relationship between humans and ‘nature’ more broadly construed.

<sup>2</sup> For more detail, see Tipper, “Creaturely Encounters.”



examples involving Mr. Valpy and Thoby imply, such moments can be accompanied by a feeling of despair: “I only know that many of these exceptional moments brought with them peculiar horror and a physical collapse” (85).

These moments are centrally about a shift in perception. They have in common a sense of sudden connection or empathy and a dissolution of conventional boundaries between things (in these instances, between people, apple trees, flowers, and the earth); they seem to entail an awakening to the enormity of life and death, to the sadness and vastness of the world, and to the infinite, inexplicable interrelations between its parts.

Woolf’s concept has striking resonances with the way that people I spoke to often framed their own experiences with animals. To illustrate, I will discuss two examples from my ethnographic data. Both extracts are drawn from in-depth qualitative interviews where participants reflected on their daily engagements with animals.<sup>3</sup> In one interview, Sandy told a detailed narrative about how, years previously, she had found a moth cocoon that she had kept and tended until it hatched. She recounted how one night, she took the moth outside to release it. Sandy speaks softly and slowly as she recalls this story, as if even the telling of it must be handled with care.

“And to stand,” she says dreamily, “and feel the delicacy of the touch of the little feet on my finger... and to hold it. And I don’t know whether it sensed the moon or something, but it suddenly began to just vibrate. It just quivered. And then in seconds, it took off. And I thought, ‘Damn it, you know here’s this thing... that you know, just *flies*.’ It doesn’t train, it doesn’t do a course, nobody teaches it. It just *does* it. It comes from inside it and you know, and it’s never known anything except crawling and eating, all its life. And then suddenly it’s transformed into this... I just think the life cycle of a butterfly is—that and the frog—I just think they are, it’s the most amazing thing. The complete transformation of these creatures. [...] I mean, I don’t know whether it *was* the moon or whether it just, I don’t know, but it just stood there and it just—one second it’s sort of quivering, *very, very, very*, delicately on my finger and the next second it was gone.”

Sandy sighs before laughing, “And then it was probably eaten by a bat, but never mind!”

I want to suggest that Sandy’s account can usefully be read as a Woolfian moment of being. In the first place, it is certainly momentary: her story depicts only a few seconds of engagement with the moth as it quivers on her finger in the moonlight. Even as Sandy tells the moment, it seems fragile—the profundity and magic of it is quickly eclipsed by her own joke about the moth being eaten. The experience itself lasted only seconds, and can be retold only in a flash.<sup>4</sup> However, it seems that, like Woolf, she returns to this tiny moment to “tell it over” because it continues to matter. In this moment she appears to experience something significant and transformative: a profound sense of wonder, amazement and connection with the nonhuman; an awakening to something beyond the “cotton wool” of ordinary life.

Echoing Woolf’s wonderment at the realization that the flower was

<sup>3</sup> All of the in-depth interviews I conducted were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The quotations in this essay are taken from these unpublished recordings and fieldnotes generated for my research. I have also added contextual, inter-personal, sensory and non-verbal information to capture those elements of an interview not present on an audio recording (see, for example, Emerson, Fretz and Shaw). In ethnographic texts, presenting detailed accounts in interviewees’ own words is intended to offer a rich insight into the “ways that the meanings of a culture are embodied [...] in its language” (Duneier 339).

<sup>4</sup> And, of course, discussing such an experience seems to re-inscribe its fleeting and ungraspable nature: although it might be understood as a moment of connection between the species, any attempt to relate it immediately underscores the difference between the human (who can recount and give voice to the encounter) and the animal (who cannot).

both earth and plant, Sandy’s experience is irrevocably linked with her musings about the profound Otherness of the moth’s bodily transformation and its instinctive ability to fly. Moreover, Sandy seems to suggest that in this moment, a shift of perception occurs: it is a moment of intimacy and fellowship with a radically Other being, where perhaps, in the intimate sensation of its miniscule feet on her finger vibrating in response to the moon, Sandy glimpses what it might *be like* to be a moth. There seems a momentary dissolution of boundaries (between human and animal, between the creature itself and the moon), and perhaps an insight into the ‘whole’—the interconnections between things, and the cycles of life that usually remain imperceptible.

Another example highlights the relevance of such moments in people’s accounts. Here, in the midst of discussing her care of back-garden bird wildlife, Fiona suddenly recalled an instance in which she had witnessed some boys torturing a bird.

Fiona gazes into the distance as she speaks, “You see, I remember once, being in China, walking through a town and watching some boys in front of me, they’d got, one of them had got a dove in his hand and he was plucking it, still alive, just plucking it and just throwing the feathers and of course this bird was in agony and they were all laughing.”

As she talks, she is miming the actions, demonstrating this plucking with her own hands. I feel a shiver. [...] Fiona frowns, remembering other incidents that seem to haunt her.

“Yes... and I remember at school, yes when I was at junior school I remember there were some boys at the school who used to do the most appalling things to animals, really dreadful, and do it you know, to quite large animals like cats. And as a girl I just couldn’t understand how they could possibly do it.”

Fiona looks directly at me. “I don’t if it’s the same for you,” she says, “but I think that, as a girl, if somebody’s hurting something, you *feel* it... or...” She hesitates for a second, seeming to want to add a corollary. “Well, you don’t obviously don’t feel it *for* them... but you know, something makes you *realize how it must feel*. And you couldn’t possibly do that to an animal.”

Although this incident occurred years ago, for Fiona, as for Woolf, it seems to have “come to the surface unexpectedly” (84) demanding to be retold and vividly relived. The experience still resonates physically and emotionally.

Fiona’s experience of overwhelming empathy for the dove’s pain seems to recall Woolf’s discussion of her childhood fight with Thoby. In that instance, Woolf’s moment of being was triggered by the act of hurting another individual, where she suddenly “became aware of something terrible; and of my own powerlessness” (84). For Fiona, witnessing another’s suffering similarly seemed to trigger a moment of “sudden, violent shock” (84) and “peculiar horror” (85), infused by a sense of “hopeless sadness” (84). For Fiona, this is a moment that stands out from ordinary life, but in a disturbing, discomfiting manner; a moment in which she experienced a mode of being that still haunts her.

What is especially striking here is how Fiona’s moment of being was one of profound connection, wherein the boundary between bodies, between self and other, and between human and animal, was erased. Her sudden, intense sense of “how it must feel” for the bird was (and remains) an instance of unmediated connection with the animal’s physical suffering, a visceral flash of insight into an animal’s being—a leap across the abyss of non-comprehension.

Fiona and Sandy provided vivid accounts of intense, momentary experiences of human-animal encounter, but many other participants also spoke of similar ‘moments’ and ‘shocks’—sudden transitions into remarkable and distinctive modes of being. Sociologically, much more

can be drawn out from people's accounts of such moments of being, nevertheless, reading such incidents in these terms offers an illuminating way to think about and understand everyday encounters between humans and animals.<sup>5</sup>

To return to the questions I raised at the beginning, it seems that in such moments of being, humans might indeed appreciate 'what it is like' to be a creature; people may experience interspecies 'fellowship' or intimacy; the suffering of an animal might be *felt* viscerally in one's own body; and such moments might blur or collapse ordinary boundaries and binaries (between self and other, between human and animal) beyond recognition. But, perhaps, such experiences are always only ever momentary—brief and startling (and sometimes alarming) glimpses into creaturely lives.

For a sociology of human-animal relations, Woolf's moments of being offer a rich and subtle articulation of both the distinctive *temporalities* of interspecies encounters (the possibility of instantaneous and momentary connections with animals) and the *ambivalence* of such connections (the way that moments might be felt as deeply unsettling or haunting, expressed in Woolf's sense of "peculiar horror and a physical collapse" [85]). Although Woolf suggests this "shock-receiving capacity is what makes me a writer" (85), I contend that such shocks are found in many people's everyday experiences. Understanding the 'ordinary' experience of knowing animals is enhanced by an attention to these extraordinary moments of encounter—instants which entail distinctive and remarkable ways of knowing; moments in which 'being' is understood anew; and where the space between human and animal is reimaged.

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*Snail by m\_bartosch at freedigitalphotos.net*

#### *The Snail and the transcending time*

"I want to sink deeper and deeper away from the  
surface with its hard, separate facts."  
Virginia Woolf, *A Mark on the Wall*

Others perhaps see the possibilities of living in a shell,  
Crawling up the wall on a world of white,  
Slightly dimmed by fireplace soot, but carrying on one's shoulders  
A whole world of knowing.  
Margaret Atwood divulges that she, too, would  
Like to come back as a snail  
Though it is possible that she didn't have in mind  
The same snail, the same wall, that same  
Moment in time. The very moment has transcended  
Time, the very snailness mired in some umbrel of emotion.  
Umbrel meaning fool or simpleton, but also a burst radiating spokes  
Leading outward. One would never expect a snail to  
Also be a fool.

Halfway up the wall I feel an itch. The strength of the carapace surface  
Is no protection from her probing. She is watching me, taking notes.  
She wants to sink deeper, to know me further but  
Without the closer look that clouds what's real. Only  
I know that to look is not to see. The shell again:  
What's apparent, very different than the soft meat of myself.

Another inch up.  
She has not seen me move. Am I in her tunnel,  
The winds of war moving about outside heartlessly  
Beating against me, echoes of the real "airless, shallow, bald?"  
Is it comforting to know that what I'm doing here is of little  
Consequence, only what I'm thinking? Or what I think I'm thinking.  
Now I've got to think I'm thinking something interesting else the mirror  
Shatters and what you see is what you get. But  
Steady now, I can just see what's coming as  
She takes pulls me from the cold surface of white into the warmer stream,  
All in a flash "lapsing into the stream" she says,  
All oddly atingle in a flow that's new.  
Is knowing possible? Can anything be  
Known? Is knowing,  
she asks me,  
ever as important as what might be the possibilities.

**Sandra Inskeep-Fox**  
**Poet and Independent Scholar**

<sup>5</sup> A full sociological analysis also attends, for instance, to the dimensions of gender (Fiona's suggestion that such moments of empathy are a uniquely female way of knowing and being-in-the-world) and of class and context (for instance, what is distinctively British, middle-class, or generational in such engagements with creatures).



*Snail by domdeen from freedigitalphotos.net*

### The Snail in “Kew Gardens”: A Commentary on Ethical Awareness

The snail in “Kew Gardens” is patient. The snail has priorities and makes important decisions. The snail is aware of his surroundings and performs actions through movements that are deliberate and slow. Woolf’s description of the snail with its careful decisions and delicacy of action stands in contrast with her depiction of humans in this story.<sup>1</sup> The humans are not aware of their surroundings as such; their awareness is limited by a basic orientation to their own affairs.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to the snail, their movements, mostly walking and talking, are awkward and loud.

The story challenges assumptions about our importance and general superiority of grace and intellect, but it also suggests a finer point. While we tend to think of nature in contrast to ourselves, we are living parts of it. The contrast drawn in the story finally repositions humans within, rather than against, nature in representing us from a snail’s point of view; the snail and the humans are brought together as different contributing members of a larger living community.<sup>3</sup> All contribute to the intricacies in a more general rhythm of living. And, while Woolf’s treatment of us is not harsh, the suggestion is in the air that we might check our hubris to reorient our basic awareness. We might accept that we are in community with what we generally take to be parts of stagnant backdrops to human action. We could notice and offer consideration to those beings of subtlety of whose cares and concerns we are deliberately ignorant. With these points generally stated, let us turn to see how they are developed in “Kew Gardens.”<sup>4</sup>

Woolf opens “Kew Gardens” by ushering the reader to a flowerbed, which seems of itself to be unremarkable; one would expect this of a story set in a garden. However, it immediately becomes apparent that the flowerbed will not be part of the backdrop of a scene of human action in the way we might usually anticipate. Woolf gently but immediately

reorients the reader’s focus from considering the larger bed as part of setting a scene to what is happening within it. Ordinarily, the action within a flowerbed would be unnoticed by the casual, or even astute, observer of the flowers in the bed who, if interested in detail, might notice the kind of flower or the excellence of the specimen of species one might take the flower to be. This is not Woolf’s focus.

Woolf proceeds to draw our attention to the flowers’ movements or, more carefully, to the flowers’ petals’ movements and their effects. The movements of flower petals are brought about by a summer breeze; the resulting variations of color are cast in the surrounding shadows. Here, there is interplay like a dance of light, color, and shadow—miniscule changes effecting still others such that everything seems to ring with a vibrancy of living. And there is a moment of anticipation for us in this dynamic scene as one does not know whether the drop of water will burst or not; we have been drawn to consider it as well as the important effects of its doing so (or not) for the complexity of rhythm in the collective movement effected by the color and light:

The petals were [...] stirred by the summer breeze, and when they moved, the red, blue and yellow lights passed one over the other, staining an inch of the brown earth beneath with a spot of the most intricate colour. The light fell either upon the smooth, grey back of a pebble, or, the shell of a snail with its brown, circular veins, or falling into a raindrop, it expanded with such intensity of red, blue and yellow the thin walls of water that one expected them to burst and disappear. Instead, the drop was left in a second silver grey once more, and the light now settled upon the flesh of a leaf, revealing the branching thread of fibre beneath the surface, and again it moved on and spread its illumination in the vast green spaces beneath the dome of the heart-shaped and tongue-shaped leaves. (28)

This paragraph is important not only for orienting the reader to the intricacies of the bed; we have also been introduced to the main character of the story. We have been introduced to our snail.

We must note that Woolf’s introduction of the snail occurs within the wider description of the action within the flowerbed. The snail is not brought out with a spotlight on center stage. Our attention is brought instead to the veins in his shell highlighted by their brown color as the petals and lights move and dance. We might notice, too, how Woolf brings us in to a point of nuance not focusing on the snail but reinforcing the detail of orientation by describing next the fiber beneath the surface of a leaf with the hint that there is much more to consider in this range of observation—“vast green spaces beneath the dome” of the leaves.

There are a couple of points here to consider. Woolf has taken care to set a scene whose scope, sharper than our usual human focus, highlights veins in snails’ shells, fibers in the leaves of plants, and the complexity of play and movement of color as a breeze moves petals of flowers in a flowerbed. And Woolf moves through these levels of description from the whole of the flower bed to the veins of the shell using the dynamic play of color in ways suggesting that the descriptions of the events of a moment or two are among coexisting elements that are ongoing. Woolf’s focus on one or the other of these elements does not relegate the others as generally unimportant or even secondary in importance in a way that bringing the reader’s attention immediately to the snail as the star of the narrative would accomplish. Woolf’s introduction violates our expectations since we are not being provided with a backdrop to the main show. We are simply prompted to alter the scope of our awareness as we move through the flowerbed following the light, the colors, and the parts of the ongoing scene they highlight in passing. We should also note that the flowerbed is one of many in the gardens; it is an arbitrary choice which suggests the likelihood that what is taking place here may be similar to action in other beds and equally worthy of notice.

Woolf’s specific focus within the bed allows the reader to recognize that the attention to the snail is also an arbitrary choice among the rich range

<sup>1</sup> Jeanette McVicker also sees a contrast but proceeds a step further in taking Woolf to be setting up a number of binary oppositions in her general “critique of Empire” (41). McVicker takes the main opposition in this interpretation to be between civilization and nature.

<sup>2</sup> A. O. Frank makes a similar point about our general orientation but offers a different interpretation of it. Drawing on the views of Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Guitari, Frank takes human self-absorption to be symptomatic of the inauthentic living driven by our basic fear of death: “[M]an projects his own nature and idea into the world and ignores the fact that death rules” (156). The Edward Bishop vs. Oliver Taylor discussion of the “it” in “Kew Gardens” is also grounded in the continental philosophical tradition though the emphasis is a bit differently placed in focusing on the human conditioning of space rather than the more specifically existentialist theme of inauthentic living prompted by fear of death.

<sup>3</sup> Diana Swanson calls this Woolf’s “Copernican Shift,” noting that the “human world is no longer at the center of [Woolf’s] writerly universe” (54).

<sup>4</sup> My method is to focus as much as possible on the text itself rather than approaching it with a prior interpretive framework. I do so to avoid simplifying, abstracting, categorizing, and so on—dangers that may lead us to think we are removed from that of which we are very much a part. I argue that this is a main theme of the story.



of options available, such as the perspective of the “angular green insect” (30) mentioned in the passage quoted from the story below. It is in this important transitional passage that Woolf draws a contrast between the snail’s thoughtful movements and those of the human passers by.<sup>5</sup> But, even here, our snail is not cast under a stark, oval spotlight causing him to wince from the brightness; the sunlight is soft, filtered by the leaves and flowers of the plants. It is an inviting light including the many things in the flowerbed around the snail; the light does not focus on the action of our star at the exclusion of his context or his own beauty but reveals his beauty with the rich diversity of the colors of his shell and the grace of his movements as highlighted by the passing light:

In the oval flower-bed the snail, whose shell had been stained red, blue and yellow for the space of two minutes or so, now appeared to be moving very slightly in its shell, and next began to labour over the crumbs of loose earth which broke away and rolled down as it passed over them. It appeared to have a definite goal in front of it, differing in this respect from the singular high stepping angular green insect who attempted to cross in front of it [...]. (30)

Here, the narrator notes that the snail seems to have a goal. This noted possibility is shifted to actuality as the point of view is relocated to the snail’s perspective. Once taking the snail’s point of view, we see that the snail not only has a goal but is also experiencing a struggle to reach it. It is concentrated on its task—deliberating before choosing a course among its obstacles.

Now as tempting as it is to ignore the work that Woolf has done in her introduction to the story and consider the humans to be the focus of the action when they enter the scene, we must allow ourselves to accept the perspective into which Woolf has ushered us. Human action is brought into this ongoing scene as a part of it. We follow the movements of color into the eyes of the humans whose movements contribute to a collective tempo and rhythm. The humans do not set the patterns although they do complicate them; their awkwardness, if jarring, belongs and even resembles something like zigzagging flights of butterflies.

The first human couple described is engaged in insincere conversation; one of the couple is speaking of their current romantic relationship while the other is thinking of a different, past romantic relationship. We expect to learn more about these humans—about their relationship, physical characteristics, personalities, and so on. Yet, we are in for a surprise. We do not follow the human characters in the course of their walk and conversation to find out these details. They simply move on. Woolf leads us gently back to the flowerbed.<sup>6</sup>

When we consider the humans from the scope of attention to the flowerbed or the perspective of the snail, they seem a bit loud, clumsy, and simply something to be withstood. We notice, however, that the snail’s perspective is limited just as the human perspective is limited. The snail’s challenges have their significance in parallel to the humans’ interest in their own affairs. But the snail’s perspective also draws a contrast—the snail’s concerns are focused and deliberate; the snail is careful in taking steps to reach its goal; the snail is not insincere. The snail’s interests are simpler and, in their simplicity, come across as more wholesome. In these ways, the snail demonstrates an ethical maturity that the humans do not. Further, while the humans are oblivious to the

snail, the snail recognizes and accepts the passing humans as something of a passing gust. As we consider this section of the story, we may note that our snail is now “he”—not “it”:

Brown cliffs with deep green lakes in the hollows, flat, blade-like trees that waved from root to tip, round boulders of grey stone, vast crumpled surfaces of a thin crackling texture—all these objects lay across the snail’s progress between one stalk and another to his goal. Before he had decided whether to circumvent the arched tent of a dead leaf or to breast it there came past the bed the feet of other human beings. (30-31)

As pairs of humans pass by, our snail has considered his course. Now Woolf brings us to appreciate nuances of the snail’s experience in the scope of what he notices, the effort it takes for him to move, and even details of his maneuvering of his body: “[H]e was doubtful whether the thin texture which vibrated with such an alarming crackle when touched even by the tips of his horns would bear his weight; and this determined him finally to creep beneath it” (33). And then there are more human passersby.

These humans, too, are awkward members of the ongoing, living scene to which we are drawn, but they are members nonetheless; the movements of the man in the second pair are likened to those of an “impatient carriage horse tired of waiting outside a home” with the difference that the man’s movements are “irresolute and pointless” (31).

In addition to being insincere and awkward, the humans do not really see what is around them. One member of the third pair sees the flowers in the flowerbed “through the pattern of falling words [...] as a sleeper waking from a heavy sleep sees a brass candlestick reflecting the light in an unfamiliar way, and closes his eyes and opens them” (32). As this human comes closer actually to noticing our larger world, she pays less attention to the content of human speech, which is already presented by Woolf in such a way that it comes across as babble; speech is part of the general pattern of sounds. Human speech loses its specific importance in this larger context as it is recognized in the collective; the young people in the last pair have voices that are “toneless and monotonous” (34)—speech as sound is enjoined into the hum of everyday living.

Woolf finally returns us from the snail’s perspective in the bed to the wider world. But we notice things differently than when we first blundered into the story expecting the usual fare focusing on the actions of humans. Woolf has prompted a change of perspective in her readers. When she brings us back from the flowerbed, we notice things outside of ourselves. And, in doing so, we escape for a moment the stark spotlight of our own gaze; we are inclined instead to notice the others with whom we share our basic course of living.

Woolf completes this transition by further blurring boundaries between humans and their surroundings; their bodies are “dissolved in the green-blue atmosphere;” they are no longer of themselves but “shapes of all these colours” and “dissolv[e] like drops of water in the yellow and green atmosphere” (35). She invites the final unity through appealing to sound in the passage quoted below. There, she identifies as “voices” fresh sounds generated by children and ceaseless mechanical sounds of cities in such a way that these other voices without words are leveled with human speech. Words, in turn, lose their centrality, their particularity; words are relevant for their contributing sounds, not their meanings. Words are cast simply as a part of a larger aural environment—sounds occurring as part of a larger and collective aural image. The visual objects, similarly, lose their particularity. Finally, the collection of aural images and the collection of visual images merge together:

Voices. Yes, voices. Wordless voices, breaking the silence suddenly with such depth of contentment, such passion of desire, or, in the voices of children, such freshness of surprise; breaking the silence?

<sup>5</sup> Tony Davenport also notes this contrast: “The writer’s interest [...] was in creating two layers of apprehension, one representing the place as an exotic, slow-moving and continuous world of plants and light seen on the scale of snails, and the other registering the immediate random presences of the human beings who come and go” (169-70).

<sup>6</sup> Christine Reynier’s analysis focuses on Woolf’s general literary techniques, especially her use of punctuated time. She sees Woolf as depicting a “world of tension [...] whose motto could be [...] unity-disparity” (50)—showing that “the interrupted conversation [...] its gaps and parasitic noises, becomes a Woolfian topos where the external world and the world of language are set against each other and intertwined” (46).

But there was no silence; all the time the motor omnibuses were turning their wheels and changing their gear; like a vast nest of Chinese boxes all of wrought steel turning ceaselessly one within another the city murmured; on the top of which the voices cried aloud and the petals of myriads of flowers flashed their colors into the air. (36)

In this way, Woolf's play with our attention and awareness is completed. I have suggested that her maneuvering of the reader's attention has an ethical thrust. She has drawn a careful contrast between the snail's world on the one hand and the insincerity, awkwardness, and self-absorption of humans on the other. Woolf highlights our tendency to miss the nuances of the rhythms of living in orienting ourselves to what is limiting and what also encourages us to isolate ourselves from what is subtle, simple, and sincere. Woolf's approach is gentle but the effect of checking our hubris is marked as, from this viewpoint, we find ourselves laughably awkward and transparent in our attempt to escape into our own affairs. But in being exposed and brought to a smaller and more humble state, we are more ourselves. Our isolation within familiar, human affairs is more clearly illusory. We see that we are already part of the general rhythms of a vibrant world—a world that invites our notice, respectful consideration, and integrity of living.

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*Ammonite Prehistoric Fossil by kongsky from freedigitalphotos.net*

#### Reading a Woolfian Sexuality in the Poetry of Marianne Moore

Notoriously, theorist Ihab Hassan uses a table of binary divisions to distinguish between modernism and postmodernism in which he assigns the "genital/phallic" with the former and the "polymorphous/androgynous" with its successor (123-24). Peculiarly, then, Marianne Moore, who fits critically among her peers of "high modernism," was fiercely condemned by second-wave feminists as they found her sexual identity and status as a woman writer weak and even, to some critics, non-existent (Leavell 220). This reception is far from that of Virginia Woolf, whom Showalter bemoans as having "for the past fifty years [...] dominated the imaginative territory of the English woman novelist," notwithstanding what she sees as Woolf's refusal to write the body (217). The strength in both Moore's *Collected Poems* and Woolf's *oeuvre* does not necessarily lie in "the quality of being sexual or possessing sex" but rather in the often ambivalent recognition of what constitutes sexuality and the preoccupation with handling it in a realistic and empathetic manner.<sup>1</sup> Of especial interest is the way that both make use of animals in their writing. With reference to *Mrs. Dalloway*, I note here that Woolf shares some thematic concerns with Moore's poem "The Paper Nautilus," particularly in terms of how exoskeleton-clad creature imagery is used to tease out a complex intersection between homemaking and female sexuality.

Richard Espley explains (in an analysis to which I am particularly indebted) that "alongside the 'real' scientific Zoological Gardens, there is a 'metaphorical' Zoo," and this "seething hotbed of animality" has been historically attributed to female sexuality (86, 87). When Moore and Woolf draw upon animal imagery, they complicate the notion that the natural world is inferior to the human one. They therefore allow the possibilities for the female tenor, the animal vehicle, and the relationship between these two positions to expand beyond the trappings of the classic sexual metaphor. This treatment takes on a particular significance because "modernism comes on the heels of Darwin's catastrophic blow to human privilege vis-à-vis the species question" (Rohman 1). Recognizing that Moore's work can be read, with Woolf, as demonstrating "not a psychosexual avoidance of fallacious human animality but a firm corrective response to its distasteful discourse" (Espley 89), we see Moore expressing the radicalism akin to trends in her modernist moment. As Bishop affectionately objected, "Do they not know that Marianne Moore was a feminist in her day? [...] Once, Marianne told me, she 'climbed a lamppost' in demonstration" (144).

At certain points Moore and Woolf are direct in their treatment of sexuality, and these moments register like a manifesto against which the rest of their work can be read. Rejected by the conventional socialite

<sup>1</sup> The first definition of sexuality in *The Oxford English Dictionary* is "the quality of being sexual or possessing sex." The third definition is "recognition of or preoccupation with what is sexual."

Lady Bruton, Clarissa's subsequent reflections form the confessional center of *Mrs. Dalloway*: Clarissa's "true nature is lesbian" (Rachman 10). Like Rachman, I see significance in the way this vision of intimacy with Sally requires a climb into the asexual space of the attic (10). This ascent is characterized by the need for privacy; Richard intuits that "she must sleep undisturbed" (26), and what eventually pulls Clarissa away from this memory, and back towards thoughts of the demands of the party, is the recollection of how Peter interrupted her kiss with Sally at Bourton, an interruption that was "like running one's face against a granite wall in the darkness! It was shocking; it was horrible!" (30). Her movement into the attic is described as "[l]ike a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower" (26). Notably, both of these figures are normally removed from the sexual sphere. Lesbianism, therefore, is portrayed as a withdrawal from patriarchy in a spiritual sense; it is armor against masculine intrusion. While this can be read as Woolf's evasion of the physical nature of lesbian sexuality, such a reading is complicated by the way Clarissa responds to Miss Kilman. Clarissa describes her as standing "with the power and taciturnity of some prehistoric monster armored for primeval warfare" (111). Taken in isolation, this utterance evokes the empty animal simile, where the referent is lost in confused notions about the overpowering sexual drive of the other and yet a dwindling inferiority before (in this case Clarissa's) human propriety. However, Clarissa faces this other at the tail end of a crisis during which she worries that the men she has pragmatically surrounded herself with are laughing at her triviality. They have too readily "classified" her. Miss Kilman, in contrast, has the metaphorical armor of an animal because her protective space does not confine her to an attic but permits her to operate in the world. It allows her to be armored for warfare against a system that would have her in fetters; as Clarissa says, "with another throw of the dice [...] she would have loved Miss Kilman! But not in this world" (9). There is strength of sexual representation here, because Woolf seems to be suggesting a slow, confused and imperfect movement towards sexual liberation over time, with Clarissa's generation struggling to work through distasteful discourses about sexuality.

Read with her array of animal poems, Moore's "Marriage" stands out as having a similar manifesto component to it. In this poem, Eve is an intellectual "able to write simultaneously / in three languages— / English, German and French" (25-27). Yet when she asks to be alone, Adam replies with "why not be alone together?" (34). Moore describes this situation as one "requiring all one's criminal ingenuity / to avoid!" (16-17). In a similar way to Clarissa, Eve must use her resourcefulness in order to seek sexual autonomy, through retiring from the space of men as the only option available to her. This very direct and honest treatment of sexuality puts Moore's animal poems in context. Like Woolf, Moore is drawn to the animal because of its ability to exist in the world in a manner that avoids *Homo sapiens* and the particular patriarchy that entails. For these writers, the animal is self-sufficient and enviable for embodying a site in which (un)ruly behavior may be conducted.

Clarissa is frequently described as if she is surrounded by a protective *shell* that she has self-fashioned, and this occurs particularly at times of creative response to confined environs.<sup>2</sup> This protective measure can be read as both an acknowledgement of the artistic demand to negotiate difference without losing identity in an unhealthy way and the need to respond to one's surroundings with one's own body. Woolf characterizes the balanced artist as one who is able to take on and off her "shell."<sup>3</sup> When Clarissa withdraws from the streets of London, she begins to construct her dress, or her exterior, in preparation for the party, and this activity continues until the point when Peter interrupts by bursting through the drawing room door. The construction of the dress, which is accompanied by sea-scape imagery (33), has interesting parallels with

<sup>2</sup> For example see Peter's description of Clarissa's gift for "making a world of her own wherever she happened to be" (66).

<sup>3</sup> This is the great achievement of the narrator in Woolf's "Street Haunting: A London Adventure." She is able to leave her "shell-like covering" at home and enter the street as "a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye" (*Selected Essays* 178).

Nancy at the party later that evening, who "stood there looking as if her body had merely put forth, of its own accord, a green frill" (157). Clarissa's artistic expression incorporates her sexuality and womanhood, but as her indignation at being interrupted illustrates, it is not limited to them. Her creativity is not a "mute facticity of the feminine, awaiting signification from an opposing masculine subject" (Butler 50).<sup>4</sup> Peter Walsh interrupts the solitary "calm" (33) that she feels. He tilts his penknife towards her creation, causing Clarissa to "hide her dress, like a virgin protecting chastity, respecting privacy" (34). His intrusion denies her the privacy of her artistic space, a space created from what is natural and familiar to Clarissa. Because she refuses him, Peter says, "That was the *devilish* part of her—this coldness, this woodenness, something very profound in her, which he had found again this morning talking to her; an impenetrability" (53; my emphasis).

Like Clarissa, Moore's paper nautilus creates her shell and brings forth her offspring from an environment apparently devoid of any exterior influence. Her celibacy becomes her aesthetic. The opening verse poses two suggestions for how the sea creature may be metaphorically compared to the human: either as an allegory for "authorities whose hopes / are shaped by mercenaries" or for "Writers entrapped by / teatime fame" (1-4). Moore answers her own suggestions with, "Not for these / the paper nautilus / constructs her thin glass shell" (5-7). Moreover, the creature's sexuality is not her exclusive economic possession: she is buried in her own eight *laboring* arms.<sup>5</sup> Ross's description of "The Paper Nautilus" as a "fable on [...] maternal love" (337) is not sufficient to encapsulate Moore's fascination with the shell. Moore breaks open the trivializing elements of the animal metaphor by moving away from classic comparisons of sexuality in order to focus on other scientific processes. This "real scientific" animal can be compared to Clarissa; she constructs an artistic product because of, or despite, the necessities of her biological surroundings. Moore celebrates this ability to resist easy classification (a resistance that Clarissa is in the ambivalent process of working through) and function dually as an artist as well as a female by using the same word that Woolf has Peter call Clarissa. She says that this animal is "in / a sense a *devil-* / fish" (17-19; my emphasis).

We see here that both writers are complicating the notion of easy classification and comparison, rather than rejecting the idea that some similarity between the female situation and the animal world could be explored. Carol J. Adams proposes in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* that "the oppression of women and other animals [is] interdependent" (29). While this work is undoubtedly controversial, Rohman's discussion of the modernist period asserts that "displacing animality onto marginalized groups [...] is a common feature of modernist literature" (29-30).<sup>6</sup> Neither Moore nor Woolf endorses this discourse, or that of genius with its tendency to focus on virility and superiority over the animal. Instead they celebrate the animal for its ability to labor in the small scale of its natural environment. Peter finds Clarissa's focus ridiculously small-scale as he speculates that "here she's been sitting all the time I've been in India; mending her dress; playing about" (35). He finds the dress a symbol of "having a Conservative husband" (35) and therefore fails to understand that choosing Richard for a spouse allows Clarissa "a little independence [...]" between people living together day in day out in the same house" (5). This sexual independence allows Clarissa to be an artist, albeit on a modest scale, and there is a sense that Clarissa's party is her only way to express herself within a circumscribed environment. She

<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler describes this muteness as a nature/culture discourse, which regularly features nature as feminine. While Woolf does not fully deconstruct associations between nature and femininity, she complicates the notion of the former's muteness.

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of the economics of sexual allure and the role of aging in *Mrs. Dalloway* see Katherine Sedon's "Moments of Aging: Revising Mother Nature in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*," especially 164. Notions of labor sit nicely with recent studies that have stressed the social and political engagement of Virginia Woolf and the wider Bloomsbury Group.

<sup>6</sup> For Adams's account of the polarized response to *The Sexual Politics of Meat* see "Preface to the Tenth Anniversary Edition" (9-25).



is therefore admired and celebrated by onlookers as “a creature floating in its element” (154). With Moore also, as Donald Hall terms it, it “often feels that her admiration for armored animals is a professional’s respect for another professional” (94). Moore attempts to engage in a reciprocal metaphor with the paper nautilus; Moore mimics the sea creature’s creativity in confined space, and both she and it practice their craft on “paper.” Furthermore, Moore reverently appropriates the shell’s “close- / laid Ionic chiton-folds / like the lines in the mane of / a Parthenon horse” (29-31) by not capitalizing the beginnings of her lines, as if each part is equally labored over in order to achieve the final product. The creature works in self-imposed enclosed freedom, because the Ionian pillars of its shell form an exclusive chamber which cannot be penetrated by another.<sup>7</sup> Just as Bloomsbury allowed Woolf the opportunity to “live differently” (*The Years* 369), Moore cohabited with her mother in order to choose her “own version of sexual exclusion” (Brownstein 328). This “outsider” status registers with an enthusiasm in their work, and this, as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have noted, stands in contrast to high modernist male writers, who tend to more fully align seclusion with existential angst (Gilbert and Gubar 3). There is strength in this ability to engineer an alternative discourse concerning the role of sexuality in modern writing; as Woolf says in “Women and Fiction,” “If, then, one should try to sum up the character of women’s fiction at the present moment, one would say that it is courageous” (*Selected Essays* 137).

Contrary to Moore’s experience, the modernist novel expands the sentence to make it plastic and inclusive. Woolf was inspired by the Joycean and Proustian sentences, which would later be called examples of *écriture féminine*. Cixous argues that this kind of writing inherently debunks the authority of singular representation, thereby allowing a bisexual texture and a non-violent, open response to the other (Bray 83). It is on comparable, deconstructive grounds that theorists such as Toril Moi (9-18) and Patricia Morgne Cramer (184-94) have countered the notion that Woolf was too estranged from her body through frigidity and celibacy to be capable of writing about female sexuality. Moore is just as able to lay claim to this non-violent position; she just does so from within poetry, where “compression is the first grace of style” (1), as she describes it in “To a Snail.” This is in a sense a greater feat because of Pound and Eliot’s insistence of the masculine in poetry, which Joyce says “ends [the] idea of poetry for ladies” (11). Like her male contemporary poets, Moore uses “alien” voice and dislocated space. However, she comes closer to a Woolfian aesthetic in what Jeredith Merrin describes as her fresh combination of modernist “multiple perspectivism” with “a strong distaste for dogmatism, egocentricity, and domination” (Merrin 143).

Bearing in mind that this needs in no way undermine the erotic potential of Woolf’s textual strategy, reading Moore’s animal imagery with Woolf can be a productive way of drawing out shared themes, such as the negotiation of bodily boundaries and the exercise of forming sexually autonomous space. This, however, is not to suggest that Woolf and Moore are always irreproachably conscientious with the animal image. Where Woolf does not conclusively renounce what Clarissa embodies as she gazes upon the “unruly other” in Miss Kilman, Moore is seemingly so eager to assimilate the bodily rules of the animal as to risk *personification* and the flattening of difference. However, what does become evident is that under the constraints of their selected genres, their work illustrates the difficulty, long-standing labor, and sacrifice—with substantial return—inherent in establishing a position from which to decipher those tropes about violence and passion that Espley calls “often so pervasive in the culture as to pass unnoticed” (86).

Considering this, I suggest that Moore’s critical reception can allow for interesting insights into Virginia Woolf. While it has been critically

important to counteract clichés about Woolf’s “frigidity,” perhaps Moore’s reception can help us to understand our criteria when selecting passages for proceeding to discuss the former’s sexuality. A strong representation of sexuality can come from complexity as much as from consistency, and we have seen that Moore and Woolf have been able to explore a more interesting animality by utilizing an outsider’s position to think beyond the field of conventional sexual analogy. Perhaps, therefore, we can come to feel an aptness for the still extant position that Woolf holds in literary criticism in Linda Leavell’s lament that “We have come to know Moore as a gendered poet but not yet as a sexual one. The blindness lies partly in our age. We accept any sexual preference—except celibacy” (220).

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<sup>7</sup> I am thinking here of the comparable intersection of liberation and confinement in the Bloomsbury Group, as proposed in Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace’s *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (im)positionings*, especially 58-59. Woolf articulates this politically committed position in *The Years* where she terms it: “to live differently [...] to speak the truth” (369).

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Grove Snail by Simon Howden from freedigitalphotos.net

### “The curious phenomenon of your occipital horn”:<sup>1</sup> Spiraling around Snails and Slugs in Virginia Woolf

Michael Whitworth declares that “Virginia Woolf was fond of metaphors of snails, of vulnerable souls secreting protective shells” (1), yet the most famous snails in Woolf’s *oeuvre*, the two who appear in her early short stories, “Kew Gardens” and “The Mark on the Wall,” seem anything but vulnerable and explicitly nonhuman. In both cases the small creatures exist as independent beings, somewhat mysterious in their autonomy, linked to author and readers through the metaphorical processes of story-telling. In “Kew Gardens” the snail’s purposeful progress is the meandering trail that knits the story together; in “The Mark on the Wall,” the snail nails down the circuitous route of associations by which the story proceeds. How did such lowly scraps of animate matter become the bearers of such significance? A brief survey of Woolf’s many uses of and associations with snails shows that, as with many of her natural references, there is a lifetime of observation, emotional resonance, and symbolic elaboration underwriting the many tenors of these miniature vehicles.

Snails and their unlovely siblings, slugs, seem to have been something of a continuous presence in Woolf’s country life in Sussex and elsewhere. Appearing first in her letters to Violet Dickinson, the invertebrate beings are initially presented as metaphors for a state of wary sensitivity. In October of 1905 Virginia Stephen refers to her socialite friend Kitty Maxse’s irritating presence in the country “as salt to a very sensitive snail” and describes herself as a kind of “slug or snail” shut out of the “unreal Paradise” of Kitty’s marriage (L1 209). A year and a half later, in April 1907, she extends the identification to her friend Violet: “you strange sensitive creature with horns flickering like a snail” (L1 292).<sup>2</sup>

Woolf’s journal on the August trip to Playden in Sussex that same year evokes another facet of molluskan significance: the cozy self-sufficiency of living inside an extruded shell. Meditating on the long and varied history of places such as Rye, Woolf compares the accumulated complexity of the town to a “chambered nautilus” (PA 367).<sup>3</sup> The next entry extends the metaphor; describing the village of Peasmarsh, apparently the first site in Sussex where she imagined making a permanent home, she wonders if someday the name will be so familiar “that the surface shell of it will have no existence” and fantasizes about whether a “dark dry little house”—“a little snail shell of a place, just off the road”—could be made habitable for the summer (PA 368). These first appearances set up a basic valence in Woolf’s treatment of

snails and slugs in her works, letters, and diaries.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, like slugs, snails are often presented as images of somewhat squeamish vulnerability, the victims of pecking thrushes, crunching feet, or heartless salting. On the other hand, their spiral shells evoke architectural references that associate snails with the greater houses of civilization.

Slugs in Woolf’s usage are almost universal figures of opprobrium bordering on horror. Sometimes, as in the reference to herself as a slug shut out of paradise, the references are only mildly derisive. In May of 1916 Virginia tells Vanessa about meeting Walter Lamb in Kew Gardens: “Poor creature! He knows he’s but a slug” (L2 96). In her diary of September 1923, Woolf complains of wanting company, saying there are times “when I relish the commonest animated slug” (D2 269). And in March 1930, writing to Hugh Walpole, she describes herself as having been ill with influenza: “I turned over like a slug and slept the month of February out” (L4 152). But more commonly, and with more frequency as she gets older, Woolf refers to people she dislikes as slugs, often conjuring up quite ugly images. In March of 1928 in a letter to Vanessa, she likens Dorothy Todd, the London editor of *Vogue*, to “a slug with a bleeding gash for a mouth” (L3 478). Depressed over the squalidness of life in Ireland, in April of 1934 Woolf chronicles spending a “pompous and pretentious” night with “baboon [Cyril Vernon] Conolly & his gollywog slug wife Jean” (D4 210) and in October of 1936 calls Ottoline Morrell’s friend Charles Morgan a “white and voluble slug” (L6 77). Only a month or so before her suicide, in February of 1941, Woolf’s disgust with a “fat, smart woman” and her “shabby dependent” stuffing their faces with cakes in Brighton reaches a crescendo of abuse as she asks in her diary, “Where does the money come to feed these fat, white slugs. Brighton a love corner for slugs” (D5 357).

In Woolf’s world, both slugs and snails are relentlessly destroyed by humans as garden pests. In 1928, she responds graciously to Ethyl Sands’ gift of a writing desk by threatening a reciprocal excess of letters, saying, “You will be wishing you had trod on your generosity as Nan treads on her slugs” (L3 528). Garden snails were also a nuisance at Monk’s House where, in 1936, she tells Vanessa, “The garden is full of Zinnias. The Zinnias are full of slugs. L. goes out at night with a lantern and collects snails, which I hear him cracking” (L6 58).<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the most vivid images of snail murder in Woolf are attributed to the predation of birds, especially thrushes, and here the emphasis begins to shift towards a somewhat sympathetic anthropomorphizing of their vulnerability.<sup>6</sup> The image first appears in *Mrs. Dalloway* as one in a series of vignettes stitched together by the aeroplane crossing above the London parks and disappearing over the suburban woods “where adventurous thrushes hopping boldly, glancing quickly, snatched the snail and tapped him on a stone, once, twice, thrice” (MD 27). The suspicion that this snail bears some resemblance to Septimus Smith, pecked at by “Human nature [...] the repulsive brute with blood-red nostrils” in the persons of Drs. Holmes and Bradshaw (MD 90), is confirmed by the repeated predation on snails in *The Waves* where they are mentioned more frequently than in any other work by Woolf. Rhoda and Louis, the two characters who most often see themselves as victims, are most closely identified with snails. Rhoda sees a “grey-shelled snail” draw across the path in the opening exchanges of the novel (W 4), and Louis too sees a snail, just after he makes the admission “I am the

<sup>1</sup> The quotation is from Marianne Moore’s poem, “To a Snail.” Thanks to Catherine Paul for suggesting it to me.

<sup>2</sup> In May of 1928 Woolf similarly describes her vulnerability to the ridicule of Vanessa and Duncan “who only draw me out to pour salt on my horns” (L3 499).

<sup>3</sup> This is the only place I could find where Woolf directly refers to a chambered nautilus—of course famous from the 1858 poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes, an acquaintance and fellow “fireside poet” of Woolf’s godfather, James Russell Lowell. But as I will go on to show, the image of the spiral as a spiritual stairway towards wisdom does seem to remain in the back of her mind.

<sup>4</sup> There are 30 mentions of snails in Woolf’s published works; another 16 make appearances in diaries and letters that were only published after her death. Slugs, appear far less frequently in public texts—only four times—but make a dozen appearances in diaries and letters.

<sup>5</sup> In this activity Leonard is similar to Lady Lasswade in *The Years*, who complains in the Present Day section that the staircases leading up to Delia’s London party are not adapted for old people who’ve “been kneeling on damp grass killing slugs” (Y 374).

<sup>6</sup> Woolf may have encountered W. H. Hudson’s account of thrush predation on Sussex snails in Chapter 4 of *Nature in Downland*.

weakest, the youngest of them all” (W 69); in addition, both Rhoda and Louis are described as having eyes the color of snails (W 16, 146).

The thrushes start attacking the snails in the Fourth Interlude—“*They spied a snail and tapped the shell against a stone. They tapped furiously, methodically, until the shell broke and something slimy oozed from the crack*” (W 78; italics in original), and their attack is immediately employed as metaphor for the passage into adult relationships.<sup>7</sup> Louis imagines that to be loved by Susan “would be to be impaled by a bird’s sharp beak” (W 86), and Bernard describes his own betrothal in similar terms except that he is the bird who frees himself from the shell of his ego: “We who have been separated by our youth (the oldest is not yet twenty-five), who have sung like eager birds each his own song and tapped with the remorseless and savage egotism of the young our own snail-shell till it cracked (I am engaged)” (W 89). This metaphor is repeated in Bernard’s soliloquy when he refers to Jinny, Susan and Rhoda as “birds who sang with the rapt egotism of youth by the window; broke their snails on stones, dipped their beaks in sticky, viscous matter” (W 183).<sup>8</sup>

Despite their at times grotesque vulnerability, snails also have more positive anthropomorphic connotations, especially when the focus is on the spiral of their protective shell. In the Third Interlude as the birds begin to sing together in chorus they become intensely conscious of a single object: “*Perhaps it was a snail shell, rising in the grass like a grey cathedral, a swelling building burnt with dark rings and shadowed green by the grass*” (W 52; italics in original). The birds’ awareness of the monumental shell, coming as it does before the chapter devoted to the children’s experiences in college and the wider world, echoes and forecasts other architectural references to snail shells as metaphors for human endeavor. In *Jacob’s Room* Woolf suggests that “if there is such a thing as a shell secreted by man to fit man himself” it is the great dome of St. Paul’s: “the volute on the top of the snail shell” (JR 65). A similar image appears in Woolf’s diary of a trip through France in 1928: “I see Chartres in particular, the snail, with its head straight, marching across the flat country, the most distinguished of churches” (D3 179), and is echoed in *Orlando* by Shelmardine’s repeated use of snail shells in making models of his passage around Cape Horn (O 188, 189, 190).

I maintain that these architectural fantasies also appear obliquely in *The Waves* with the image of the country home or palace blueprint that for Rhoda represents the culmination of human civilization: the oblong that is set upon a square (rather like the oval-shaped flower garden in Kew). Appearing for the first time as a gift consoling Rhoda for Percival’s death, the figure represents “the perfect dwelling place” and is initially presented—like the dome of St. Paul’s in *Jacob’s Room*—with a flourish on top: “Wander no more, I say; this is the end. The oblong has been set upon the square; the spiral is on top” (W 118).

Tenuous as it may seem, this connection between spirals, architecture, and snails suggests a kind of metaphorical complex richly informing readings of Woolf’s snails as producing creative works of art. In her 1925 essay on “American Fiction,” Woolf characterizes Sinclair Lewis’s relentless realism using a snail metaphor: “Far from being shellless, however, his books, one is inclined to say, are all shell; the only doubt is whether he has left any room for the snail” (*The Moment and Other Essays* 118). She employs a similar metaphor describing the genesis of her own novel *Mrs. Dalloway* in the 1928 Introduction to the Modern Library edition: “the idea started as the oyster starts or the snail to secret

<sup>7</sup> In the third Interlude birds “plunged the tips of their beaks savagely” into a sticky mixture which is either the “[y]ellow excretions” of a slug or the slug itself (W 53). If the slugs are metaphors of the children’s development, they have not yet hardened the shells of their ego.

<sup>8</sup> On a personal note, twice in 1933 Woolf refers to Ethel Smyth as a thrush pecking at her shell: “yesterday it was like being a snail shell & having a thrush tapping till the beak of her incessant voice broke my skull” (D4 147), and “Its like being a snail and having your brain cracked by a thrush—hammer, hammer, hammer” (L5 160).

a house for itself” (qtd. in Beja 198). And when she is in despair in 1933 over the endless revisions of what was to become *The Years*, she exclaims, “No, I can’t look at The Pargiters. Its an empty snail shell” (D4 161).<sup>9</sup>

These images of snail shells as the houses of fiction resonate for me with Woolf’s many evocations of spirals as manifestations of artistic creativity. In “The String Quartet” (perhaps the same one Rhoda listened to) Woolf describes the music as “somehow ascending in exquisite spirals into the air” (CSF 139). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, similarly, “Faint sounds rose in spirals up the well of the stairs” (37), much as the sounds and sights of the garden mount “up the spiral stairway into [Orlando’s] brain” (13) and the colors of paint rush “spirally” through my body” in “Walter Sickert” (CDB 189).

Few critics analyzing “Kew Gardens” and “The Mark on the Wall” examine the complicated web of associations underlying snails and their spiral shells in Woolf’s entire body of work. Early critics such as Dean Baldwin do not pay much attention to the animal identity of the mark on the wall and stress the “startlingly human characteristics” of the snail in “Kew Gardens” (16). Later critics outline a more complicated set of functions, moving from emphasizing the metaphoric identity of the snail with humans to recognizing its separate autonomy as a natural being.

Seeing “The Mark on the Wall” as inscribing a dichotomy between “deductive hypothesis” and “series of reflections,” Nora Sellei ends up inadvertently making the snail into something of a symbol of fixed and objective truth (195-96). Since “the non-identification of the mark [...] becomes the metaphor for ontological uncertainty” (195), the snail becomes identified with ontological certainty, the nailing down of meaning. While similarly characterizing the snail as “something definite and real,” Joanne Trautmann Banks presents it as a representative of “Nature’s reality” (20). Like Sellei and Banks, Michael Whitworth reads the story as a philosophical exploration of the comparative importance of “the contents of consciousness” and “external objects” (119). Gendering the split between a Victorian and masculine world which sees things in terms of hierarchies and norms and “a liberated but more private world in which the norms have been destroyed,” he does not explicitly identify the snail with either side (119). But knowing Woolf’s later associations with snails creates a layer of ambivalent amusement over these dichotomies: that a creature which is so often pierced by other beings should be mistaken for a nail is as hilariously ironic as the idea that such a lowly and indeed squishy pest should be a stand in for a phallogocentric hegemony.

Interpretations of the snail in “Kew Gardens” reach towards a similar complexity. Sellei sees the snail as being something of a liberating figure, its “neutral or nonhuman perspective” representing the impersonal voice which replaces the convention of the omniscient narrator (197). Michelle Levy also emphasizes the nonhuman status of the snail in “Kew Gardens,” seeing it as part of Woolf’s project of decentering the human presence in fiction” and making “serious what appears insignificant” (145). And Michael Whitworth notes how the shift to the snail’s perspective allows Woolf to “question the importance of the humans who walk around the garden” (120); since the snail has a purpose and the humans don’t, the snail becomes in some sense more human than the humans.

In her 2012 study of Woolf and the modernist uses of nature, *In the Hollow of the Wave*, Bonnie Kime Scott chronicles the many ways that Woolf’s “most memorable natural images [...] fuse with the identity of the animals or human beings who perceive them” (213). Snails and slugs metaphorically enact this fusion: images of both the self and the other, they not only personify laziness, conspicuous consumption, and

<sup>9</sup> The culmination of the snail-as-house metaphor comes in 1935 when, overwhelmed with the “equipage” cluttering “the complete English gentleman’s home,” Woolf imagines “how a house should be portable like a snail shell” (D4 340).



vulnerability but also represent autonomy, self-sufficiency, and the highest of human artistic accomplishments. It is no wonder, then, that at the very beginning of her writing career Woolf should prefer to “write in my own way of ‘four Passionate Snails’ than be, as K. M. [Katherine Mansfield] maintains, Jane Austen over again” (D1 316; underline in original).

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*Anna and Tiko breeding 2008 (2341208883)*  
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#### “Like Snake that Swallows toad”: Woolf and Male Cultural Power

Watching a snake take a toad on Skipwith Common, Yorkshire recently, I recalled Woolf’s similar sighting in early September 1935 (D4 337-38). As readers have long noted, Woolf’s encounter underlies that grisly moment in *Between the Acts*, when Giles bloodily stamps to death a snake which is trying, unsuccessfully, to swallow a toad. Mark Hussey’s Cambridge University Press edition of Woolf’s final novel offers, in addition to her diary and other sources, associations from *Paradise Lost*’s portrayal of Satan. Hussey also accepted, for that edition, my own suggestion of Andrew Marvell’s verse satire *The Loyall Scot* as a further literary echo.

Woolf had set herself the timely project of systematically reading Marvell at his 1921 tercentenary (D2 114). Specifically, this was in response to T. S. Eliot’s influential efforts to secure for the poet a more settled canonization. Her appropriations of Marvell (Eliot had had his own), which I have elsewhere traced throughout *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, continued during the 1920s and ’30s. In effect, this allusive praxis constituted a subterranean resistance, under figure, to the “magisterial” (D2 292) Eliot’s paternalistic cultural authority. Woolf was still “reading [...] Marvell of an evening” in late 1933 (D4 199).

In 1935, Eliot’s mere cultural presence inhibited Woolf’s writing of *The Years*: “reflections on Tom week end: that [*The Years*] is too long. Cant write. That he is more masterly; tells a story like one who has the right” (D4 343). She told herself she was “at last not much knocked off my perch by [Eliot]. That is, not as I was when he came here & I was writing Jacob’s Room” (D4 344). So the problem was an old one. In 1934, she resolved that “I cant be frozen off with [Eliot’s] divine authority any longer” (D4 263). But this determination was wishful, a symptom of longstanding unease. For on first meeting Eliot in 1918, she had found him “intolerant, with strong views” (D1 218); and in 1920, “felt him & his views dominant and subversive” (D2 67). As a result, the needful motivation to write *Jacob’s Room* could and did flag, because “Eliot [...] made me listless; cast shade upon me” (D2 68). By November 1921, after he had praised her work, Woolf was “disappointed to find that I am no longer afraid of him” (D2 140). Yet as has been noted, Woolf’s felt overshadowing by Eliot would recur into late-career. He would remain an affectionately feared master.

To return to *Between the Acts*, Woolf’s library contained Alexander Grosart’s 1872 *The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Andrew Marvell M. P.*; but she would not find her literary snake and toad there, as Grosart thought the lines spurious. However, the Woolfs also had H. M. Margoliouth’s 1927 two-volume *The Poems & Letters of Andrew Marvell*, which presented the disputed passages in smaller font, and which did contain this striking image.

Marvell's poem, *The Loyall Scot*, ventriloquised John Cleveland, reversing the tendency of Cleveland's *The Rebel Scot*. In the opinion of Marvell's most recent editor, Nigel Smith, this was done to symbolically problematize that royalist poet's availability to Tory high politics (402-03). Similarly, Woolf's persistent reassignments of Marvellian imagery in her own praxis queried Eliot's right to attribute—from the great height of his cultural and political conservatism—selective poetic values to Marvell. Woolf was minded to address Eliot's dispensations, whether his cultural authority took the form of an informally “magisterial” manner, or whether, after his religious consolidation of 1927-28, that authority was increasingly refracted through his mystical royalism and his Anglo-Catholicism.

Marvell's revisionist poem is above all anti-authoritarian. He thought he detected a deplorable royalist drift toward the Bishop of Rome. He saw the Anglican bishops' swollen ambition to impose episcopacy on presbyterian Scotland as encroaching upon the crown's true prerogative. He could not know of the statecraft of Charles II's secret overtures to Louis XIV, or of the king's closet Romanism; but even so, he had read the political weather correctly. He did not relish the episcopal and archiepiscopal drive to conformity in England, regarding this as a popish instinct; and he reacted strongly to any signs of apparent pro-Catholic bias at Court.

Hence chief among the bishops accused of “Eating their brethren” is “an Apochriphall Archbishop Bell / [who] Like Snake that Swallowes toad doth Dragon swell.” A snake swallowing a toad was no doubt a common enough sight in Marvell's native Yorkshire. It was his personal supplement to his allusion to the Apocrypha's *Bel and the Dragon*, a fact which would have been evident to contemporary Bible readers. The simile's hierophant assumes inflated proportions, just as a snake would look bloated upon swallowing a toad.

Woolf's own reptile, “curled in an olive green ring” (*Between the Acts* 72), is an unthreatening grass snake. Its need to eat cannot harm Giles, though toads had best look out. Its plight with the uningestible toad is in palpable contrast with Giles's violent, pseudomessianic craving for action (cf. Genesis 3:15 and Romans 16:20). Yet there are other, less visible, undertones to Woolf's imagery here.

The incident appears during a break in a theatrical event, namely the village pageant. There are also vignettes within the play, whose spectators, observing a stage audience, rightly wonder: “Were they about to act a play [...] Was this, perhaps, the Globe theatre?”—concluding, “Yes; it was a scene from a play” (64). The amateur actors change costume during the interval (71), and it is at this point that the restless Giles finds “a snake [...] choked with a toad in its mouth [and] unable to swallow” and sees the toad's “blood.” The sight is “monstrous,” a “birth” gone wrong (72).

One of Woolf's literary sources is evident from the following lines in volume one of Margoliouth's 1927 Marvell edition. The lines, which help to clarify which lexical and ideational elements triggered her memory, conclude by referring to Colonel Blood's 1671 attempt on the crown jewels. Marvell writes, against the authoritarian Anglican bishops (Margoliouth switching from smaller to larger font after “swell,” giving accidental prominence to “Blood”):

Their Companies the worst that ever playd  
And their Religion all but Masquerade.  
The Conscious Prelate therefore did not Err,  
When for a Church hee built a Theatre.  
A Congruous Dress they to themselves Adapt,  
Like Smutty Storyes in Pure Linnen Wrapt.  
Doe but the Pyebald Lordships once Uncase  
Of Rochets Tippetts Copes, and wheres their Grace?  
A Hungry Chaplain and a Starved Rat  
Eating their brethren Bishop Turn and Cat

But an Apochriphall Archbishop Bell  
Like Snake that Swallowes toad doth Dragon swell.  
When daring Blood to have his rents regain'd  
Upon the English Diadem distractin'd,  
Hee Chose the Cassock Circingle and Gown,  
The fittest Mask for one that Robs a Crown. (166-81)

The framing emphasis is on bad acting, on conscious theatricality, and on costumes which fool no one; and the poem pursues these topoi with its citation of Blood's futile clerical disguise, bringing the ideational “Snake that Swallowes toad” into fortuitous proximity with the simple lexis of “Blood.” Almost immediately thereafter in Margoliouth, Woolf will have read of a “Twin headed man / With single body,” summarized as “that [...] monster,” a Siamese twin recorded in various seventeenth and eighteenth century Scottish histories (Smith 409). The idea—unnatural birth and conjoining—and the lexis of monstrosity occur in the immediate vicinity of hammy theatricality and unapt costuming; and it was in this context that Woolf read, in Margoliouth's edition, of the “Snake that Swallowes toad,” and (fortuitously) of “Blood.” Just as Marvell did in this section of *The Loyall Scot*, Woolf too had been meditating the symbolic relations of power and costume. Her thinking was active along the lines of sexual rather than ecclesiastical politics; and she wondered, with Marvell in his poem, what it was, precisely, that privileged one nation over another. That much is evident from her 1936 and 1937 work on *Three Guineas*. Yet the Anglican hierarchy did not escape her censure either, as the text and plates of *Three Guineas* show.

Woolf's 1935 encounter with a snake trying to swallow a toad had been, by the time she came to write *Between the Acts*, processed through a robustly literary and political sensibility, and the incident was subsumed in her politicized aesthetic. She had felt, throughout her writings of the 1920s and '30s, a need to subvert Marvell's frequent, casual and ingrained sexism by atomizing and then reallocating elements of many of his much loved (not least by her) images and lyrical effects. But she was aware, too, of the ironies entailed in the anti-authoritarian Marvell's beatification and canonization, *ex cathedra*, at the hands of an ultraconservative like Eliot. Her numerous Marvell allusions are, cumulatively, acts of resistance to these different kinds of male cultural authority. They complicated the poems of the seventeenth-century poet, and they undermined the high eminence of his twentieth-century advocate. At the very least, Woolf asserts an equal right, with Eliot, to read Marvell within the framework of her own political and aesthetic position, and to make his poetry serve that stance. Her snake-and-toad image in *Between the Acts* is disturbing and unforgettable. Giles's gratuitous force merely compounds its grossness. The image suggests how viscerally Woolf felt the stamp of authority, how monstrously hard to swallow she found male cultural power.

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*Muzlja Church Birds*

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### As Fish to Wanton Boys: Animal Suffering in *To the Lighthouse*

To convey the fragility of human life in *The Tragedy of King Lear*, Shakespeare writes, “Like flies to wanton boys are we to th’ gods; / They kill us for their sport” (Shakespeare IV.i. 37-38). In writing this simile, Shakespeare participates in a long-established literary tradition that attempts to make sense of the human condition by locating it within an existential spectrum bookended by animalkind and divinity. This literary tradition, in its modern Western form, is ultimately based in Christian tradition, for according to the Book of Genesis, God intends for mankind to both serve Him and exercise dominion over animalkind. Specifically, Shakespeare’s simile reflects the *Great Chain of Being*, a popular Elizabethan worldview based in the Christian creation myth that emphasized God’s creation of a highly-ordered universe in which humankind serves God and animalkind serves humankind; ultimately, this chain was devised based on the perceived potency and agency of each metaphorical link. However, as popular scientific and religious thought evolved in the British Isles, so did Britain’s authors’ reflections of this dynamic. Coupled with the onset of the Great War, these scientific developments prompted thinkers like Virginia Woolf to contemplate the fragile nature of human life. In her most popular novel, *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf uses representational means similar to Shakespeare’s, and even though she rearranges their components, she offers a conclusion consistent with the Bard’s.

Initially, young Jasper Ramsay acts as one of Shakespeare’s *wanton boys* by shooting innocent birds for fun, an activity he seems to enjoy routinely. Though Woolf does not directly compare these birds to human sufferers like Shakespeare compares flies to human beings, she offers details that allow readers to access human empathy for the creatures. Significantly, the birds are anthropomorphized by Mrs. Ramsay, Jasper’s mother, who names them Joseph and Mary; when she discovers her son shooting at the avian couple, Mrs. Ramsay asks if Jasper, “think[s] they mind [...] having their wings broken,” wondering why “he wanted to shoot poor old Joseph and Mary” (TTL 84). Through Mrs. Ramsay’s dominant narrative perspective, readers are steeped in a mindset that comprehends animal pain as a phenomenon shared by humankind; she applies a familiar, motherly concern—a fear of broken bones—to an experience not possibly undergone by human beings: broken wings. Jasper, however, in total disregard for the birds’ wellbeing, posits that his mother does “not understand the fun of shooting birds,” contending

that “they did not feel” (TTL 84). This amalgamation of Mrs. Ramsay’s empathy and Jasper’s *wanton* disposition produces a *readerly affect* similar to that of Shakespeare’s simile, challenging readers to consider animal and human suffering as a shared arbitrary experience.

Though not as violently as Jasper targets Joseph and Mary, the “[b] rooding” Nancy Ramsay torments minnows caught in a coastal tidal pool, “and cast vast clouds over this tiny world by holding her hand against the sun, and so brought darkness and desolation, like God himself, to millions of ignorant and innocent creatures” (TTL 78). Although Nancy’s actions may not reflect the *wanton* aggression exhibited by Shakespeare’s *boys* and Jasper Ramsay, Woolf’s essay “The Sun and Fish” provides biographical insight into the author’s representational intent. This essay not only names the scenario Nancy enacts, but records the author’s terror upon observing a 1927 solar eclipse, which she notably experienced in the same year she composed *To the Lighthouse*. After witnessing the sun fade, Woolf thought, “This is the end. The flesh and blood of the world was dead; only the skeleton was left” (“The Sun and the Fish” 187). Though Nancy does not cause these minnows to suffer physically, she does cast them into a world depicted as grim and chaotic, simulating to them the condition that would yield their non-being by enacting the desolation Woolf dreaded while witnessing the eclipse. Furthermore, as in Jasper’s case, Mrs. Ramsay—who feels intellectually overshadowed by her overbearing husband—facilitates the reader’s ability to understand the minnows’ experience as a form of suffering also experienced by human beings, for in Mr. Ramsay’s presence, Mrs. Ramsay “could feel his mind like a raised hand shadowing her mind [...] [when] her thoughts took a turn he disliked,” stifling her intellectual curiosity (TTL 125).

Lily Briscoe, the questioner herself, acts similarly to Nancy, thus aligning herself with Woolf’s *wanton* tormentors, for she “raised a little mountain for [...] ants to climb over,” and thereby “reduced them to a frenzy of indecision by this interference in their cosmogony” (TTL 200). As with the birds attacked by Jasper and the minnows in Nancy’s tidal pool, these ants are loaded with heightened representational stakes, for Lily notices they are “red, energetic, shiny ants, rather like Charles Tansley” (TTL 13, 200). Throughout the novel, Tansley is consistently represented as a pessimistic atheist—and an intellectual devotee of Mr. Ramsay, the stoic philosopher—whose caustic personality and chauvinist outlook clash with Lily’s search for human connection and artistic fulfillment. Thus, Lily’s projection of her resentment for Tansley onto the ants places her in the position of Shakespeare’s *wanton boys*, terrorizing insects comparable to human beings.

Perhaps most significantly in regard to the motif of animal suffering, Lily terrorizes the ants soon after she poses thematic questions that broach the themes explored in Shakespeare’s simile. While thinking of Mrs. Ramsay, who has passed away years ago, Lily wonders at the nature of life in general, fearing the universe deals out suffering and death to human beings in a *wanton*, cruel, and incomprehensible way, asking:

Could things thrust their hands up and grip one; could the blade cut; the fist grasp? Was there no safety? No learning by heart of the ways of the world? No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle, and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air? Could it be, even for elderly people, that this was life?—startling, unexpected, unknown? (TTL 183).

Narratological moments later, Woolf’s reader receives a complex figurative answer: “[Macalister’s boy took one of the fish and cut a square out of its side to bait his hook with. The mutilated body (it was alive still) was thrown back into the sea.]” (TTL 183). While not an explicit reply to Lily, Macalister’s boy mimes the actions referenced in her questions, *gripping*, *cutting*, and *grasping* a random fish, a process that surely leads to suffering and death, the phenomena Lily contemplates while mourning Mrs. Ramsay. These actions, when following Lily’s questions in such short order, serve as physical



responses to her spiritual questions, echoing and reifying life's universal fragility.

Paralleling human existential experience with that of a creature so small might seem an odd metaphorical fit given commonly held perceptions, like those based in Christian theology, that view human experience as necessarily more complex than its animal counterpart; however, this literary device is actually in line with Woolf's intellectual disposition. In a later essay, "The Death of the Moth," Woolf's narrator, presumably Woolf herself, watches a moth collapse upon a windowsill and slowly die; she writes, "It was useless to try to do anything. One could only watch the extraordinary efforts made by those tiny legs against an oncoming doom which could, had it chosen, have submerged an entire city, not merely a city, but masses of human beings; nothing, I knew had any chance against death" ("The Death of the Moth" 2). In this short narrative, Woolf makes the comparability of human and animal suffering explicit, stating plainly that moths suffer and die by the same force as human beings; here, Woolf reflects a marked interest in representing human death as comparable to the death of creatures, like moths and fish.

Solidifying her intention that Macalister's boy's actions be read as an answer to Lily's questions, Woolf places brackets around the fish's demise, a formal device discussed in her personal diary as a means to convey simultaneity. When asking herself how she might communicate narratological simultaneity, Woolf resolved to do so "in a parenthesis [...] so that one had the sense of reading the two things at the same time," hinting at her intention for the brackets surrounding the fish's demise, parenthetical punctuation marks that also contain a separate parenthetical phrase, to signal that the fish suffers while Lily questions (Woolf qtd. in Hussey xlv). By eliminating the temporal distance between Lily's questions and their answer, Woolf clarifies that they are components of a single literary device, coinciding to form an existential suggestion similar to Shakespeare's: human beings suffer and die as readily as fish, moths, or flies.

These brackets, however, serve more than one formal function; for throughout the novel's shortest "act"—the central section, titled "Time Passes"—a litany of human deaths are reported in the same formal fashion as the fish's. For example, "[Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said, everything, they said, had promised so well.]" (TTL 136); and "[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.]" (TTL 137). Perhaps the most shocking example of this bracketed reporting is the announcement of Mrs. Ramsay's death: "[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.]" (TTL 132). Because these characters' deaths are reported in the same bracketed form as the fish's imminent peril contained in the novel's final section, they are mutually painted as manifestations of a singular categorical experience shared by humankind and animalkind alike.

Significantly, however, deaths are not the only events reported in this way, for news regarding modest plot points receives the same formal treatment: "[Here Mr. Carmichael, who was reading Virgil, blew out his candle. It was past midnight.]" (TTL 131); "[Prue Ramsay, leaning on her father's arm, was given in marriage. What, people said, could have been more fitting? And, they added, how beautiful she looked!]" (TTL 135); and "[Mr. Carmichael brought out a volume of poems that spring, which had an unexpected success. The war, people said, had revived their interest in poetry.]" (TTL 138). In these cases, brackets convey not simultaneity but narratological asides in which events that do not drive the plot are plainly and summarily stated to illustrate the unspectacular flow of everyday life on the English home front during WWI. Death, both human and animal, is an inalienable component of that flow, especially when thousands of one's countrymen face mustard gas and machine gun charges routinely in the trenches; by formally paralleling

human deaths and insignificant plot details, Woolf destabilizes traditional, readerly interpretations that elevate the meaning of human death above other phenomena, a project consistent with Darwin's theory. In this way, she reorders the Great Chain of Being to parallel human and animal existence using means similar to Shakespeare's simile: small creatures needlessly suffering at human hands.

Contributing to this similarity in literary means, both Macalister's boy's actions and Shakespeare's simile are steeped in religious language, but to different effects. Fish are among the oldest and most resilient of Christian images, associated with Christ and Christianity since the religion's underground practice in the Roman Empire, and typically used to represent practicing Christians themselves (Hooke 537). In this sense, Macalister's boy reverses the religious dynamic embodied in Shakespeare's *wanton boys*, not occupying the figurative role of a tormenting god but the tormentor of God's devout. Here, Woolf incorporates a Christian symbol without explicitly pointing to its religious significance, but in the case of Jasper and the birds, Woolf constructs a similar religious dynamic that is markedly more explicit. By naming the birds Joseph and Mary, Mrs. Ramsay evokes the names of Christ's earthly parents in the Biblical tradition, therefore asserting, and not merely suggesting, a concrete, etymological association between the birds and Christianity. Just as in the case of Macalister's boy and the fish, Jasper inflicts *wanton* violence upon animals figuratively associated with the first Christians, the first two human beings aware that Christ was sent to Earth. Standing alone, these two representations do not display a complete figurative picture, but the reader must also remember Woolf's *wanton* girls.

When terrorizing minnows on the beach, Nancy is compared to "God himself" as she exercises her imagined omnipotence over the helpless creatures, transfiguring animals and manipulating the minnows' cosmos. Although Lily is not expressly compared to a deity, she does enact Nancy's brand of godly manipulation by disrupting ants' "cosmogony," the order of their universe, thus not merely confusing them. Moreover, the ants that Lily disrupts are expressly compared to Charles Tansley, who is often referred to as "the atheist"; therefore, Lily's assault on the ants is a figurative assault on faithlessness, a detail that aligns her further with Nancy's deistic actions.

These representations collectively construct a discursive formation that echoes the assertion made by Shakespeare's simile: human beings suffer and die as inexplicably as animals; there is no divine caretaker offering humankind safety. Driven by the figurative response offered by Macalister's boy through the brutal killing of a random fish, the formation is augmented and its implications echoed by each instance of animal suffering contained in the novel. However, unlike Shakespeare's simile, Woolf's representations do not make clear what the source of universal suffering is, for while she offers God as one explanation through her descriptions of Nancy's and Lily's actions, Jasper's and Macalister's boy's actions are not painted as those performed by gods, but against them. These attacks on images associated with Christianity are telling of Woolf's own self-professed atheism (see Corner), but they do not clarify suffering's source. While one alternative to religious belief is a strict subscription to scientific explanation—as represented by the male-centric, stoic, and scientific atheism explicitly tied to Mr. Ramsay and his devotee, Tansley—the textual details linking the suffering inflicted by the boys to science are lacking.

As I have suggested elsewhere, this gendering of human tormentors, with boys representing God's enemies and girls representing God's defenders, was likely influenced by Woolf's parents' spiritual-philosophical outlooks; while both her mother and father were self-proclaimed agnostics, Woolf saw a brand of faith in her mother, who was outspokenly philanthropic and optimistic about the human experience. Woolf's father, however, directly criticized practitioners of faith—Christians, specifically—as those who shirk the scientific realities of the universe in favor of faith based in what he alleged to be fiction. This

dynamic is even recapitulated in Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's attitudes and outlooks, for Mr. Ramsay is a skeptical philosopher who is introduced as a protesting roadblock to the philanthropic titular journey to the lighthouse for which Mrs. Ramsay has knitted stockings and procured necessities for the lighthouse operators, and their children, who cannot leave lighthouse (Hevert 8).

Whether or not Woolf intended for her *wanton* boys and girls to be affiliated with faith or faithlessness, the implications of this gendering—and the alternative to the deistically-centered torment enacted by Nancy and Lily—is irrelevant for, as illustrated by fish and birds compared to Christians, ants compared to atheists, and minnows disassociated from religion, suffering and death occur regardless of religious belief or lack thereof. In this sense, Woolf not only echoes Shakespeare's assertion that no one is safe from suffering and death, but specifies that religion can offer no safety from these phenomena.

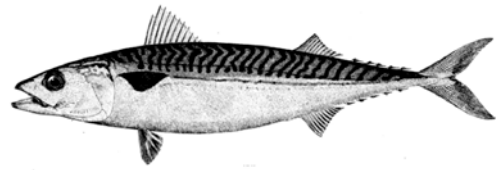
This evolution of implication—echoed by Woolf's complex, formal construction of her animal-centric discursive formation—reflects a worldview driven by Darwin's theory of evolution, compounded with a war that yielded ungodly destruction. Just as Shakespeare was steeped in an intellectual climate that valued distinction between humankind and animalkind—accounting for the structure of his simile, which positions human beings as less potent than God, but more powerful than flies—Woolf came of age among circumstances that allowed her intellectual access to the reality of human death and the theory of evolution, which apparently yielded an understanding that human beings are themselves animals and that these metaphorical equivalents share existential value. While it is fascinating to read Woolf's reflection of popular perceptions of the human-animal dynamic as influenced by world events, she and Shakespeare ultimately offer the same opinion: despite perceived extreme shifts in popular intellect and the growing devastation of war, people have and will continue to suffer and die as inexplicably as animals.

Woolf and Shakespeare are simply two players in this representational game in which manifold authors of great acclaim have participated, from monastic scholars to modern novelists. The careful consideration of representations of animal suffering in literature not only allows readers insight into thematic implications, but the intellectual landscape in which the author wrote, constructing a literary record of the evolution or stasis of ideas regarding the human-animal dynamic.

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*Atlantic Mackerel (Scomber scombrus)*  
By NOAA [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

## Something Fishy: [Sniffing Out] The Shape of Trauma and Transformation in *To the Lighthouse*

### Introduction

In Chapter 5 of "The Lighthouse,"<sup>1</sup> one finds Lily Briscoe, the painter, and Mr. Carmichael, the poet, on the lawn of the Ramsay summer home while Cam, James, and Mr. Ramsay sail with Macalister and his boy to the lighthouse. Lily works on her canvas—her thoughts sketching scenes of liberty—and Carmichael sleeps on the grass. However, by the end of the chapter, all creation has ceased; her thoughts are consumed by Mrs. Ramsay's absence; she rails against the void, invoking art's potential to, if not vanquish, at least contain despair, giving it shape, and with shape, boundaries:

For one moment she felt that if they both got up [she and Carmichael, painter and poet] here, now, on the lawn, and demanded an explanation, why was it so short, why was it so inexplicable, said it with violence, as two fully equipped human beings from whom nothing should be hid might speak, then, beauty would roll itself up; the space would fill; those empty flourishes would form into shape; if they shouted loud enough Mrs. Ramsay would return. "Mrs. Ramsay!" she said aloud, "Mrs. Ramsay!" The tears ran down her face. (243)

In a disquieting move, Woolf folds Chapter 7 back onto Chapter 5, repeating Lily's cries and continuing with the scene: "'Mrs. Ramsay!' Lily cried, Mrs. Ramsay!' But nothing happened. The pain increased. That anguish could reduce one to such a pitch of imbecility, she thought! Anyhow the old man had not heard her. [...] No one had seen her step off her strip of board into the waters of annihilation" (244). With Chapter 5 and Chapter 7, Woolf foregrounds the opposing forces of creation (through art) and destruction. But what of the wrinkle that is Chapter 6? Enveloped within and bracket-bound, Chapter 6 serves as the site where creation and destruction collide—Chapter 6 is the site of trauma. A close reading of Chapter 6 will help motivate this claim.

### Chapter 6: A Close Reading

[Macalister's boy took one of the fish and cut a square out of its side to bait his hook with. The mutilated body (it was alive still) was thrown back into the sea.] (243)

These two sentences, encased in square brackets, serve as the entire contents of Chapter 6. On the surface, the subject seems innocuous enough—a boy, name un-given, fishing. However, upon reaching the second sentence and the phrase, "[t]he mutilated body (it was alive still) was thrown back into the sea," the innocence of this aside-seeming scene disappears, replaced by a visceral representation of trauma. Then one focuses on the shape of the wound—such an unnatural shape—with

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* is organized into three sections—"The Window," "Time Passes," and "The Lighthouse." These larger chunks are then subdivided into numerical chapters (Chapter 1, 2, 3, etc.). Because this essay is primarily a close reading, I have referenced only two additional sources to validate my commentary.

its plumb lines and right angles. It is a manufactured wound, inflicted with the casual brutality of a child. The fact that the child is male is no accident. Woolf, through this scene, gestures to the psychological and physical trauma perpetrated by culture and its conventions within a patriarchy—a society of easy sacrifice.

As we move outward now to the larger text, this scene from the boat carrying the Ramsays to the lighthouse, embedded as it is in the fold between Chapters 5 and 7, traces the shape of Lily's inner turmoil. She can either transform her anguish over Mrs. Ramsay's death into art, or succumb to it, and, in doing so, be transformed. The "square" of her canvas can fill the chunk that has been cut away, or she will become the missing piece; she will become Mrs. Ramsay—a new square chunk on the same old hook. These wounds have a way of replicating themselves.

### Other Sites, [Other Squares]

The brevity of Chapter 6 is unique, inviting the reader to take note of its form—a bracketing (or squaring off)—which, in itself, is not unique to the text. In the section entitled "Time Passes," Woolf utilizes the same form to mark other sites of trauma. Taken together, these "squares" form a mosaic that illuminates the gendered nature of these cuts, and Chapter 6 provides a key to these moves.

The reader learns of the death of Mrs. Ramsay within the chunk: "[Mr. Ramsay stumbling along a passage stretched his arms out one dark morning, but, Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, he stretched his arms out. They remained empty.]" (175). One could construe Mr. Ramsay as one of Macalister's boy's fish—that fate had taken a chunk from him—and, as such, someone deserving of sympathy. However, it is his arms that remained empty, which implies that instead of being wounded, Mr. Ramsay has rather had an object snatched from his grasp. With arms outstretched, he will employ sympathy to ensnare the next Mrs. Ramsay. Instead of being the fish, Mr. Ramsay is Macalister's boy baiting his hook. (These wounds have a way of repeating themselves).

Woolf marks Prue's wedding as a site of trauma, and, in doing so, indicts the convention. She writes: "[Prue Ramsay, leaning on her father's arm, was given in marriage that May. What, people said, could have been more fitting? And, they added, how beautiful she looked!]" (179). Prue was "given in marriage" by her father. This use of the passive relegates Prue to the status of object, while reinforcing Mr. Ramsay's power to trade in women. That she "is leaning on her father's arm" suggests trepidation or illness; suggestions which are subsequently reinforced by the details of her death. "[Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said. They said nobody deserved happiness more.]" (180). Prue's pregnancy serves as a site of trauma which, due to convention, replicates itself in marriage, and, ultimately, destroys her. With these scenes, Woolf impresses upon the reader that all women's bodies are marked by trauma for they are denied self-possession. Prue's plight is "indeed a tragedy," the tragedy being that she was born female.

The death of Andrew in the war shifts this analysis to more masculine terrain: "[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.]" (181). One is again reminded of Macalister's boy and his casual brutality—a scene of easy sacrifice. By overlapping these two scenes, a grotesque portrait of war emerges. Leaders of men are aligned with Macalister's boy; they mutilate and discard other human beings like so many fish, and those who return come back physically or psychologically "mutilated [...]" (for [they are] alive still)" (243). Andrew does not return and, as such, does not have to suffer the trauma of the war's aftermath. He is not a mutilated fish, but the people who survive him (and loved him) are; and it is here—at the site of Andrew's death—that Woolf gestures towards art's potential for transforming trauma through the poet Carmichael.

Andrew and Carmichael were lovers and, although not expressed explicitly, Andrew's death affects the poet deeply. This supposition becomes clear if one considers the site of trauma as not only a destructive space, but a creative one: "[Mr. Carmichael brought out a volume of poems that spring, which had been an unexpected success. The war, people said, had revived their interest in poetry.]" (183). As a writer, he fills the square that has been cut from him with stanzas, poems, pages—a book. Lily attempts this process of transformation and healing with her painting. However, Lily ultimately fails where Carmichael succeeds. Why is this? In the act of creating, Lily struggles to transform herself from object to subject—from what is created to creator. Carmichael, in being a man, is taken seriously; he has an audience. The war may have revived the public's interest in poetry; but it never questions his status as poet. Lily must, in contrast, transform her sense of self, and even then, society may very well dismiss her as Tansley does "whispering in her ear, 'Women can't paint, women can't write'" (67).

Through Lily and Carmichael, Woolf demonstrates how the site of trauma can serve as both a creative and destructive space. Carmichael transforms Andrew's death into a collection of poetry; Lily attempts to harness her grief over Mrs. Ramsay to create a serious painting. But one may ask: who speaks for Prue? Where is the creative force in these sites of trauma? To answer these questions, one must take a wider view and incorporate the context of *To the Lighthouse*—one must invoke Virginia Woolf herself.

### Autobiographical Aspects

Although classified as fiction, Virginia Woolf herself acknowledges that *To the Lighthouse* is highly autobiographical. Most of the characters serve as surrogates for real people. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay correlate to Woolf's own parents, Prue to her half-sister Stella, and Andrew to her brother Thoby, while Lily represents a composite of her sister Vanessa (a painter) and Woolf herself (see Hussey 301). Keeping this in mind and revisiting the sites of trauma mentioned previously, new insights emerge that imbue the work with even greater complexity and meaning.

First, one must return to the questions raised at the end of the previous section. Who speaks for Prue? When considering that Prue bears a striking resemblance to Stella, it becomes clear that Virginia herself does. Woolf transforms the trauma of Stella's death into an indictment of the objectification of women. She tweaks the circumstances surrounding her death (she was pregnant, but she did not die in childbirth) to speak to larger issues of women's roles and women's bodies. Woolf transmutes her loss into illuminations of other sites of trauma perpetrated by culture and convention.

Thoby did not die in the war but of a misdiagnosed illness. However, through Andrew, Woolf utilizes fiction as a means of exposing the thoughtless brutality of those who wage war so lightly. She harnesses her pain and, in doing so, gestures to the mutilation of bodies and minds that serve as the real spoils of war. One cannot know what Carmichael wrote in his war poems, but through Woolf, one can perhaps trace their shape.

Woolf admits that, prior to writing *To the Lighthouse*, she was haunted by the memory of her mother. In finishing the book, she was able to move on ("Sketch" 81). Woolf inserts this sense of closure at the novel's end when she writes: "It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision" (281). Lily, like Woolf, moves on, but in a different direction. One suspects that Lily will never paint again; she has taken Mr. Ramsay's bait; she will become his caretaker. What can one make of this interpretation if, indeed, Lily functions as a surrogate for the author? This transformation serves as a manipulation of another site of trauma that has no corresponding site within the work itself. Virginia's father is dead, but Mr. Ramsay lives. Woolf was convinced that if her father had lived she never would have become a writer; instead she would have, like Lily, become her father's caretaker. I would suggest that if this were the case,

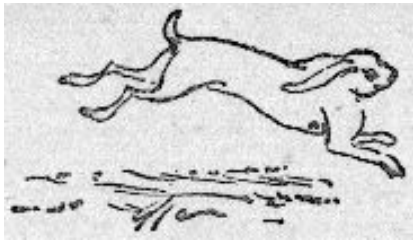


Mr. Stephen's living and the loss of Woolf's genius would have been the greater trauma, for her and (unknowingly) for us.

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*Illustration from Jules Verne's "Dix heures en chasse" (1881)  
by Gédéon Baril, illustration 27, via Wikimedia Commons*

#### **The "Vital Lie" in Virginia Woolf's "Lappin and Lapinova"**

"Deprive the average man of his vital lie, and you've robbed him of happiness as well"

—Ibsen (203)

A term coined by Henrik Ibsen, the "vital lie" refers to the self-deceptions people establish and sustain to make themselves happy instead of confronting the truth. Since human beings take shelter in this "vital lie" by disregarding the truth in order to escape from it, it becomes impossible for them to survive without the existence of this "vital lie." Talking about the "vital lie," Mike W. Martin "regards self-deception as a valuable coping technique shielding us from unbearable realities and debilitating truths and contributing to personal growth, self-respect, love and community" (5).

In her short story "Lappin and Lapinova," Virginia Woolf portrays her character Rosalind as a woman preoccupied with the "vital lie" in order to escape from the patriarchal order. However, reading between the lines, we can see that even this world of the "vital lie" sheds light on the dominance of the patriarchal hegemony. In this context, this article will examine how the "vital lie" Rosalind takes refuge in echoes the hegemony of the patriarchal system. To begin with, Rosalind creates a make-believe world by naming herself Queen Lapinova and her husband Ernest King Lappin (the French word for rabbit). In this make-believe world, she regards herself and her husband as rabbits. The animal imagery gradually develops when Rosalind tries to adapt herself to her new surname as a married woman:

Rosalind had still to get used to the fact that she was Mrs. Ernest Thorburn. Perhaps she never would get used to the fact that she was Mrs. Ernest Anybody, she thought, as she sat in the bow window of the hotel looking over the lake to the mountains, and waited for her husband to come down to breakfast. Ernest was a difficult name to get used to. It was not the name she would have chosen. (84)

This suggests that neither her husband's given name nor the surname "Thorburn" are Rosalind's own preference; but whether she likes it or not, the surname is the outcome of her marriage and she's expected to accept it. As Dale Spender states, "when females have no right to 'surnames,' to their own family names, the concept of women as the property of men is subtly reinforced (and this is of course assisted by the title *Mrs.*)" (25). In other words, in a patriarchal society, where men are

the dominant gender, a woman married to a man is doomed to assume the surname of the husband whether she likes it or not.

Rosalind is so engaged in the world she creates in her mind that she strips her husband of his real name and attributes to him the role of a king, who has the sole authority: "A hunting rabbit; a King Rabbit; a rabbit that makes laws for all the other rabbits" (84). The adjective "King" suggests that it is men in the patriarchal society who determine the rules for the others. The word "other," while it may reference any and all subordinates, also indicates that the women are regarded as the "second sex." As Simone de Beauvoir suggests: "He is the Subject, she is the Absolute—she is the other" (13). This discrimination between the genders is intensified when Ernest and Rosalind carry on their marriage under their new names: "He was King Lappin; she was Queen Lapinova" (86). Although the titles at first glance denote that they are of the highest rank, when examined separately, with the presence of the king as the head of the rabbits, "Lapinova" is reduced to the secondary position. Furthermore, the hegemony of the patriarchy is reinforced by Rosalind's name, Lapinova, "with its Slavic patronymic suffix, 'ova'" (Simpson 152). The contrast between Lappin and Lapinova is explicitly defined as follows: "They were the opposite of each other; he was bold and determined; she wary and undependable" (86). Such a description shows that the make-believe world "is best seen as a mental space that results from the blending of the characters' own 'reality' with other, imaginary scenarios" (Semino 57). In this respect, "King Lappin" is portrayed with superior qualities, as opposed to "Queen Lapinova," who is depicted in inferior terms. As Beauvoir articulates "the two sexes have never shared the world in equality" (16).

In other words, while the male has strong qualities, the female possesses weak ones, and this is reinforced by Rosalind's description of the couple: "He ruled over the busy world of rabbits; her world was a desolate, mysterious place, which she ranged mostly by moonlight" (86). The word "rule" indicates that it is the male who exercises his power over the others and thereby has the opportunity to dominate other people. Moreover, the term "busy world" denotes that the male has the advantage of having an active relationship with the people around him. On the other hand, the world of woman is expressed by the word "desolate," which means that she is an isolated person devoid of the sociability her partner enjoys. This concept is best expressed by Beauvoir when she remarks that men "hold the better jobs, get higher wages, and have more opportunity for success than their new competitors. In industry and politics men have a great many more positions and they monopolise the most important posts" (16).

Bearing in mind such a chasm between the genders, the emphasis on the moonlight in the story further reinforces how the myth of matriarchy is supplanted by the fact of patriarchy. This is evident when Rosalind associates herself with the female hare, which is "an animal symbolic of the Moon, because it sleeps during the day and is awake during the night and because it is very fertile" (Becker 137). In this respect, while men are endowed with the right to interact with their surroundings, women are doomed to live solitary lives, with the primary function of fecundity. In fact, this is the role patriarchy expects of women, and Thorburns serve as a good example in the sense that apart from Ernest, there are nine other sons and daughters, "many themselves married and also fruitful" (87).

For Rosalind, this make-believe world "functions as her escape and salvation, while simultaneously endorsing the symbolic structure of patriarchal dominance" (Campbell 73). This dominance is illustrated, for instance, by Ernest's classification as "a great hunter" (86), which points out how men see women as sexual objects in patriarchal society. As Beauvoir states: "For him she is sex, absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential" (13). Ernest's declaration that he "chased a hare" (86) in fact sheds light on the sexual roles expected of men and women in this patriarchal

culture. While Rosalind wants her husband recognize her sexual desires and fears, Ernest wants a sexually passive wife, but Rosalind “is a wild creature longing for the forest and hunted by a patriarchal system” (Walker 157). In this context, how women are victimized in the patriarchal society is illustrated when “Aunt Mary” said that she “could never bear to see a hare in a dish—it looked so like a baby” (87). In other words, Aunt Mary articulates her awareness of the fate of a wild creature in the same vein.

Men in the narrative serve as a destructive force in the society. This factor is evident when Rosalind perceives her father-in-law as a poacher “stealing off with his coat bulging with pheasants and partridges to drop them stealthily into a three-legged pot in his smoky little cottage. That was her real father-in-law—a poacher” (89). For Rosalind, in her make-believe world, the father-in-law plays the role of a poacher, who illegally kills animals and thus participates in the process of destroying the harmony of nature. As Herta Newman observes, “in the rabbit empire she has fashioned, Lapinova recreates the fearful conditions she is trying to escape” (20). Man’s hegemony as the sole authority is reinforced by the transformation of the parental Thorburns’ daughter, Celia, who is described as a ferret “with pink eyes, and a nose clotted with earth from her horrid underground nosings and pokings. Slung round men’s shoulders, in a net, and thrust down a hole—it was a pitiable life—Celia’s; it was none of her fault” (89). Turned into a domestic pet, Celia is depicted as someone restricted to the area of house under the hegemony of man. In this context, the emphasis on women being in a net refers to the patriarchy, a system wherein men are the dominant rulers of the society. The word “pitiable” is especially striking since it shows the miserable position of the women. Furthermore, the phrase “It was none of her fault” reinforces the idea that men are to blame for this situation.

Rosalind’s dream world is like a shelter in the sense that only in this world does she feel that she is not lonely: “Without that world, how, Rosalind wondered, that winter could she have lived at all?” (87). This sense of safety is evident, for instance, when Ernest’s parents commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of their union in their golden wedding party. Although Rosalind constitutes a part of this family by marriage, she feels that she does not belong to them and is “a mere drop among all those Thorburns” (87). This statement suggests that Rosalind has difficulties in adapting to a clearly patriarchal family, hence her initial difficulty in accepting her husband’s surname. Rosalind’s “inability to cope with her ‘real’ life if not through a fantastic scenario is what may lead readers to conclude that Rosalind’s initial difficulties as a new wife have progressively developed into some form of mental disturbance” (Semino 65).

Rosalind’s detachment from the real world and involvement in the fantasy world prompt her to trust in her make-believe world to such an extent that the absence of the dream world poses a threat to her security and happiness as illustrated one night when Ernest enters the house, and Rosalind articulates her anxiety: “It’s Lapinova ... [...] She’s gone, Ernest. I’ve lost her!” (92). Ernest’s indifference paves the way for Lapinova’s death: “‘Caught in a trap,’ he said, ‘killed,’ and sat down and read the newspaper” (92). The existence of the vital lie is the animating force of life, for “to unmask it without sensitivity to the vital needs it serves can be disastrous” (Martin 5). In this context, Ernest’s response shatters Rosalind’s vital lie, and the sentence “So that was the end of that marriage” (92) at the end of the story announces the breakdown of the marriage.<sup>1</sup> Natania Rosenfeld states that such an ending “represents Rosalind’s own liberation from servility and, by extension, a feminist refusal of an oppressive model of marriage” (146), but I see a darker outcome in Rosalind’s world.

To sum up, Virginia Woolf employs the concept of “vital lie” in “Lappin

and Lapinova” to demonstrate the fact that people can be happy when they sustain their private life by crafting a secret language used only between themselves. Rosalind “invents a fantasy world in which they [she and her husband] alone are king and queen, and where they alone know the code” (Harris). In this context, Rosalind takes refuge in her fantasy world, which serves as a vital lie to lead her life, sustain her happiness, and tolerate her marriage. However, even in this fantasy world, Rosalind is well aware of the patriarchal hegemony that hampers her happiness. As Adrienne Gavin remarks, characters like Rosalind “who attempt to mesh their fantasy life, which contains their true identity, with reality find that the ‘real’ world rejects their attempts” (130). Consequently, Ernest’s declaration of Queen Lapinova’s death destroys the make-believe world Rosalind has so far been attached to, and thereby she loses not only access to her secret identity but also the meaning of life.

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*A Young Hare by Albrecht Durer [Public domain],  
via Wikimedia Commons*

<sup>1</sup> In contrast with my argument, Natania Rosenfeld states that such an ending “represents Rosalind’s own liberation from servility and, by extension, a feminist refusal of an oppressive model of marriage” (146).



*Girl Cuddling a Dog*  
Liam's Pictures from Old Books—fromoldbooks.org  
by permission of Liam R. E. Quin

### What Does Power Smell Like?

#### Canine Epistemology and the Politics of the Pet in Virginia Woolf's *Flush*

Within the critical history of *Flush*, the canine protagonist lingers between a mere symbol, read as representative of Victorian women, or as an often failed attempt by Woolf to identify animal otherness. Jutta Ittner, for example, reads *Flush* as a case of “traditional” anthropomorphism (182), a dog reduced to a “human extension” (188). Ittner claims, “animal existence is diminished to an anthropomorphized caricature—animal alterity turned into a literary device. Flush’s inner and outer world does not challenge the reader to reconceptualize animalness but rather reaffirms human projections” as Flush ultimately “reinforc[es] social values” (189).<sup>1</sup> Working through the novel’s engagement with smell, Alison Booth’s essay on “rank discourse” asks, “But as a medium for sensation, is [Flush] not perhaps an improvement on the speaking, writing subject?” (9). Booth insinuates, however, that the writing subject and the smelling subject may not be so different as smell reveals its own “artifice” within a textual world (3). Yet Booth’s question invites us to more fully reconsider Flush as a “medium for sensation,” or to take more seriously what I call his animal epistemology. If in the end Flush is *not* “an improvement on the speaking, writing subject,” does he at least offer a different version? And can his otherness inform our Victorian (and contemporary) understanding of animal alterity and pet keeping?

Animals are both producers and possessors of knowledge, and attempting to filter the world through an animal point of view can open a new and often destabilizing lens for (re)examining our own world and the lives of animal others. Taking into account the Victorian setting of the novel helps us understand that Flush disrupts the dominant empirical epistemology of the period, allowing readers to experience animal alterity as a non-empirical mode of knowing. In this way, I challenge the dominant critical belief that the novel’s use of anthropomorphism discounts the possibility of animal alterity. Instead, reading the novel through Flush’s canine epistemology, which functions primarily by way of scent, challenges the empirical belief in the authority of vision and the ability to know and understand simply by looking. Though Flush’s canine epistemology allows us to move beyond observable aspects of Victorian patriarchy, this does not reduce Flush to the role of symbol or “literary device,” as the novel’s engagement with patriarchy simultaneously portrays the troublesome power relationships associated with pet keeping. In *Flush*, the politics of the pet are explicitly tied to the humans such pets often symbolically stand for, as Woolf privileges

the critical possibilities of an animal epistemology to reveal not only the “smelly” side of gender oppression in Victorian England, but to also imagine animal alterity. Flush’s non-empirical canine epistemology both decenters the human and delineates the politics of the pet in Victorian England.

Flush’s entrance into the Barrett household is destabilizing for both Flush and the human reader. For Flush “Until this moment had [...] set foot in no house but the working man’s cottage at Three Mile Cross” (17). His astonishment is at first visual, for at Three Mile Cross “the boards there were bare; the mats were frayed; the chairs were cheap. Here there was nothing bare, nothing frayed, nothing cheap—that Flush could see at a glance” (17). Through Flush’s point of view, readers are unsure of what they see, for “Nothing in the room was itself; everything was something else” (20). While Flush is overwhelmed by the sight of luxury in the Barretts’ Wimpole Street house, “he was more astonished by what he smelt than by what he saw” (18). Filtered through Flush’s epistemology, the bedroom of an upper-class invalid becomes something completely foreign:

But again it was the smell of the room that overpowered him. Only a scholar who has descended step by step into a mausoleum and there finds himself in a crypt, crusted with fungus, slimy with mould [*sic*], exuding sour smells of decay and antiquity [...] only the sensations of such an explorer into the buried vaults of a ruined city can compare with the riot of emotions that flooded Flush’s nerves as he stood for the first time in an invalid’s bedroom, in Wimpole Street, and smelt eau de cologne. (19)

The comparison between Flush entering an upper-class bedroom and a scholar entering a “crypt” full of fungus, mold, and “sour smells” destabilizes the reader’s perception of the bedroom of a rich Victorian woman. Coming after the descriptions of wealth and luxury, the reader’s perception of Elizabeth’s bedroom is completely subverted into its near opposite: mold, decay, and old age, ironically mixed with “eau de cologne.” While here the reader may *see* wealth and luxury, he or she also *smells* decay through the above comparison and thus realizes the extent of Elizabeth’s oppressed life. Although we may not have access to Elizabeth’s interiority, Flush’s epistemology challenges an empirical engagement with gender oppression: Elizabeth’s life may not look problematic, living as she does in a rich house on Wimpole Street, yet she is in actuality stifled in the dark.

This re-imagining of a rich woman’s Victorian bedroom in turn emphasizes a similar constraint on Flush’s life. Once in Elizabeth’s bedroom the doors are “shut on freedom; on fields; on hares; on grass” (22). While Elizabeth’s face “was the pale worn face of an invalid, cut off from air, light, liberty,” Flush’s “was the warm ruddy face of a young animal; instinct with health and energy” (23). Elizabeth’s life is already restrained, and Flush’s life is to become so. Indeed, seen in this light, the earlier descriptions of Elizabeth’s dusty bedroom function as a foreshadowing of Flush’s future as a housedog. Further, this emphasis on the faces and gazes of Elizabeth and Flush subvert a familiar ideology of human-animal difference; while at this moment Elizabeth’s interiority is absent for the reader, Woolf emphasizes Flush’s inner life. The focus on the face and gaze of an animal introduces a Derridian focus on Flush’s subjectivity and point of view, highlighting Flush’s alterity. Describing the experience of seeing his cat look at him, Derrida writes:

And from the vantage of this being-there-before-me it can allow itself to be looked at, no doubt, but also [...] it can look at me. It has its point of view regarding me. The point of view of the absolute other, and nothing will have ever given me more food for thinking through this absolute alterity of the neighbor [...] than these moments when I see myself seen naked under the gaze of a cat. (11)

Thus Elizabeth’s life is described through smell, giving us a new perspective on female oppression, while the reader experiences the

<sup>1</sup> For other analyses that neglect to consider Flush’s animal otherness, see Caughie (1991), Snaith (2002), and Squier (1985). Analyses that focus on Flush and his animal mind include Wylie (2002) and Smith (2002).



subjective experience of a dog removed from his familiar and enjoyed outside environment.<sup>2</sup>

While Flush's new life with Elizabeth emphasizes the similarity between them, it also draws our attention to the politics of pet keeping in Victorian England. While critics such as Kari Weil recognize the importance of alternate perspectives within the novel, they neglect to consider how Flush's perspective highlights the confusion between dominance and affection that forms the ideology of pet keeping in the Victorian period and our own. Although Weil claims that "The project of *Flush* is to transcend the boundaries of human perception in order to evoke the social world as it may be perceived by a dog—through smell instead of sight" (84), her ultimate point leads us to "dog love" where "Woolf conceives of a love that does not rely on fashionable or conventional identities or on permission from authority" (81, 86). However, as we just saw above, Flush's life becomes stifled at his entrance into the bedroom, and thus this is a love of which we should be wary.<sup>3</sup>

Flush's moment of "freedom" when he first experiences the park with Elizabeth and her sister highlights the confusion between freedom and oppression, between dominance and affection that forms the novel's engagement with the ideology of the pet. The sensuous smells of the park literally disappear by a jerk at Flush's collar, a reminder that he is now a housedog: Flush smelled "Smells that lay far beyond the range of the human nose; so that while the chair went on, he stopped, amazed; smelling, savouring, until a jerk at his collar dragged him on" (29). And again: "when he saw once more, after years of absence it seemed, grass, flowers, and trees [...] he dashed forward to run as he had run in the fields at home. But now a heavy weight jerked at his throat; he was thrown back on his haunches [...]. Why was he a prisoner here?" (30). Flush's subsequent acceptance of the "chain"—"he gladly accepted the protection of the chain" (30)—resorts to familiar constructions of animal subjectivity and interiority in the Victorian period that suggested animals willingly accepted and enjoyed human domination.<sup>4</sup> Woolf's word choice here, the "chain" as opposed to the "collar" she mentions earlier, in fact highlights that domination occurs with domestication, an alignment convincingly made by Yi-Fu Tuan, who claims, "Domestication means domination: the two words have the same root sense of mastery over another being—of bringing it into one's house or domain" (143). The transformation of the collar into the chain highlights that to become domesticated—to suppress one's own nature—is to be dominated. Flush's domestication is exemplified in "the bedroom school" where he learns "to resign, to control, to suppress the most violent instincts of his nature" (34)—his desire to go outside. This is then aligned with a false sense of agency in Flush's "decision" to give up outdoor smells for his position as an affectionate pet, as the narrator states, "And Flush, to whom the whole world was free, chose to forfeit all the smells of Wimpole Street in order to lie by her side" (35).

At the end of the novel when Elizabeth and Flush become independent, we see how Flush's epistemology reflects his newfound liberation and agency. Only in Italy can both Elizabeth and Flush "leav[e] tyrants and

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of animal subjectivity that differs from my focus on alterity, see Smith, who argues that the novel "represents Woolf's attempt to exercise modernist literary techniques in the mapping of a canine subjectivity, as an experiment worth performing for its own sake" (349).

<sup>3</sup> Readers may be familiar with Donna Haraway's argument against the ideology of "unconditional love," which for her discounts animal alterity and creates a problematic anthropomorphism that aligns animals and children. See *The Companion Species Manifesto*, especially pages 34 through 39. Elizabeth's belief in Flush's unconditional love and his preference for a human world rather than an animal one is emphasized in her statement that "Flushie [...] is my friend—my companion—and loves me better than he loves the sunshine without" (35).

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed discussion of constructions of animal subjectivity in the Victorian period, see my forthcoming article in *Society and Animals*, "'I promise to protect Dumb creatures': Pastoral Power and the Limits of Victorian Animal Protection."

dog-stealers behind them" (109). Even the Brownings' new house in Italy reflects the new and independent life of both Flush and Elizabeth, "For at Casa Guidi the rooms were bare. All those draped objects of his cloistered and secluded days had vanished" (120). While Flush and Elizabeth's liberation expresses their similarity throughout the text, we also see a heightened focus on Flush's alterity in the Italy chapter. Woolf enhances her attention to the disjunction between animal knowing and human expression as she points towards the limits of language in capturing canine experience. No longer a dog on a chain, Flush breaks from the norms of Victorian pet keeping and sentimental constructions of human-animal relationships and lives through smell, freely roaming the streets of Italy. Free from the chain he becomes less and less human, experiencing Italy though an alterity that humans can imagine but not access. Woolf frequently contrasts Flush's epistemology with language to show the discord between the two:

Beauty, so it seems at least, had to be crystallized into a green or violet powder and puffed by some celestial syringe down the fringed channels that lay behind his nostrils before it touched Flush's senses; and then it issued not in words, but in a silent rapture. Where Mrs. Browning saw, he smelt; where she wrote, he snuffed. (129)

and:

it was in the world of smell that Flush mostly lived. Love was chiefly smell; form and colour were smell; music and architecture, law, politics and science were smell. To him religion itself was smell. To describe his simplest experience with the daily chop or biscuit is beyond our power. (130)

Although Weil has suggested that "Woolf's embracing of smell in *Flush*" is to emphasize smell "as a foundation of civilization" (95), Woolf seems more focused on contrasting Flush's epistemology with that of the human. Thus while for the sake of a literary project Flush's life must be filtered through human consciousness and language, the reader is still made aware of the extent of Flush's alternative subjectivity, one that functions as a non-empirical mode of being in the world, and has the possibility of decentering the human and their modes of knowing. Even though the novel demonstrates the amount of power humans have over their canine companions, it also implies that when it comes to the nose, the dog is the one with power over the human.

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Cavalier king charles spaniel by V.e.r.i.k. from stockfreeimages.com

### Virginia Woolf's *Flush*: Decentering Human Subjectivity through the Nonhuman Animal Character

The dog in Virginia Woolf's novel *Flush: A Biography* (1933) is based on the author's knowledge of two real dogs: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's cocker spaniel and Woolf's own cocker spaniel named Pinka. The text, a story of a dog's life, while popular during Woolf's lifetime, was neglected by scholars for decades but now is recognized as an important element of Woolf's canon. Critics David Eberly, Susan Squier, and Ruth Vanita primarily associate the dog narrative with human representations such as sexuality, politics, and/or class issues. Other readings of the novel see it as a "feminist allegory of the subjugation of women in Victorian England" (Smith 349). Such readings, while clearly legitimate, ignore further meaning offered in the text: the complex workings of human-animal relationships with an existential emphasis on the canine perspective. Contemporary readers of *Flush* might now realize that a nonhuman animal narrative may, in addition to human representations, also work to expose a view of the nonhuman animal for its own sake.

Recent interest in the field of animal studies offers a change in the human perspective of nonhuman animals from hierarchal to relational. For instance, Jeanne Dubino's scholarship on Woolf and the natural world provides an evolutionary context to *Flush*, supplying evidence of Woolf's extensive knowledge of Darwinian language and spaniel breeds. Dubino also considers *Flush* alongside Darwinian coexistence in terms of interaction between species and their environments or what we might call worlds. Other recent critics who turn attention toward the dog's perception in *Flush* include Jutta Ittner, Dan Wylie, and Craig Smith.<sup>1</sup> Such articles support the need to examine the nonhuman animal as a subject of interest. By focusing on Flush's consciousness and relational

<sup>1</sup> One article by Jutta Ittner, "Part Spaniel, Part Canine Puzzle: Anthropomorphism in Woolf's *Flush* and Auster's *Timbuktu*" (2006), considers the possibility of Woolf attempting to move outside of anthropomorphic trends. However, Ittner ultimately concludes that *Flush* is inevitably a tale of an animal other's consciousness that results in human solipsism. Another article that recognizes Flush's dogness per se is Dan Wylie's "The Anthropomorphic Ethic: Fiction and the Animal Mind in Virginia Woolf's *Flush* and Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone*" (2002). Wylie focuses on the "dog-human language-barrier" (120), noting Woolf's "desire to recognize individuation in the animal" (121). Craig Smith's article, "Across the Widest Gulf: Nonhuman Subjectivity in Virginia Woolf's *Flush*" (2002), matches the current scientific community's observations of animal behavior to Woolf's portrayal of Flush, arguing that the novel shows a certain accuracy in terms of Woolf's animal insight.

being, my essay will argue that Woolf's depiction of the nonhuman animal subject in *Flush* should be read as one that stands against anthropomorphizing nonhuman animals.

### A Brief Review of the Nonhuman Animal in Literature

*Animal Victims in Modern Fiction* (1993), by Marian Scholtmeijer, one of the first of its kind to examine the animal in literature, surprisingly fails to acknowledge *Flush* at all. *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (1995), a collection edited by Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan, also fails to mention *Flush*. In *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (2008), Phillip Armstrong briefly mentions *Flush* in a chapter devoted to other major modernists such as D. H. Lawrence and Ernest Hemingway.<sup>2</sup> Armstrong places *Flush* in the category of "therio-primitivism," a term he defines as a "specifically modern conjunction between animality and pre- or non-modern forms of humanity" (142). Here Armstrong refers to the influence of Darwinian and Freudian theory on the modern view of the nonhuman animal. That is, if the modernists desire a return to a pure state of being, it can be found in the human unconscious, i.e., instinct, drive, impulse, or primitive nature of one's being. For humans, one might gain access through dreams or, in the case of Woolf, Lawrence, and Hemingway, through human-animal experiences as nonhuman animals seem to successfully access said states of being. For Woolf and Lawrence, human and nonhuman animal characters experience the stifling effect of bourgeois society with its order, rules, and conventions, hence repressing pure instincts. These instincts are the foundations of our being, often times buried in memory. As Armstrong says: "modernist writers and artists did not seek to eliminate the received dichotomy between civilization and primitivism; rather they embraced it, but by reversing its values" (143). In this way, animality serves as a "salvation" to the modern crisis of being.

Of *Flush*, Armstrong says, "in Virginia Woolf's biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spaniel Flush, the meeting between dog and mistress presents a mockery of the Victorian taste for anthropomorphic identification" (166). Correctly, Armstrong refers to those passages that mirror the dog with his mistress and concludes, "like any modernist beast, what Flush really wants is to go hunting, but confined to Miss Barrett's 'bedroom school' he learns instead to 'resign, to control, to suppress the most violent instincts of his nature'" (166). Armstrong then returns to his theory of therio-primitivism and attributes Flush's unnatural isolation to mocking Victorian society. While Armstrong's claim concerning Woolf's mockery of Victorian anthropocentrism is valid, his perspective dismisses the novel as merely humorous and hence frivolous, the unfortunate perspective taken of the novel by several past critics. Perhaps viewing *Flush* as a protagonist would have opened the possibility for Armstrong to explore animal intentionality imagined by Woolf. Instead, he deems *Flush* a "beast" to be categorized with the hunting perspective of Hemingway, a perspective clearly not suiting of Flush's personhood displayed in the novel. Other than that they access a primal instinct, Hemingway's nonhuman animals should not be grouped together with Woolf's and Lawrence's. Woolf and Lawrence relay a far more sympathetic perspective on nonhuman animals, attempting to empathize with animal suffering and their unfortunate demeaning position as it relates to the historically hierarchal human-animal relationships.

### Reading *Flush* as Against Anthropomorphism

As the title of the novel self-proclaims, *Flush: A Biography* is clearly the story of a dog's life, yet at the end of the 1983 introduction, Ritchie Trekkie leaves the reader with the lines, "The story is a perfect vehicle for Virginia's vein of fancy—who but she would have thought of telling

<sup>2</sup> Here Armstrong refers to nonhuman animals in Lawrence's "St. Mawr" and *The Plumed Serpent*, whereas Hemingway's animals include those appearing in *The Old Man and the Sea* and *The Sun Also Rises*.

the love story of two poets through the eyes of a spaniel?” (xvi). I read the work differently and argue that the language and plot structure remain devoted not to the love story of Miss Barrett and her suitor but to the actual life of a singular dog’s inimitable, albeit imagined, life experiences. Flush’s “human thoughts” are only human to the extent that they are written by a human for a human audience. Flush leads a dog’s life with dog-thoughts, exhibiting a social life with not only humans but also other dogs.

Today, animal studies scholars aim towards developing a new discourse for speaking of the nonhuman animal. Animal identity politics wish to create language outside of race, class, and gender studies, one that speaks specifically to animal being. In Woolf’s story, Miss Mitford gives Flush to Miss Barrett as a nonhuman animal companion for a human invalid. Under such circumstances, according to John Berger, a modern pet assumes a life entirely based upon that of its owner.<sup>3</sup> Berger argues,

The pet is either sterilized or sexually isolated, extremely limited in its exercise, deprived of almost all of the animal contact, and fed with artificial foods. This is the material process which lies behind the truism that pets come to resemble their masters or mistresses. They are creatures of their owner’s way of life. (256)

While critics such as Ittner interpret Flush as mirroring his human mistress, Woolf complicates the human-animal relationship described here by Berger when structuring Flush’s life with periods of freedom along with periods of isolation. Flush, at times, appears bound to his owner, eating human foods and remaining isolated. Yet, at other times, he forms bonds with other humans. More importantly, he has a social, even sexual, life with other dogs. Flush shows resistance to an entirely human-centered or human owner-centered life through Woolf’s imagined dog thoughts and behavior.

In fact, because the plot structure of the novel centers upon a nonhuman animal character, it maintains humans as secondary characters. Chapter One begins with a history of the cocker spaniel breed.<sup>4</sup> Woolf describes Flush’s heritage as one might begin a novel with the protagonist’s family coat of arms, marking the beginning of a series of commentary on breeding and the existing class system among dogs. Woolf then switches from the history of breeding to Flush’s own dog-thoughts on dog breeding. That is, Woolf begins the novel with a family heritage that describes Flush as having a priori memories of “dark men” calling “Span! Span!” Woolf explains, “some historians say that when the Carthaginians landed in Spain the common soldiers shouted with one accord ‘Span! Span!’” (3) because “span” in the Carthaginian tongue means rabbit. Thus, Flush instinctually hears this ancient hunting call from many ages before his birth.<sup>5</sup> While one might dismiss Woolf’s historical sketch as “therio-primitivism,” the fact that the novel begins with a dog’s ancestry is remarkable in itself. The first half of Chapter One presents Flush’s ancestors in an ancient foreign land, yet, the second half of the chapter purposefully turns to Flush’s individual, unique experiences as a puppy, forming a foundation that will recur in his memories throughout the book. After a brief history of the Spanish dog and breeding practices, Woolf says, “we turn from these high matters to consider the early life of Flush in the family of the Mitfords” (8). From here, each chapter in the book revolves around key moments in the development of Flush’s personhood. Readers move through each meaningful event in Flush’s life from youth to old age via his thoughts and personalized experiences of said events. And, just as a human

character might develop, transform, and manifest into a complex being, so too does Flush grow. One might argue that Flush’s consciousness parallels human consciousness, and to some degree that is true; yet, Woolf remains ambitious in her attempt to create not a human character but a nonhuman character based on the specific details exclusive to canine being. Flush displays sensitivity to touch, sounds, smell, and tone, accurately predicting linguistic meaning based on interpretations of human voice and bodily gestures. To some degree, Flush must be anthropomorphized, for there simply is no way to truly know the consciousness of a dog. However, the existence and nature of this book insist that the mystery of animal being makes it a consciousness worth imagining and documenting.

In attempting to understand nonhuman animal lives, the best critics to do the job so far include those such as Matthew Calarco, who look back to major philosophers’ claims on the nonhuman animal in order to reconsider the human-animal relationship with the intention of studying the animal for itself. When referring to the question of determining the “distinction between humans and animals,” Calarco in *Zoographies* claims:

to do philosophy today means proceeding from and in a view of the rupture in the human-animal distinction that has grounded thought thus far. In decentering the human, and by thinking from out of a new humility and generosity toward what we call “the nonhuman,” a genuinely nonanthropocentric thought might be developed. (64)

*Flush*, with its dog-centered narrative, presents what Calarco here calls a “rupture” in our historically anthropocentric perspective. Calarco goes on to read Emmanuel Levinas’s face of the Other in terms of the animal face. Calarco says,

To approach nonhuman animals in this manner, however, is already to grant the notion that animals might have the capacity to initiate something like an ethical encounter, an encounter in which an animal could strike a human being as radically Other and challenge the categories under which human thought and practice might place a given animal. Such an encounter would mean that the animal could have a “face” in the Levinasian sense, which is to say, an expressivity and vulnerability that calls my thought and egoism into question and that demands an alternative mode of relation. (64)

Calarco deems it feasible to apply the face of the Other human to the nonhuman animal Other because Levinas’s project is not a “species project”; rather, it is an “ethical concept” (65). Therefore, when a human experiences another human face, she or he “could—at least in principle—be extended well beyond human beings to include other kinds of beings” (Calarco 65).

The first and last meetings between Flush and Elizabeth Barrett Browning show an ethical encounter resulting in the nonanthropomorphism Calarco describes. Both characters demonstrate an ethic toward the other at the moment of the gaze. Thus, arguably, we see a decentering of the human anthropomorphic mode of being through an ethical responsibility towards another, one that occurs through the gaze and rejects the most basic sense of egoism for both nonhuman animal and human. When Flush and Miss Barrett first meet, Woolf emphasizes facial recognition: “‘Oh, Flush!’ said Miss Barrett. For the first time she looked him in the face. For the first time Flush looked at the lady lying on the sofa” (21-22). The text continues, “There was a likeness between them. As they gazed at each other each felt: Here I am—and then each felt: But how different! [...] Thus closely united, thus immensely divided, they gazed at each other” (Woolf 23). In their final meeting just before Flush’s death, Woolf again repeats the same gaze between Flush and Mrs. Browning. Flush is dreaming under a shady tree in this last scene. Woolf returns to those meaningful moments in his life such as the loss of Miss Mitford and the kidnapping. When he wakes, he suddenly runs through the city streets toward his home

<sup>3</sup> Although Berger refers to modern, not Victorian, pets, his description resonates with Flush’s experiences of freedom and isolation.

<sup>4</sup> Jeanne Dubino provides an evolutionary context to this section on Flush’s heritage in her article, “Evolution, History, and *Flush*; Or, The Origin of Spaniels.”

<sup>5</sup> For a more in-depth etymology of the word “Span,” see the aforementioned Dubino article.



and the home of his owner, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. When Flush arrives, “she looked up, startled, as he came in[.] [...] Then, as he leapt on to the sofa and thrust his face into hers, the words of her own poem came to mind” (160). Immediately thereafter is the poem written by Mrs. Browning, a reminiscence on their long human-animal relationship. As the gaze continues, Woolf writes,

but she was woman; he was dog. Mrs. Browning went on reading. Then she looked at Flush again. But he did not look at her. An extraordinary change had come over him. “Flush!” she cried. But he was silent. He had been alive; he was now dead. (161)

Each character, human and nonhuman, seems deeply affected by gazing at the Other’s otherness. In the scenes of the gaze, each character’s look at the other causes them to think of their existential similarities and differences, hence disrupting their usual worldview and creating a possible space for “an alternative mode of relation.” Woolf’s human-animal gaze relays the power in a face-to-face interaction and its ethical consequences.

Flush and Elizabeth Barrett Browning experience Calarco’s description of an existential disruption when forced into questioning the self in order to recognize an ethical responsibility for the other. Barrett’s disruption becomes most apparent in the novel when she risks her own life to save Flush from the kidnappers. We are made aware of Flush’s internal conflict between his yearning for freedom and exercise versus his loyalty to Elizabeth. Woolf writes, “Between them, Flush felt more and more strongly, as the weeks went on, was a bond, an uncomfortable yet thrilling tightness; so that if his pleasure was her pain, then his pleasure was pleasure no longer but three parts pain” (Woolf 35). When given the opportunity to leave the bedroom: “But no—though the door stood open, he would not leave Miss Barrett” (Woolf 35). Thus, Flush, while showing conflict, chooses Elizabeth’s pleasure over his own desires. Similarly, Elizabeth struggles to rescue Flush from the kidnappers but eventually does so.

Like Calarco, Giorgio Agamben returns to past classical writings to re-think the human-animal relationship. According to Agamben, our perception of human being forms from our own manufactured divisions, namely divisions between human and animal. When referring to Jacob von Uexkull, a German biologist known for revealing the animal’s subjective environment, Agamben reminds us that humans interpret the animal’s perceived world as equivalent to that of a human’s perception of the world.

Too often [...] we imagine that the relations a certain animal subject has to the things in its environment take place in the same space and in the same time as those which bind us to the objects in our human world. This illusion rests on the belief in a single world in which all living beings are situated. Uexkull shows that such a unitary world does not exist; just as a space and a time that are equal for all living things do not exist. (40)

Although the nonhuman animal and the human worlds do not exist in the same worlds per se, they are surely related. One might think of the Heideggerean being-in-the-world in which multiple factors are at play in the uniquely human world, whereas a nonhuman animal’s world presumably has its own multiplicities in being. The key here, though, on which Heidegger, Uexkull, and Agamben all agree, remains that while the human and animal world may inhabit differences in space, time, and environment, the human and animal world are relational. That is, as Uexkull once determined, while the spider weaving its web does not communicate directly with the fly, the spider’s web is absolutely “fly-like.” Similarly, while Woolf cannot technically be-in-the-world of a dog, her novel takes a bold shot at imagining the nonhuman animal world, one that emerges as uncannily dog-like. In addition, Woolf’s depiction of Flush’s perception surely exposes the anthropocentric world projected onto Flush. In the end, Woolf provides us with parallels in

terms of interpreting Flush as analogous with human social systems and history, yet her additional step of investing in Flush’s thoughts and being causes us to examine not only human parallels but also nonhuman animal consciousness itself.

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*Spaniel Eyes by Tina Phillips from freedigitalphotos.net*



Cocker spaniel (PSF) by Pearson Scott Foresman [Public domain],  
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## Dogs and Servants

Every time I watch *The Wizard of Oz* I worry about the fate of Toto. Oh, I know he's going back to Kansas with Dorothy, I've seen the film a hundred times. And I don't worry that Dorothy will be stuck in Oz, or the Scarecrow will go up in flames. So why do I have this intense emotional response to Toto every time he disappears from the screen, especially when he's snatched up by the Wicked Witch's flying monkeys? Anticipating your possible reaction to this pathetic confession, I summon Donna Haraway to my defense. Writing on the highly emotional scenes of parting between master and dog on the TV show *Cell Dog*, she threatens: "I dare you to be cynical, even if all the knives of critical discourse are in your hands" (*When Species Meet* 65). Yes, I admit it, I have a knee-jerk response to Toto, yet I'm not normally sentimental. So why? I think I feel so strongly because if Toto were lost, I can't follow him, I can't put myself in his place. Not that I can imagine myself a flaming scarecrow, but Scarecrow talks. He has consciousness, if not a brain, and thus he can be the center of consciousness. Toto cannot, which makes him more vulnerable, perhaps, more deserving of my empathic response, while at the same time foreign, so absolutely "other." To put it in the common parlance of the literature classroom, I identify so strongly with Toto precisely because I *can't* identify with him. I am woman, Toto is dog.

Just six years before Victor Fleming's classic film, Virginia Woolf published her popular novel—a Book-of-the-Month Club selection in the U.S.—*Flush*, based on the life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's cocker spaniel as narrated in the Brownings' letters. Reading those letters, Woolf responded so strongly to the figure of the dog that she "couldn't resist making him a life," she wrote (L5 162). Woolf too responded so intensely to the dog, I want to suggest, because she could not—indeed, would not—identify with him. Still, Quentin Bell's delightful and often-quoted remark that *Flush* is not so much a novel by someone who loved dogs as a novel by someone who wanted to *be* a dog, is apropos here. Just what kind of identification is this, this empathic response, to quote Jacques Derrida writing on his encounter with a cat, in the face of the "absolute alterity of the neighbor," or companion species (360)?

I am interested in the relationship between dogs and domestic servants in Woolf's novel. As Marianne DeKoven writes in her *PMLA* guest column on animal studies, many scholars use "nonhuman" animals because they are "motivated by the parallels between animals and subjugated human beings" (363), such as domestic servants.<sup>1</sup> In *Flush*, parallels abound. Both dog and servant are severed from family ties. Flush must part, wrenchingly, from Miss Mitford in being given as a gift to Miss Barrett.

A door shut. For one instant he paused, bewildered, unstrung. Then with a pounce as of clawed tigers, memory fell upon him. He felt himself alone—deserted. He rushed to the door. It was shut. He pawed, he listened. He heard footsteps descending. He knew them for the familiar footsteps of his mistress. [...] Miss Mitford was slowly, was heavily, was reluctantly descending the stairs. And as she went,

[...] panic seized upon him. Door after door shut in his face as Miss Mitford went downstairs; they shut on freedom; on fields; on hares; on grass; on his adored, his venerated mistress [...] on all he had known of happiness and love and human goodness! There! The front door slammed. He was alone. She had deserted him. (*Flush* 21-22)

Likewise, Lily Wilson, Miss Barrett's maid, would have parted from her family in going into service, though no emotional scenes of parting are narrated, and she had to part from her fiancé in following Miss Barrett to Italy. Both dog and servant are bound to their mistress through affective ties and familial intimacy. So strong is that bond that Lily elopes to Italy with her mistress just as Flush, out of love for Miss Barrett, conquers his biting jealousy of Robert Browning. Both dog and servant, at least in London, are restricted to confined domestic spaces: for Flush, Miss Barrett's back bedroom, for Lily, Mr. Barrett's house on "the most august of London streets," Wimpole Street—a house first described in terms of the dress and rituals of its servants (16-17). Such confinement, moreover, marks their status as property. Donna Haraway remarks that the nineteenth-century bourgeois family invented the practice of middle-class pet keeping, and Woolf notes that had Lily not gone to Italy with Miss Barrett, she would have been "turned into the street before sunset" (170). In another Woolf novel, *The Years*, Crosby, the old family housekeeper, is "identified with [...] the furniture she spends her life polishing," as Alison Light says in *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants*, and is described as "following Eleanor about the house like a dog" (71). Dogs and servants are faithful (185). Like dogs, Light remarks, "servants belonged to another species" (141). Cross-species identification is evident in Woolf's personal writings on domestic servants as well. In her diaries and letters, she describes her domestic Lily as having "charming, stupid, doglike eyes" (Light 133), and Lottie "works like a horse" (Light 142). At one point, in frustration with Lottie, she writes, "Considering their unimportance they must be compared to flies in the eye for the discomfort they can produce in spite of being so small" (D1 197).

As I pursued the many parallels between dog and servant, I kept coming back to a remark a student made about this novel in what my graduate students have dubbed my "class on class." Isn't it interesting, Erin said, sardonically, that Woolf can get into the mind of a dog but not the mind of a servant. Certainly, as I have written elsewhere, Woolf does seem to have trouble getting into the heads of domestics:

Visions of joy there must have been at the wash-tub, say with her children, [...] at the public-house, drinking; turning over scraps in her drawers. Some cleavage of the dark there must have been, some channel in the depths of obscurity through which light enough issued to twist her face grinning in the glass and make her, turning to her job again, mumble out the old music hall song. (TTL 131)

So writes Woolf of Mrs. McNab, the woman who cleans and tends the Ramsays' summer home in *To the Lighthouse*. Similarly, the biographer-narrator of *Flush* appends a note on the "extremely obscure" life of Lily Wilson. "Since she spoke almost as seldom as Flush," writes the narrator, "the outlines of her character are little known" (169). Echoing the earlier novel, the passage continues:

Then Mrs. Browning had died—there can have been no lack of thoughts in Wilson's old head as she sat at the window [...]. But nothing can be more vain than to pretend that we can guess what they were, for she was typical of the great army of her kind—the inscrutable, the all-but-silent, the all-but-invisible servant maids of history. (174)

At first it seems contemptible—or at the very least, remarkable—that Woolf can get into a dog's head but not a servant's, as if she were indifferent to the latter's visions of joy or daily sufferings. For all Woolf's empathy with outsiders and her pleas for writers to give us the "lives of the obscure" so that we might bridge the class divide, and despite her lament in *Three Guineas* that the Dictionary of National

<sup>1</sup> My initial writing on *Flush* focused on the function this popular novel performs in Woolf's canon. I read *Flush* as the *excess* of a canonical theory of value that sets up distinctions between good and bad literature, high art and popular fiction, providing us instead with a noneconomical, or noncanonical, theory of value (Caughie 145).

Biography contains no lives of maids, for, as she writes in *Flush*, “biography had not then cast its searchlight so low” (170), Woolf, it seems, is far better able—not to mention more willing—to write from the perspective of a cocker spaniel than of a serving woman.<sup>2</sup> Why? Rather than exposing her insensitivity to servants (for which there is ample evidence in her diaries and letters), I want to explore the conventions of proximity and identification in Woolf’s writing about dogs and domestics. What different modality of identification is operating in the representation of dogs and servants in *Flush*? Or in my response to Toto?

If, as animal studies scholars argue, in writing about animals we are to resist making the dog a person, thereby making the animal a figure for the self, why would it be possible, or what could it mean, to make the person a dog? In his chapter on Gertrude Stein in *Cruising Modernism*, Michael Trask writes of Stein’s use of dogs and their importance to the “making” of persons. Dogs, like servants, play a supporting role, subordinate yet essential, especially for anchoring “mobile persons” (75) in a rapidly fragmenting society. The increasing demand for domestic servants in response to an ever-expanding middle class, writes Light, came at the very time live-in service was on the wane (179-80). Employer and servant alike now wore the same clothing styles, attended the same cinemas, voted for the same political party, and listened to that great leveling device, the BBC. Those who are “in danger of sliding out of place,” Trask writes, are “in dire need of the categorical fastness that dogs [and, I would add, servants] [...] exemplify” (75). Thus the domestic dog, “at once obedient and misbehaving, faithful and straying” (76), he says, becomes a figure for the contradiction of modernity: an imperative to obedience within a social system that was fragmenting. Dogs as “modern subjects,” writes Haraway, require “self-rewarding discipline from legitimate authority” (64). Similarly, Light says that dogs “embodied the Victorian past with their ready capacity to obey authority and respond to discipline” (50), much like servants. “In her clean white apron and cap,” Light remarks, “the servant kept all kinds of disorder at bay” (82).<sup>3</sup>

Woolf’s novel *Flush* exemplifies as well modernity’s desire to control behavior, exposing the “categorical fastness” (Trask 75) that a fragmenting society desires. Comparing canine and human aristocracies, Woolf’s narrator finds the canine much superior because the Spaniel Club establishes definitive signs of good breeding based on ears, eyes, noses, and coats. Curled ears, a light nose, or a topknot are, the narrator tells us, “nothing less than fatal” (6). Distinctions in human society are far less definitive: a coat of arms may be forged, an income may be earned, and coats can be bought off the rack. Throughout the novel Woolf has Flush learn to make distinctions, to draw boundaries. In the city, he must be led on a chain; in the countryside, he may run free. In London he must curb his sexual instincts, in Florence he can indulge them. In London he drinks from a purple jar, in Florence he eats off the street. In Wimpole street all dogs are purebreds, in Pisa they are mongrels. Such distinctions in the novel are explicitly *class* distinctions. Indeed, it is Flush’s dognapping that leads Barrett to the London slums to see firsthand the lives of others bordering on her own genteel neighborhood. For Woolf, dogs, like servants, “exist on the margins,” in the proximate social spaces both Stein (Trask 79) and Woolf seek to narrate. In narrating these spaces, Woolf discovers that dogs play an important role in negotiating the problem of identification in modernist writing. By making the person a dog, establishing an identification between dogs and servants, Woolf discovers a way out of the double bind of the modernist writer who would write across class lines without

making her character—whether Lily Wilson or Mrs. McNab—a representative figure of the working classes.

Trask asserts that behaviorists and evolutionary biologists of Woolf’s day were blurring the lines between animal and human behavior to establish a “natural” model of subjectivity. But Woolf, significantly, keeps animal and human distinct. Woolf gently satirizes precisely this behaviorist psychology in the scene after the emotional parting, where Flush and Miss Barrett gaze into each other’s eyes for the first time:

Each was surprised. Heavy curls hung down on either side of Miss Barrett’s face; large bright eyes shone out; a large mouth smiled. Heavy ears hung down on either side of Flush’s face; his eyes, too, were large and bright: his mouth was wide. There was a likeness between them. As they gazed at each other each felt: Here am I—and then each felt: But how different! [...] Broken asunder, yet made in the same mould, could it be that each completed what was dormant in the other? (23)

This is the kind of sympathetic identification Woolf deflates. Instead, Woolf emphasizes the world of difference between canine and human: “But no. Between them lay the widest gulf that can separate one being from another. She spoke. He was dumb. She was woman; he was dog” (23).

Woolf keeps the canine and the human distinct for good reason. For the social spaces Woolf seeks to narrate are at once as proximate and as remote as the canine’s world of smells: “Where Mrs. Browning saw, [Flush] smelt; where she wrote, he snuffed”:

Here, then, the biographer must perforce come to a pause. Where two or three thousand words are insufficient for what we see [...] there are no more than two words and perhaps one-half for what we smell. The human nose is practically non-existent. The greatest poets in the world have smelt nothing but roses on the one hand, and dung on the other. The infinite gradations that lie between are unrecorded. Yet it was in the world of smell that Flush mostly lived. (129-30)

I want to suggest that *Flush* models precisely the kind of writing needed to enter into those social spaces, the manifold and shifting social spaces between the classes, and to respond to “the absolute alterity of the neighbor” (Derrida 380). Imagining life from a dog’s perspective provides a view—or a sniff—from the margin without having to identify with that position—an identification that is always discomforting if ever really possible. It provides what I have termed an ethics without identification.

In *When Species Meet*, Haraway provides a clue to the alternative reading of dogs and servants I’m suggesting here: “we might nurture responsibility with and for animals better by plumbing the category of labor more than the category of rights” (73). The category of rights is based on an assumption of similarity between positions that are not only *not* symmetrical, but that necessarily entail the use of one another’s bodies (79)—as fleas use Flush’s body, as the Brownings use Lily’s. So when we read “visions of joy there must have been,” we needn’t see this as a refusal to *respond* but as a refusal to *identify*. The assumption that in refusing to identify with servants, Woolf fails to give them their due is based on a notion of rights structured by a larger economy of the law. And here I turn to one final text that explores the boundary between animal and human: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism.” Writing about the violence done in trying to bring the so-called Third World Other into the circuit of the law, as Victor Frankenstein does with his monster, or Charlotte Brontë does with Bertha, the madwoman in the attic, Spivak writes that their failure to do so “reminds us that the absolutely Other cannot be selfed” (850). Not writing from the Other’s point of view, not making the Other speak, can itself be a responsible act, a *response* to the “absolute alterity of the neighbor.” In fact, a writer in Woolf’s position, a member of the

<sup>2</sup> So too Barrett Browning could write about Flush but not about Lily, as the narrator remarks in a passing phrase that “since Miss Barrett never wrote a poem about her,” we don’t know Lily (169).

<sup>3</sup> Writing on Lily in her long note, the narrator wonders how she came to be Barrett Browning’s maid, whether perhaps she had become known to the Barretts’ cook “by the decency of her demeanor and the cleanliness of her apron” (168).



middle-class who employed domestics, cannot turn the servant-other into a self without violence. To quote Spivak again, “the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self” (846)—or the middle-class self. Domestic service, like imperialism, is a “territorial and subject-constituting project,” entailing a “violent deconstruction” of oppositions between human and animal, speech and silence, freedom and bondage (843). Writing on Derrida’s essay, “The Animal that I Therefore Am,” Haraway commends him for rejecting the “facile and basically, if generally well-intentioned, move of claiming to see from the point of view of the other” (21). In forbidding himself to assign meaning onto the cat, by insisting the cat is a real cat and not a metaphor, Derrida asks, “must I conversely give in to the other violence or stupidity, that which would consist in suspending one’s compassion and in depriving the animal of every power of manifestation [...]?” (387). Clearly not, as Woolf shows in that highly charged scene of parting described above.

It’s not, I would argue, that Woolf’s writing about servants does no political or ethical work insofar as she remains distant from the servant’s interior; it’s that it doesn’t do the work we may want, the work that sustains our sense of self, that makes us feel good because we can sympathize with the other. An ethics without identification *does* work, though, as a way of negotiating proximate social spaces, and the alternative between, to quote Derrida, “a projection that appropriates and an interruption that excludes” (388). If, as Haraway argues, the category of labor provides a model for writing about dogs without giving them an identity (that is, dogs are not analogous to wage laborers), then animal studies might provide a model for writing about domestic servants that requires a response to, but not an identification with, that subject position. When Alison Light says that dogs appear in Woolf’s writings “as a stand-in for that other dogsbody, the servant” (50), we need not take that as a commentary on Woolf’s scandalous view of servants, but as a clue as to how to read her modernist project of writing across class lines.

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## Here Ends the Special Issue on Virginia Woolf and Animals

### Truly Miscellaneous

#### Dr. Jekyll and Mrs. Hyde Park Gate: Echoes of Robert Louis Stevenson in *Mrs. Dalloway*

A writer, plumbing the cavernous depths of the human psyche, explores in an experimental “phenomenon of style” (Nabokov 184) the “competing tugs of the conscious and the unconscious, [...] the life-denying Thanatos principle and the life-enhancing Eros” (McLynn 262) and invents two separate characters who share, enigmatically, one self. The text described here is Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, but the portrayal lends itself just as easily to Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. While Woolf and Stevenson are far too dissimilar to share much common space in modern literary studies, striking echoes nonetheless resonate between these London novels, particularly in their treatment of literary doubles and their parallel scenes of transformation and suicide.

Virginia Woolf’s early journals reveal her fascination with Stevenson. A 1905 diary entry provides a glimpse of her running “Out to Hatchards to buy Stevenson and Pater,” seeking the essays “not to copy, I hope, but to see how the trick’s done” (*Passionate Apprentice* 251). Woolf’s father, Sir Leslie Stephen, an “eminent Victorian” in his own right, may have helped inspire his daughter’s early interests. Sir Leslie had known Stevenson long before Virginia arrived; born a generation before Woolf in 1850, Stevenson was a literary acquaintance of Stephen. Biographer Frank McLynn gives Stephen, as editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, a special position in Stevenson’s career as advisor and mentor, writing that “Before the 1880s, Leslie Stephen [...] was the only man in Britain of editorial status to be certain of Louis’s genius” (101). Stephen encouraged and published some of Stevenson’s early works, including a significant essay on Victor Hugo that Stevenson later felt “marked [...] the beginning of his command of style” (Graham Balfour qtd. in McLynn 102) and one of his first notable short stories, “Will o’ the Mill,” in 1879 (McLynn 139).<sup>1</sup> Woolf echoes her father’s sentiments by glimpsing in Stevenson seeds of literary genius worth cultivating.<sup>2</sup>

Woolf’s keen affinity for Stevenson did not last, however. Though she once admired Stevenson’s essays, she later offers only lukewarm praise of his fiction. In “Phases of Fiction” (1929), Woolf favors Stevenson’s works over those of Sir Walter Scott in her discussion of the Romantics, writing that “any page of *The Master of Ballantrae* [...] still stands wear and tear; but the fabric of *The Bride of Lammermoor* is full of holes and patches” (67). She admires Stevenson’s knack for storytelling and his artful treatment of romance, admitting that passages of his are “lovely and brilliant” (68) taken alone, though she feels unsatisfied by

<sup>1</sup> We also have Sir Leslie Stephen to thank, indirectly, for one of the most famous literary characters of all time, since he introduced Stevenson to writer William Ernest Henley, whose amputated leg made him the inspiration for Long John Silver in *Treasure Island*.

<sup>2</sup> Stevenson’s personal history, as the son and grandson of lighthouse designers, might have held additional interest for Woolf. In fact, Robert Louis Stevenson’s only writing for the Scottish Society of Arts was “a paper on a proposed new device to make lighthouse lights flash” (Harman 3). The Stevenson family designed several lighthouses on the Isle of Skye, where Woolf’s 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse* takes place. Indeed, when I read of the stocking Mrs. Ramsay is knitting for the Lighthouse keeper’s “little boy, who was threatened with a tuberculous hip” (TTL 5), I think of Stevenson, who was a sickly little boy thought to suffer from tuberculosis.

his works as a whole: “Our attention is caught by some knot of ribbon or refinement of tracery when in fact we desire only a bare body against the sky” (68), she writes. “We remember the detail, but not the whole” (68). For Woolf, one such remembered detail is Stevenson’s own doubleness. She puzzles over his attraction for adventurous, boyhood themes amidst his carefully developed style: “Carelessness has never been laid to the charge of Robert Louis Stevenson. He was careful, careful to a fault—a man who combined most strangely boy’s psychology with the extreme sophistication of an artist” (67). Here Woolf notes in Stevenson the same kind of “strange” duality that marked some of his key fictional characters.

Woolf, ever mercurial about her likes and dislikes, expressed a much more critical view of Stevenson in a 1925 letter to Janet Case, writing, “Stevenson is a poor writer, because his thought is poor, and therefore, fidget though he may, his style is obnoxious” (*Letters* 3 201). Even more harshly, she adds in a following letter that she can’t bear to read “a single thing of his [...] a second time” (L3 211). With Stevenson, Woolf finds her own sense of duality in a strange oscillation of admiration and repulsion. Although her responses to him become strikingly negative, Woolf nonetheless reveals a lifelong fascination with Stevenson’s writings; certainly, Woolf had read his works a *first* time, and was willing to investigate their ideas and nudge them in new directions. After all, as Woolf wrote of Stevenson’s essays, she reads Stevenson “not to copy [...] but to see how the trick’s done.”

The differences between Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), a modernist experiment in stream-of-consciousness language showing the ebb and flow of one day of a woman’s life, and Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), an allegorical, sensational, male-centered Gothic tale akin to detective fiction, are certainly obvious, yet the fictions share similarities that have been overlooked. Both novels are portraits of London and its roving inhabitants.<sup>3</sup> They open upon similar scenes of flâneurs enjoying the city. Stevenson’s strolling cousins, Utterson and Enfield, “put the greatest store by these excursions” as they walk by shop fronts “with an air of invitation, like rows of smiling saleswomen” (*JH* 8). Woolf’s Clarissa Dalloway is, in turn, a female flâneur enjoying the “swing, tramp, and trudge” of the city as she crosses Victoria Street, savoring “life; London; this moment of June” (MD 4). Both novels additionally experiment with literary form and narrative perspective: while Woolf in a single scene will float from the consciousness of one person to another, Stevenson makes use of three narrative sections, one in third person and two in first person, revealing his own engagement with different angles of perception.<sup>4</sup> Alan Sandison even argues that Stevenson “delights in [...] polyphonic coexistence” (6) and has considered the novel a “harbinger of Modernism” (224).<sup>5</sup>

Most significantly, both novels share a striking resemblance in their use of literary doubles. As Karl Miller notes in his work *The Modern Double*, during the *fin de siècle*, “duality underwent a revival” (209), particularly in Gothic fiction. We know from “Phases of Fiction” that Woolf was no great admirer of the Gothic, for she dismisses Anne Radcliffe’s “Gothic absurdity” (69) and writes that her inability to sustain emotion over mystery and murdered bodies makes us “laugh” (70). Nonetheless, by the end of the nineteenth century, *fin de siècle* Gothic can be compared to modernism in its challenge to literary realism. As Linda Dryden

<sup>3</sup> In fact, critics have felt the urge to include maps when discussing both texts. See, for example, the front matter of the Norton Critical Edition of *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and the front matter of *The Mrs. Dalloway Reader*.

<sup>4</sup> Stevenson uses third-person narration to introduce the characters and demonstrate the lawyer Utterson’s fascination with Jekyll and Hyde, then gives Dr. Lanyon’s first-person narrative of Hyde’s transformation, and, finally, unveils “Henry Jekyll’s Full Statement of the Case,” revealing his motivations and experiments.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald R. Thomas also characterizes the novel as modernist, writing that “The act of self-narration is revealed in *Jekyll and Hyde* to be a ritual act of self-estrangement” and “opens the door to the modernist claim that the self is not represented at the scene of writing” (73).

has argued, “there is a palpable connection between the Gothic, the literature of duality and modernity” (41). Late nineteenth-century Gothic writing connects to modernism on an elemental level through its preoccupations with fragmented identity and its resistance to closure. These themes find expression in the busy streets and dark recesses of urban life. Dryden writes of the modern Gothic, “Unstable identity became closely linked in this fiction with the labyrinthine metropolis and its teeming population. Issues of duality—split personalities, physical transformations, mistaken identities, doppelgängers—were found to be manifested in the social, geographical and architectural schisms of the modern city” (19).<sup>6</sup> Anticipating psychological interests of the twentieth century, Gothic novels frequently center around an anxiety that cannot be eluded. The doppelgänger reflects this inescapable anxiety “through a malevolent ‘other’ who destabilizes the cohesion of the self” (Dryden 39). Indeed, these are Stevenson’s main preoccupations in *Jekyll and Hyde*, and these are precisely some of the key themes that Woolf taps into in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In both texts, the upbeat city life soon manifests its dark underbelly: too soon, Stevenson’s strolling men find themselves near a “sinister block” of buildings with its “tramps,” stray children, and the lurking shadows of lurid crimes (*JH* 8), while Clarissa dwells on a superficially recovered society still suffering from the First World War (MD 5). The doubles of the novels emerge from these dark, hidden realms.

Woolf famously writes in her diary while working on *Mrs. Dalloway*, “I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters; I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humor, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect” (D3 263). Through this method, Woolf creates two remote individuals that are internally connected, though they never meet. Woolf first envisioned the characters separately, but by October 1922, Woolf imagined bringing the woman socialite and the mentally unstable man together.<sup>7</sup> In her diary she describes the novel in development as “a study of insanity & suicide: the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side” (D2 207). Suzette Henke has even envisioned the novel as “an allegorical struggle between good and evil—between Clarissa Dalloway’s comic celebration of life and the tragic, death-dealing forces that drive Septimus Smith to suicide” (125). In her 1928 introduction to the Modern Library edition, Woolf explicitly describes Septimus as Clarissa’s “double,” writing, “in the first version Septimus, who later is intended to be her double, had no existence; and [...] Mrs. Dalloway was originally to kill herself, or perhaps merely to die at the end of the party” (“An Introduction” 11). For the final version, suicide and death instead are given to Septimus, “the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer” (MD 25), while Clarissa experiences his actions vicariously. Yet, even before this scene they are connected, both experiencing moments of suspension and interruption, even seeming at times to share a consciousness, though they derive from very different social worlds. For instance, as Clarissa sews her gown, she is thinking, “Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets fall. And the body alone listens to the passing bee; the wave breaking; the dog barking, far away barking and barking” (39–40). The imagery of Clarissa’s suspended moment connects her to Septimus, when, later in the book, he is lying on the sofa in his flat: “Every power poured its treasures on his head, and his hand lay there on the back of the sofa, as he had seen his hand lie when he was bathing, floating, on the top of the waves, while far away on shore he heard dogs barking and barking far away. Fear no more, says the heart in the body; fear no more” (139, my italics). The characters seem bathed in the same descriptive ether as their “caves” of consciousness unite; the two share a

<sup>6</sup> Elaine Showalter points out that Stevenson taps into an “account of the divided and troubled consciousness that Dr. Freud was also beginning to analyze in Vienna” (Preface i).

<sup>7</sup> Clarissa Dalloway was created first for the short story “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street” while a character that was a prototype for Septimus Warren Smith originated in “The Prime Minister.” These became the foundation for *Mrs. Dalloway*. See also Hoffmann.

hidden facet of their identities while they reveal only a small portion of themselves to the world.<sup>8</sup>

When we think of literary doubles, we may envision most immediately the famous Jekyll and Hyde, and it certainly seems likely that Woolf did so, too, even if unconsciously. Though they share a body and a consciousness, Jekyll and Hyde represent how mankind is “not truly one, but truly two” (JH 48). They, too, might be seen as “the sane and the insane, side by side,” though Jekyll’s friends increasingly question his sanity as Stevenson’s novel progresses. Henry Jekyll is introduced as a highly regarded public figure: “Henry Jekyll, M.D., D.C.L., LL.D., F.R.S., etc.,” a Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Civil Law, Doctor of Laws, and Fellow of the Royal Society (13). His tragic flaw is that, born into “a large fortune” and expected to have “an honourable and distinguished future,” he must, from his youth, suppress his natural “gaiety of disposition” (47), which he finds “hard to reconcile with my imperious desire to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public” (48). In “conceal[ing] my pleasures,” as he describes it, he finds himself “already committed to a profound duplicity of life” (48). To relieve himself of the agony of hiding a private self beneath a public exterior, Jekyll devises a means of housing them in “separate identities” (49); through the use of a potion, Jekyll splits away all his hidden feelings, the thoughts he can no longer stand to suppress as an upstanding public figure, and houses them in Hyde.

While Woolf perhaps would have dismissed Stevenson’s supernatural morality tale for its heavy-handedness, she would have agreed that each person has a public and a private self.<sup>9</sup> *Mrs. Dalloway* is largely a text about suppressed emotions and the struggle to locate personal identity. In this shell-shocked society ravaged by the war, individuals emerge like Mr. Bowley, who is “sealed with wax over the deeper sources of life but could be unsealed suddenly, inappropriately” (MD 20), showing how a hidden identity can surface to challenge “appropriate” norms and customs. As the wife of a member of Parliament, Clarissa feels the pressure of living in an upper-class world of surface appearances: “How much she wanted it—that people should look pleased as she came in. [...] Much rather would she have been one of those people like Richard who did things for themselves, [...] half the time she did things not simply, not for themselves; but to make people think this or that” (10). She even holds a secret desire to be someone else: “Oh if she could have had her life over again! she thought, stepping on to the pavement, could have looked even differently!” (10). Instead, she thinks of her body not as her own but as a “body she wore” (10)<sup>10</sup> and her identity as subsumed by her husband’s: “this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (11). She spends her day submerged in the past, remembering her youth at Bourton, her kiss with Sally, her love for Peter, reflecting on the person she might have become (“how they were to reform the world” [33]). She is more or less successful at living her double life, though Woolf’s original plan for the novel suggests that the weight of her past could have gotten the best of her in the end. Intriguingly, she is roughly the same age as Dr. Jekyll: Clarissa “had just broken into her fifty-second year” (36), while Dr. Jekyll is “a smooth-faced man of fifty” (JH 19), both struggling with mid-life crises of identity.

Hyde, on the other hand, emerges “smaller, slighter and younger than Henry Jekyll” (JH 51) because he is the side of Jekyll that is less exercised. Clarissa’s double, Septimus, is also younger than Clarissa, “aged about thirty” (MD 14). Just as Hyde, as his name implies, represents Jekyll’s hidden natures, revealing the repressed, the id, Septimus liberates what the other characters attempt to conceal; as Alex Zwerdling writes of Septimus, “It is as if Septimus were a repository for the suppressed feelings of the rigidly controlled people around him” (Zwerdling 75). His crisis of identity comes from being in the war, losing Evans, his close friend and commanding officer, and feeling nothing, precisely the way society has encouraged him to. As a result, he loses himself. His wife Rezia reminds herself, “And it was cowardly for a man to say he would kill himself, but Septimus had fought; he was brave; he was not Septimus now” (MD 23). She is only able to contend with his alteration by conceptualizing it as a complete change of identity. Likewise, Clarissa, to herself, seems “not even Clarissa anymore,” but this study of “the sane and the insane side by side” is meant to reveal where Septimus ventures that the carefully guarded Clarissa does not.

As a man listening to the birds sing in Greek (MD 24), talking to himself, watching how the world “wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames” (15), and seeing the dead Evans appear “behind the railings” (25), Septimus is the one who fully crosses into the realm of madness and thus becomes a threat to the anesthetized postwar way of life. Rezia struggles with the agony and embarrassment of having a shell-shocked husband: “Far rather would she that he were dead!” she thinks (23). Worst of all, his is a public outrage: “People must notice; people must see” (15); she thinks, “failure one conceals. She must take him away into some park” (16). While trying to hide Septimus’s behavior, she realizes, “I can’t stand it [...] having left Septimus, who wasn’t Septimus any longer, to say hard, cruel, wicked things, to talk to himself, to talk to a dead man, on the seat over there” (65). Septimus lacks Hyde’s evil nature, but here Rezia casts her changed husband in the same mould as Hyde who is hard, cruel, and “particularly wicked-looking” (JH 22). As Rezia frantically and angrily contemplates his shift of identity in this scene, a “child ran full tilt into her, fell flat, and burst out crying” (MD 65). This evokes Hyde’s famous first appearance in Stevenson’s text where a little girl, “running as hard as she was able,” runs into Hyde and he tramples over her, leaving her “screaming on the ground” (JH 9). If Woolf is thinking of Stevenson here, she uses the echo to reinforce the dark side of consciousness into which Rezia feels Septimus has slipped.

In both novels, the dark side of human character carries hints of deviant sexuality. The way Septimus feels about himself bears resemblance to Hyde, that physical manifestation of the hidden, the malignant: Septimus attests to committing “an appalling crime” (MD 96) and sees himself as so “pocked and marked with vice that women shuddered when they saw him in the street” (91). Intriguingly, though Hyde’s appearance inspires “loathing” and can make the onlooker in the street “turn sick” (JH 9), he only gives “an impression of deformity without any namable malformation” (17); his hideousness is found within and radiates without. Tonya Krouse also notes the way Septimus believes his body is marked by his illness, showing, in Foucault’s words, “a lesion, dysfunction, or a symptom” of his pathology (qtd. in Krouse 16). The “pathology” she reads in Septimus is homosexuality that cannot properly be expressed in the society in which he lives, and she equates these facial markings with those that might be acquired from sexually transmitted diseases. Many critics have similarly argued that Jekyll’s “gaiety of disposition” which he must hide is literally being gay.<sup>11</sup> For example, in *Sexual Anarchy*, Elaine Showalter suggests that Jekyll’s friends may believe Hyde is blackmailing Jekyll for being a closet homosexual (“paying through the nose for some of the capers of his youth” (JH 10)), and points out that the novel was published the same year the

<sup>8</sup> Suzette A. Henke nicely describes Clarissa and Septimus’s connection when she writes, “Both Septimus and Clarissa Dalloway are visionary seers who experience moments of heightened perception, transcendental states of psychic illumination or ‘inner light’” (139).

<sup>9</sup> Stevenson and Woolf are further aligned in the ways both struggled with illness throughout their lives. Both knew intimately of the separate realms of illness and health they inhabited, which might be read as a double life.

<sup>10</sup> This may remind us of how Jekyll describes the way he felt compelled to “drink the cup, to doff at once the body of the noted professor, and to assume, like a thick cloak, that of Edward Hyde” (52).

<sup>11</sup> It is important to note, however, that in 1886 the word “gay” did not generally mean homosexual, though Alan Sandison notes that it “had become widely associated with promiscuity and loose morals” (224).



Labouchère Amendment was passed, outlawing homosexual activity (Showalter 112).<sup>12</sup> Most significantly, the idea of the hidden, double life of the homosexual was connected to Stevenson's novel by someone very close to Woolf, who once confessed, Jekyll-like, "I separate my loves into two halves" (qtd. in Nicolson 34). In 1920, Vita Sackville West, who met Virginia in 1922 and became her lover in 1925, wrote that her intimate friend Violet called this her "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personality"<sup>13</sup> as Vita vacillated between her "pure" heterosexual love for her fiancé and her shameful, "savage," and "perverted" lesbian desire for Violet (35).<sup>14</sup> If Sackville-West ever shared this comparison with Woolf in the early period of their relationship when Woolf was writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, it certainly would have encouraged Woolf to think of Stevenson in shaping characters with same-sex desires.<sup>15</sup>

Whether or not Jekyll and Septimus are gay men repressing that part of their natures, both works reveal a fear of the hidden becoming revealed publicly. Strikingly parallel public scenes occur in each novel on a sunny day in Regent's Park. Septimus struggles with his shell shock and madness as he and Rezia sit "on a seat in Regent's Park" (MD 21) and he tells himself "he would not go mad. He would shut his eyes; he would see no more" (22), while Rezia laments, "People must notice" (23). Though the day is fine, with the "sparrows fluttering" (22), his illness is overtaking him. Here the sane side of Septimus struggles with the "insane" side, painfully and in vain pushing away the delusions, the hallucinations. A similar scene occurs in Stevenson's novel where Jekyll sits "in the sun on a bench" on "a fine, clear [...] day" in "Regent's Park [...] full of winter chirrupings and sweet with Spring odours" (JH 58) and suddenly "began to be aware of a change in the temper of my thoughts, a greater boldness, a contempt of danger, a solution of the bonds of obligation" (58). Against his will, he changes into Edward Hyde, trapped in public alone with no aid and no way of transforming back. In these scenes, we sense the utter helplessness of both men, overtaken by manifestations of the hidden parts of the psyche.<sup>16</sup> Both novels build to a key scene of suicide as these hidden demons cannot be exorcized. In *Jekyll and Hyde*, Jekyll realizes that the only control he has over Hyde is through killing the body that houses them both, though he does not want to die. Having lost the ability to turn back to Jekyll, he locks himself in his room. Suspecting Jekyll has been murdered and replaced by Hyde, the butler goes to get Utterson, the novel's detective figure, lawyer, and champion of reason, a "lover of the sane and customary sides of life" (JH 13), who also enlists the help of

<sup>12</sup> Showalter points out that the Labouchère Amendment was "Popularly known as the Blackmailer's Charter" (112), and from the opening of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Jekyll's friends assume Hyde is blackmailing him.

<sup>13</sup> In her discussion of Stevenson's text and homosexuality, Showalter also mentions this quote by Sackville-West but does not make the comparison to Woolf or *Mrs. Dalloway*.

<sup>14</sup> Sackville-West continues writing in her diary of her love for Violet Keppel (later Trefusis) in language which echoes a familiar duality: "how seraphic and childlike my years of marriage with Harold, when that side of me was completely submerged! I am so frightened of that side sometimes—it's so brutal and hard and savage, and Harold knows nothing of it; it would drive over his soul like an armoured chariot" (Sackville-West qtd. in Nicolson 35). She seems familiar with the language of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; her simile of the chariot directly recalls Hyde trampling over the young girl, "like some damned Juggernaut" (JH 9). Juggernaut, a loan-word derived from Jagannatha, one of the names of Krishna, is in English usage a reference to a large cart which purportedly crushed worshippers in its path.

<sup>15</sup> Septimus and Clarissa each show feelings widely read as homoerotic. Woolf certainly knew of Vita Sackville-West's love for Violet and later playfully parodied their relationship in her novel *Orlando*. Sackville-West's older son, Nigel Nicolson, tells us in the Foreword of *Portrait of a Marriage* that, regarding her diary, "as far as I know [she] had never shown it to anyone" (ix), but she certainly may have shared personal feelings or stories from it, especially with those with whom she was most intimate.

<sup>16</sup> As Linda Dryden writes of the Gothic double, "To be haunted by another, by a spectre, is uncannily enough, but to be haunted by yourself strikes at the foundations of identity" (41).

Bradshaw, the footman (37). Though the man inside pleads, "for God's sake, have mercy!" they assault Jekyll's door with an axe until "the lock burst in sunder and the wreck of the door fell inwards on the carpet" (38). Inside, they find a good fire on the hearth, "papers neatly set forth on the business table" and "the things laid out for tea: the quietest room" (39). In the middle of the room lies the twitching body of Hyde, who has taken arsenic. Jekyll's body is of course never found.

Septimus's suicide also occurs in desperation as he waits in his room. Sir William Bradshaw plans to call between 5 and 6 o'clock to arrange Septimus's removal to a rest home (MD 98): "There was no alternative. It was a question of law" (96-97). Similar to Utterson, Bradshaw is a champion of the legal system and a worshipper of order and "proportion" (99). It is not Bradshaw who arrives (though a Bradshaw does so in Stevenson's text), but Dr. Holmes, a name reminiscent of both the rest home and the sort of rational and imposing *fin de siècle* detective figure that Utterson assumes in his own text.<sup>17</sup> Holmes pushes Rezia aside while Septimus contemplates his fate in a neat little room familiarly full of papers and a gas fire. "He did not want to die. Life was good" (149). Jekyll, too, loved life, but his hand is forced. Septimus thinks, "Holmes would burst open the door," so he jumps out the window (149). In both texts, the men take extreme measures to escape a final forced entry into their private selves as the doors to their hidden lives are "burst" open.

The fates of literary doubles are often intertwined. Woolf wrote in a letter in June 1925, "this I certainly did mean—that Septimus and Mrs. Dalloway should be entirely dependent upon each other" (L3 189), but she never intended for them to die together. Quite the opposite, Stevenson's text ends with Jekyll's written confession, which officially brings "the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end" in narrative (JH 62), though we already have witnessed his death scene. Ronald R. Thomas calls this ending a modernist "fragmenting of the self into distinct pieces with distinct voices" (73). As the final vestiges of his identity wear away, Jekyll writes, "this is my true hour of death, and what is to follow concerns another than myself" (62). By "another" he means Hyde, who is subsuming his identity; however, his suicide takes away the lives of both men at once. What follows Septimus's suicide in Woolf's novel also "concerns another," but Clarissa, precisely because of Woolf's creation of Septimus, lives on, though greatly affected by the death of her double. Septimus shouts in jumping from the window, "I'll give it you!" (MD 149). The referent is unclear, but the end of the novel may imply that he has given his life to Clarissa, who later, at her party, withdrawing into a "little room" by herself (183), experiences Septimus's death vicariously and feels it is all "her disaster—her disgrace" (185). Indeed, "She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself" (186). His death has "preserved" something she has lost in her own life (184), and she feels that "No pleasure could equal [...] this having done with the triumphs of youth, lost herself in the process of living, to find it, with a shock of delight, as the sun rose, as the day sank" (185). Jekyll's flaw is that he cannot contend with his composite and complex self, and Stevenson finds no hope for a man who cannot reconcile his public and private identities. He leaves his novel for us as the *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, as if we are reading a curious case file or indulging in unraveling a puzzling mystery. This is akin to Lady Bradshaw mentioning Septimus at Clarissa's party as merely "a very sad case" (183), thus reducing him to a mere study.

Though Woolf's novel bears these occasional echoes of Stevenson's, as if her memory of his famous literary doubles lurk behind her novel as a faint, ghostly palimpsest, she employs a very different ending. Unlike Stevenson, the woman writer who grew up at 22 Hyde Park Gate provides a glimmer of hope for the individual who struggles to please society as she keeps pieces of herself hidden. Her novel ends not in fragmentation but reunion. The answer comes not in hiding but in assembling the parts of oneself. In the narration at the end of Clarissa's

<sup>17</sup> The first Sherlock Holmes story did not appear until the year after Stevenson's novel was published, but detective fiction was already quite popular.

reverie, her encounter with the Other, her embrace of death, we find, "She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room" (186). In contrast to Stevenson's text, here we find hope for the composite self, who emerges from the room of isolation alive and well in Woolf's ending, returning to collect the specters of her past.

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#### REVIEW

##### IN THE HOLLOW OF THE WAVE:

##### VIRGINIA WOOLF AND MODERNIST USES OF NATURE

by Bonnie Kime Scott. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012. 268 pages. \$39.50 cloth.

Bonnie Kime Scott's book on Woolf and the modernist uses of nature is a wonderfully encyclopedic review not only of the history of ecofeminism, especially in relation to Woolf, but also of modernist uses of nature in general and of a host of natural phenomena which appear in Woolf's writing. Sensibly organized, the book's Introduction and six chapters move from Woolf's early exposure to natural history to her deployment of gardens and landscapes as political sites exposing the hierarchies of gender and empire, to her many identifications with a menagerie of animal species, to an assessment of ecological ideas of natural order. Although at 220 pages the book is quite concise, it is dense with information on a variety of topics ranging from summaries of critical theory to lists of insects and dogs appearing in Woolf's life and work.

The Introduction establishes Scott's high philosophical ambition to take her place among the community of thinkers working towards discovering "a new, posthuman pattern that escapes androcentrism and the nature/culture binary" (2), extending her previous germinal work rethinking the role of feminism in Modernism to a more comprehensive reinstating of the place of nature in critical accounts of the movement. In the process Scott takes on the vexed question of the relationship between woman and nature, attempting and largely succeeding in chronicling patterns of association without being entrapped by essentialist assumptions. Tracing the critical history of idealizing tendencies by which Woolf's frequent references to garden scenes have been sublimated into Edenic nostalgia, the Introduction outlines the dissolution of such spiritualized dichotomies in feminist, ecofeminist, postmodern and post-humanist theories. As in much of the rest of the book, however, this very useful summary of previous scholarship is so dutifully comprehensive that at time it becomes necessarily superficial.

Chapter 1, "Toward a Greening of Modernism," is similarly ambitious, beginning the process of reinserting nature into modernist studies by reviewing the ambivalent rejection and inclusion of nature and natural sensations in the work of a panoply of Woolf's contemporaries, including T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, H. D., Jane Harrison, D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, and Djuna Barnes. Pointing out how the anti-Romanticism of early modernist advocacy among the "men of 1914" (14) eschews traditional admiration of nature while ambivalently retaining an emphasis on immediate experience, Scott documents how the association of nature with the damp chaos of feminine subjectivity conflicts with many male modernists' personal memories and experiences. The chapter provides

an especially enlightening comparison of the natural experiences of a post-Victorian childhood shared by Woolf and T. S. Eliot, while showing how childhood access to garden settings for Stein, H. D., and Katherine Mansfield populated their writing with natural landscapes and images of flowers, and documenting how women writers such as H. D. and Jane Harrison created an alternative classicism reaching through natural imagery towards a celebration of Eleusianian mysteries. What Scott modestly calls a “small inventory” (40) of naturalist concerns in modernist contemporaries of Woolf ends with an exploration of the extension of the human/animal continuum in the work of Djuna Barnes.

Chapter 2 further develops Scott’s inquiry into the personal context of modernist approaches to nature by chronicling the role natural history played in the family, life and work of Virginia Stephen Woolf. Divided into three sub-sections, the chapter first documents the Stephen family enthusiasm for natural history, their acquaintance with such notable figures as Darwin and his children, Thomas Huxley, Herbert Spenser, and Mary Kingsley, Leslie Stephen’s childlike love of animals, his habit of “long observant walks” (48) inherited by his daughter, the Stephen siblings’ visits to the Natural History Museum and Regent’s Park Zoo, as well as the enthusiasm for insect collection and bird-watching which Virginia particularly shared with her older brother Thoby. Next comes an account of scholarship on how the underlying narratives of Darwinian theory play out in Woolf’s novels, followed by a review of the appearances of such Victorian women naturalists as Eleanor Ormerod, Mary Kingsley, and Marianne North in Woolf’s mature prose.

The next two chapters explore varieties of natural place in Woolf’s life and work. Chapter 3 on “Limits of the Garden as Cultured Space” moves more or less chronologically through the gardens Woolf encountered throughout her life, weaving together biography, memoir, garden history and appearances in Woolf’s fiction. Next comes an account of Woolf’s experiences in the gardens of female friends such as Violet Dickinson, Ottoline Morrell, and Vita Sackville-West. Then there is an excursion into the gardens of Bloomsbury artists such as Roger Fry and Vanessa Bell, followed by an account of the garden at Monk’s House. The chapter ends with two sections on how gardens ambiguously figure as both spaces of sensual connection and as places of control and confinement in major novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves* and *Between the Acts*.

Chapter 4 on the art and politics of landscape begins with a more theoretical bent than the chapter on gardens. The rather bewildering range of subjects touched on in the chapter’s introduction—how landscape preferences are ascribed to characters, the critique of the pastoral, ecofeminist blending with the environment, scholarship on the idea of “Englishness,” and the role of the visual arts in shaping Woolf’s perception of nature—is an apt prelude to a kaleidoscopic succession of topics. From a review of the various houses where the Stephens stayed on vacations and at which the young Virginia practiced forms of landscape writing both parodic and sincere, to an overview of the effects of Post-Impressionist theory on landscapes in *The Voyage Out* and *To the Lighthouse*, the chapter makes an excursion into Leslie Stephen’s alpine adventures, wheels back to analyze the use of landscape in several novels, stops for a moment to consider Woolf’s treatment of India, looks for a moment at trees, discusses the association of landscape with character in *The Waves*, considers Woolf’s use of the moors, and winds up with a look at the portrayal of the countryside in *Between the Acts*.

Dealing at greater length with the human/animal continuum first discussed in relationship to Djuna Barnes, Chapter 5 is a similarly capacious grab-bag of references to the menagerie of species which inhabit Woolf’s work from dogs, to horses to chickens, cows, more dogs, moths, and birds, with sidebars about the politics of fishing, hunting, and the plumage bill, interwoven with an impressive array of references to contemporary postmodern theory about cross-species relationships by the likes of Derrida, Donna Haraway, Giorgio Agamben, and Marianne DeKoven.

Scott’s final chapter, “Virginia Woolf and Ideas of Environmental Holism,” pulls back from the meticulously detailed gathering of histories and examples in previous chapters to ask more generally whether “an ordering approach to nature is decipherable in Woolf’s works” and to speculate on the possible implications of such a vision (193). Being careful to avoid anachronistic attributions of contemporary ideas to Woolf, Scott establishes possible parallels between theoretical and epistemological paradigms available to Woolf and contemporary positions of “deep ecology” (196) and ecofeminism. Beginning with an account of the reframing of patriarchal myth by which the cyclical rebirth of Persephone and the disruptive drama of Antigone replace the masculinist mythic mode of Osiris and Oedipus and reclaim Eden for human and female habitation, Scott goes on to interrogate how the quest for unity in Woolf criticism, which first sought aesthetic balance and spiritual communion with nature, gave way to an increasingly decentered account of human consciousness and a deconstructive awareness of what has been repressed by logocentric systems of thought. She ends by demonstrating how Woolf’s consciousness of nature is frequently presented through an interactive collage of images in which humans merge with nature, protected in the hollows of leaves, or waves, or hillsides.

Judiciously illustrated and conscientiously documented, *In the Hollow of the Wave* shares with an encyclopedia the positive characteristics of topical organization and comprehensive coverage, but also demonstrates a kind of dutiful mandate to get everything in, being so full of information, citations, and cross-references that at times it becomes more of a reference work than a sustained argument. The thirty-five separate sub-sections, while clarifying organizational structure, tend to pixilate the book into a series of short refractions which don’t always fuse into a clear image. While making a generous and useful contribution to Woolf and modernist studies, the book doesn’t quite soar to meet its higher theoretical ambitions. Nonetheless, it lays the foundations for a great deal of future work on Woolf, proving itself a must-read for scholars and common readers and a must-buy for any comprehensive library.

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## REVIEW

### *VIRGINIA WOOLF AND THE MIGRATIONS OF LANGUAGE*

by Emily Dalgarno. New York: Cambridge UP, 2012.  
228 pages. \$99.00 cloth.

Emily Dalgarno's study of Virginia Woolf's intensive, lifelong interest in literary translation reminds us of the power of comparative literature, suggests a neglected method for thinking about the global in Woolf studies (and in modernist studies more generally), and reveals some often-neglected sources for Woolf's literary and political views. Dalgarno argues that Woolf used "translation as a means to resist the tendency of the dominant language to control meaning" (1) and that the recent theoretical redefinition of "translation as cultural process" (3) makes visible this aspect of Woolf's serious engagement with translation. With six chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion, the book covers a lot of ground. The chapters on "On Not Knowing Greek" and its articulation of Woolf's theories of translation, on *The Years* and Woolf's engagement—as reader, publisher, and translator—with Russian literature, and on *The Waves* and Proust's consciousness as an alternative to Freud are particularly strong. The book ends with a discussion of the Algerian novelist Assia Djébar's connections to Woolf and ideas of lamentation especially as filtered through both women's reading of *Antigone*.

The Djébar chapter matters because the move in focus from Woolf's influences to those whom Woolf has influenced remains an important way of demonstrating not only Woolf's continued relevance, but also the shifting significations of themes (such as lamentation) and texts (such as *Antigone* and *Three Guineas*) across nations and time. Complexities of "knowing" and "not knowing" resonate differently for Djébar, an Algerian writing in French who knows little of her Berber mother tongue, speaks Arabic, studied Greek, and writes in French. Unfortunately, Dalgarno buries the lede, noting Djébar's use of epigraphs from Woolf in a 1995 text on translation a full eight pages into a dense chapter. As Dalgarno explains, Djébar places Woolf in an interesting and fresh constellation of writers for whom translation was a problem of interest: Malek Alloula, Charles Dobzynski, Jeanne Hyvrard, and others. I wish that the example of Djébar had been more richly situated in this constellation, or another: that is, I would like to better understand both the range of writers to whom Woolf matters, as well as why Djébar in particular was singled out for study.

*Virginia Woolf and the Migrations of Language* begins with a discussion of theories of translation and moves seamlessly from there into analysis of Woolf's engagement with those theories in her 1925 essay "On Not Knowing Greek." Dalgarno shows how Woolf simultaneously represents, synthesizes, and moves beyond the ideological debate in the 1920's about how best to translate. This debate had profoundly gendered sides—pitting an older, masculinist philological mode against a newer mode of Classical studies that was to be open to anyone who had not the privilege of beginning Greek

in grammar school, including women. By steering clear of this debate, on the one hand, Woolf avoids an opportunity to make an easy feminist argument. On the other hand, she redirects our attention to the original goal: gaining knowledge of Ancient Greece. Of particular interest is Dalgarno's identification of Arnold's "Literature and Science" as an intertext. There, Arnold uses "knowing," the very word Woolf's title calls into question, more than thirty times. It is too bad that despite many fascinating wayside observations, the subsequent chapter on *Antigone* turns away from politics and back to philology in ways that seem determinedly dusty rather than helpful.

Woolf's reading of and engagement with Proust has been explored by Nicola Luckhurst and others, but Dalgarno's special attention to what Woolf learned from the Moncrieff translation marks a significant and fascinating contribution. Put simply, Moncrieff "simplified Proust's language by reducing his rich vocabulary to the pair *conscious/unconscious*" (109), creating an apparent link with Freud that the French original cannot sustain. Still, this connection through translation "engaged Woolf's strengths" for, unlike Freud's unconscious, Proust emphasized "the power of imagination to provide a conscious perspective on the unconscious" (109). In this chapter, then, we have not only an influence study, but a scholarly account of the significance of a particular translation, as well as an account of why Woolf, who knew French, might choose to read Proust in English. (In large measure, because her circle included some very, very fluent Francophones in Lytton Strachey, Vita Sackville-West, and others.)

The chapter on *The Years* and the profound influence of Tolstoy on the scale and scope of that novel contains important insights, not least the way that the involvement in Russian literature by the Hogarth Press "helped to create the British market" for Russian literature and gave the Press "a stake in international modernism" (6). Tolstoy's interest in essay and epic, his interest in scenes that do not strictly advance plot can, as Dalgarno shows, help us appreciate Woolf's project in *The Years* and some of its false promises. However, in moving so fluently amongst Woolf's work, the chapter occasionally loses sight of chronology: I found myself searching, while reading a digression on Woolf's notes on *Anna Karenina*, as to when Woolf made the notes (the mid-twenties), and wondering why, at the end of the chapter, we turn to *Night and Day* (1918), a novel written before Woolf's serious reading of the Russians began. But these are quibbles. Dalgarno's insight about the connection between Eleanor Pargiter and Nicholas (a Pole in the novel, but a Russian in galley) as a connection aided by translation is truly moving and remarkable: it demonstrates Woolf's interest in and hope for cross-cultural communication. Dalgarno writes: "To complete the sentence begun by a foreigner would seem to be Woolf's twentieth-century trope of the cave: one is helped to emerge from darkness by means of a translation which Eleanor seems less to author than to witness in herself" (86). Dalgarno's learned study bears witness not only to Woolf's art but also to the way that her art turns away from England to translations and the untranslatable as a way to help us see beyond the shadows.

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## REVIEW

### **BRITISH WOMEN'S TRAVEL TO GREECE, 1840-1914: TRAVELS IN THE PALIMPSEST**

by Churnjeet Mahn. Surrey, England and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012. 167 pages. \$99.95 cloth.

The title of her essay "On Not Knowing Greek" notwithstanding, Virginia Woolf was, of course, passionate about knowing Greek—ancient Greek—especially by way of proving her scholarly mettle. But with her early twentieth-century travels to Greece, she came to be receptive to contemporary Greece as well. Much of her diary entry "Greece 1906," later revised as the story "A Dialogue upon Mount Pentelicus," was focused on her current-day travels, and in these two short pieces she provided anthropological glimpses of the Greeks whom she encountered. In these works she also considered the way Greece gives rise to questions on the kinds of engagement one has with the country—whether, to be more specific, a visitor relates to it as a traveler or tourist, with the narrator in "Dialogue" deciding to claim, for herself at least, "the honourable title of tourist" ("Greece 1906" 338).

Churnjeet Mahn's *British Women's Travel to Greece, 1840-1914: Travels in the Palimpsest* addresses all three of these ways of knowing Greece: through scholarship, ethnography, and tourism. With her focus on the challenges middle-class women faced in their forays into the larger world and the way they participated in the debates on their new roles in the public sphere, Mahn separates her analysis into three categories of travelers to Greece. She starts with the Cambridge-based scholars Agnes Smith Lewis and Jane Ellen Harrison, who not only wanted to study Greek and its antiquities, but also believed it was important to travel there and to see present-day Greece for themselves. The second group includes ethnographers like A. P. Irby, G. M. Mackenzie, Fanny Blunt, and Lucy Garnett, whose racialized and hierarchal representations of Greek women fell into an uneasy space above their Turkish and Bulgarian counterparts and below their British ones. The final set of women, such as Emily Pfeiffer, Isabel J. Armstrong, and Catherine Janeway, the "New Lady Traveller[s]," an amalgamation of the "lady travellers" and the "New Women" (Mahn 8), came to Greece to assert their claim to independence—and as self-avowed tourists. Mahn uses the term "palimpsest" to describe the temporal layering of Greece but also to demonstrate how the different genres written by all these travelers can be considered together to produce an image of contemporary Greece (9).

For scholars interested in Woolf and Greece, Mahn's book is a treasure trove; through the lens *British Women's Travel to Greece* we can more clearly see the contexts informing Woolf's own scholarly, ethnographic, and touristic perspectives. Mahn treats Woolf specifically in her three-page discussion of the impact of Harrison on Woolf; like her exemplar, Woolf saw Greek and Greece as a symbol of liberation, but a symbol obscured by the impossibility of ever really knowing ancient Greek (69). For the second two discourses—of ethnography and tourism—Mahn does not extrapolate from her discussion of the writers whom she treats to the writings of Woolf; Woolfians, however, can readily make their own connections. For example, Woolf need not have read any of the ethnographers whom Mahn analyzes in *British Women's Travel*, but we know from the holdings in her library (see King and Miletic-Vejzovic) that she had many travelogues, including those by the nineteenth-century

travelers Alexander William Kinglake and William Mitchell Ramsay, whose books *Eothen* and *Impressions of Turkey during Twelve Years' Wanderings*, respectively, are filled with descriptions of the peoples they met. In both of her short travel pieces on Greece, Woolf also describes chance encounters,<sup>1</sup> but rather than producing a racial hierarchy and emphasizing Orientalist stereotypes, as A. P. Irby, G. M. Mackenzie, Fanny Blunt, and Lucy Garnett did in their several works, Woolf instead parodies such stereotypes—for example, the way the travelers in "A Dialogue" denounce the Greek boys whom they meet as "barbarians" ("Dialogue" 64). Woolf dramatizes the kind of misogynist criticism the "New Lady Travellers" encountered in *Jacob's Room*, as we see in Jacob's outburst against them: "damn these women! [...] How they spoil things" (151).

*British Women's Travel to Greece* is also valuable for those interested in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British women's travel and in nineteenth-century Orientalism. Churnjeet Mahn provides excellent background on the history of the Murray and Baedeker guidebooks and the impact these guides had on travelers.<sup>2</sup> Like Woolf ("Greece 1906" 319; 331; 335), nearly all nineteenth-century woman travelers referred to Murray or Baedeker in their travelogues (Mahn 6). Over the course of the nineteenth century, these guidebooks steadily de-emphasized the Oriental signifiers present in Greece and increasingly Hellenized the country. In addition, they provided a panorama of Greece, one that suggested a comprehensive but at the same time abstracted view. In connection with the visual, Mahn addresses the rise of picture postcards, which served to shape travelers' expectations (101).

Mahn's alliterative categories—palimpsest, panorama, and picture postcard—leave an indelible impression on the mind of her readers and serve to show the role of the visual in tourism and travel. If there were another edition of *British Women's Travel to Greece*, I wish it would include illustrations! But though Mahn leaves out a few of the more important critics on Woolf and Greece in that section of her discussion, like Martha Klironomos, Christine Reynier, and Angeliki Spiropoulou, her knowledge of the scholarship on the writing of British women travelers in Greece is otherwise inclusive and comprehensive. Her book is both thorough and stimulating, and, I hope, will further open up areas of study, especially on modernist women's travels to Greece.

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<sup>1</sup> One could make the case that Woolf's own "Lives of the Obscure," about nineteenth-century British women, are ethnographies.

<sup>2</sup> The Woolfs' library, now housed at Washington State University, has fifteen volumes of Baedeker (Gillespie).

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## REVIEW

**ENVISIONING DISEASE, GENDER, AND WAR:  
WOMEN'S NARRATIVES OF THE 1918 INFLUENZA PANDEMIC**  
by Jane Elizabeth Fisher. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.  
262 pages. \$90.00 cloth.

**FRONT LINES OF MODERNISM:  
REMAPPING THE GREAT WAR IN BRITISH FICTION**  
by Mark D. Larabee. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.  
224 pages. \$85.00 cloth.

Palgrave Macmillan has a wide and varied on-line catalogue—including a number of critical volumes involving both Virginia Woolf, and Virginia Woolf and war, more often than not, the Great War, and sometimes involving themes other than the war per se, as is the case in the two books yoked together in this review in part because they suggest new approaches to the topic.<sup>1</sup> Neither Jane Elizabeth Fisher nor Mark D. Larabee is looking to exploit the cachet that reference to Woolf might bring, and each uses Woolf selectively, though in Fisher's book Woolf's presence is felt throughout. Fisher, who names the IVWS in her acknowledgements and who is described by the press as both a professor of English and Director of the Women's Studies Program at Canisius College, with a concentration on "19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century literature and culture" and an emphasis on women writers and "medical humanities" (back cover), demonstrates the greater familiarity with and sensitivity to Woolf in tracing the trajectory of "the 1918 influenza pandemic, World War I's lethal twin" (1). Mark Larabee's approach may rightly be seen as owing much to his military specialization,<sup>2</sup> teaching at the U.S. Naval Academy, and participating in the Joseph Conrad Society; his volume looks to the literature (in one chapter finding "Fluid Front Lines" in Conrad and Woolf) to support his thesis, "attending specifically

to *topography* [emphasis his], by which [he] mean[s] both physical and imaginative settings and the literary methods of describing those settings" (4). Both volumes offer challenges to the reader, but Fisher's book, it seems to me, is the more accessible and offers a salutary new way of understanding not only Virginia Woolf but also the significance of the 1918 pandemic in the twenty-first century.

Anticipating a wave of new and not-so-new treatments involving the Great War as the centennial anniversary of its beginning in August 2014 approaches<sup>3</sup>, both of these books attempt to lay claim to original and significant approaches to the topic. Larabee calls his study *Front Lines of Modernism: Remapping the Great War in British Fiction*, a title suggesting a not-so-new sensitivity to both the Great War and to its presence in British Fiction, as it seems to echo Allyson Booth's title, *Postcards from the Trenches: Negotiating the Space between Modernism and the First World War* (1996)<sup>4</sup>, and as Larabee, somewhat disingenuously, fears that "It might appear [...] that the time for [his] historicist literary-cultural study has passed its peak" (1). Larabee acknowledges his debt to Paul Fussell and his work, *The Great War in Modern Memory*, particularly his comment involving dislocation as an enduring cultural impact of the war, at the same time predicting that "the upcoming centenary of its outbreak will occasion a fresh round of assertions about the central role it has played in the creation of the modern world" (3). In "juxtaposing" ten authors (including, in the fourth and last chapter, Woolf and Conrad) who "dealt in varying ways with fundamental difficulties in seeing what was happening in the spaces of the front lines and then describing that spatial vision for readers" (8), Larabee "shows how currents of experience and meaning in literary topographies cross the boundaries of the experimental and the traditional" and other boundaries as well (5). The archival sources mentioned in the descriptive blurb on the back cover ("wealth of previously neglected archival sources") may refer to the eight figures, mostly maps from the war and panoramic sketches; there is no acknowledgement of or reference to archival repositories in the bibliography (something the publisher apparently and unfortunately chose to omit in Fisher's book), but in the acknowledgements Larabee mentions the Special Collections Division and Interlibrary Loan Unit of the Washington Libraries, the Geography and Map collection of the LC, and the Museo Nacional del Prado (xi). In addition to an introduction ("Unsettled Space") and a conclusion ("The Presence of Landscape and the Meaning of History"), the book has four chapters, moving from "Military Mapping and Modernist Aesthetics: Blunden, Aldington, and Ford" to "In Flanders with No Baedeker: Beaman, Forster, and Ford"; "The Persistence of Landscape: Montague and West"; and "Fluid Front Lines: Conrad and Woolf." The figures mentioned above are too technical for a novice, though Larabee's intended audience, which clearly seems more military than literary, may not find them as arcane or impenetrable as I, with my limited background in "military mapping" and "cartographic technology" (14).

In Jane Fisher's less esoteric, but complex, finely embroidered, and new approach, *Envisioning Disease, Gender, and War: Women's Narratives of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic*, including poetry, one of the aims is to fill a major gap in Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* as it involves "processes of repression and recollection surrounding [...] forgotten parts of the 1918 influenza pandemic, allowing it to reemerge in the last decade of the twentieth century as a vital part of public discourse" (1). Fisher also owes a debt to Allyson Booth, particularly involving silence as the "traditionally respectful response

<sup>1</sup> The current online Macmillan catalogue lists 71 books on "Virginia Woolf," most of which we have reviewed in these pages, and lists twelve on "Virginia Woolf and War," including the two being reviewed here. There are also 692 books listed under "Great War"; 63 under "World War I"; and 142 under "Gender and War." Curiously, the online Palgrave Macmillan catalogue list includes the Larabee book, but not the one by Fisher. Both books note the following on the copyright page: "Where this book is distributed in the U. K., Europe and the rest of the World, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England [...]."

<sup>2</sup> At the web site of the Naval Academy, Larabee is identified as "Associate Professor, Permanent Military Professor."

<sup>3</sup> At the time of this writing, books on World War I have already begun to appear: e.g., *1913: In Search of the World Before the Great War*, by Charles Emerson (2013). Several in the Macmillan catalogues will be released before the end of the year.

<sup>4</sup> My review of Allyson Booth's book was published in *Woolf Studies Annual* 4, in 1998.



to mass death” (7) and to John M. Barry’s “panoramic history,”<sup>5</sup> *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History*. But, it is in Fisher’s approach to exploring the permutations of silence and memory that we see the great originality of this study—which does not trace the history of the pandemic per se but the “reasons for cultural amnesia” (5-6), some of which are related to memories of the war. In so doing, as Fisher explains, “[t]he trajectory of [her argument] moves from modern to postmodern, from surprisingly hopeful gender incoherence to crushing gender role inflexibility” (37). Between the Prologue, “The 1918 Influenza Pandemic and Modern Memory,” and the Epilogue, “Loss, Contagion, and Community,” the book is divided into six chapters, the first four and the epilogue referencing Woolf, almost as a touchstone: from Walter Benjamin’s use of the *flâneur* in chapter 1 (“The *Flâneuse*: Seeing and Remembering the Shock of Modernity”), where she introduces the postwar “foundational change,” found in Woolf’s focus on “marginal experiences such as illness and aging” (33); to “gender incoherence, World War I, and the pandemic disease” (70) seen in chapter 2’s treatment of Willa Cather (“Gender and Modernity: The things Not Named in *One of Ours*”); chapter 3, on which this review focuses (“‘Novels Devoted to Influenza’: Regarding War and Illness in *Mrs. Dalloway*”); chapter 4, involving Katherine Ann Porter, an influenza survivor, who saw the disease as dividing her life; chapter 5, featuring contemporary writer Alice Munro of Canada, American poet Ellen Vryant, and Nigerian novelist Buchi Emecheta; to the Nigerian narratives of Elechi Amadi and Buchi Emecheta in chapter 6 (“The 1918 Influenza Pandemic in the Developing World: Elechi Amadi and Buchi Emecheta’s Occluded Vision”). Among the timely illustrations in the book (a nice touch) are posters from the Library of Congress collection, many involving the Red Cross, and the Imperial War Museum, including John Singer Sargent’s depiction of an influenza hospital.

*Front Lines of Modernism* is presumably tied to the war as depicted in British literature, blurring genres (memoirs, fiction, and the novel, for example, with poetry excluded) “to demonstrate how [authors] respond to the seemingly incommunicable experience of war” (6), moving from literal maps to those involving “an emotional reconstruction of the self” in the name of “modernist aesthetics” (14-15). But this is not as derivative or unoriginal as it may sound, hinging on recognition of cartographic inadequacies in the face of battlefield realities; tensions between the objective and subjective; and the “authorial strategies” used in representing these tensions (15). On the way to the chapter on Joseph Conrad (admittedly the author’s main man) and Virginia Woolf (one of the author’s two women—the other being Rebecca West), Larabee’s most interesting chapter (2) explores “the demise of Baedeker in England” and how “the radically transformed landscape of the Western Front furnished new ground for guidebooks (ironically enough) and a burgeoning battlefield tourism market” (89). In the “Fluid Front Line” chapter, Larabee involves the sea which seems “by its nature immune from the topographical depredations of industrialized warfare” (133), and chooses Conrad’s *The Shadow-Line* (1916) and Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room* as ostensibly unlikely sources of “topographies of the Great War as legible as any trench map” (134). Preceding the section on Woolf (160-178), the section on Conrad (134-160) sees *The Shadow-Line* as including autobiographical elements and, although largely overlooked as a war novel, serving as “a meditation on the spatial phenomena of the war” (147). Tracing the author’s “topographical strategy” from its metaphorical beginnings to its correspondence to the pattern of boundary crossings at the time of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle (151), Larabee concludes that “the book’s status as a war novel is considerably less oblique than critics have generally allowed” (155). Referring to his own understanding of Conrad’s biography and navigational background (including two schematics), Larabee ends by saying that “*The Shadow-Line* depicts the pluck in the face of danger that Conrad sure hoped

his son would exhibit [which] may also be why Conrad and his family preferred not to see [it] too clearly as a war novel” (160).

When it comes to Virginia Woolf’s “fluid front-line,” the analysis is somewhat less exacting and rather less persuasive. Larabee recognizes that “Booth perhaps has done the most” in “observing ‘the persistence with which the landscape of the trenches gets superimposed onto the landscape of England’ in [*Jacob’s Room*]” (162), but Larabee sees the novel “as an engagement with the war as a set of historical events—of particular spaces of the war and what happens in them” (162). To do this, he relies on the theories of Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, an expert of sea power in the late nineteenth century—and, while Larabee explicitly disclaims any indication that Woolf read or was aware of Mahan, he contends that *Jacob’s Room* nevertheless “encodes, however unintentionally, a new way of thinking about sea space” (163), “records the overt impact of Mahan’s doctrines on the conduct of war [and] testifies to the more subtle application of such Mahanian concepts as global connectness” (170). Whether this unique approach will be of much value to readers outside of the military academies, I’m not sure. But certainly, by the end, we understand that the *Front Lines of Modernism* does not so much attempt to offer new readings that will be useful to all readers so much as to “introduce[e] military cartography into modernist perspectives [and] also provide a corrective for the extent to which current criticism focuses so much on relations of power as an underlying factor of mapping” (186). For placing Woolf into a context that may well win her new readers, we must be grateful to Mark Larabee. But, to do it for the sake of calling *Jacob’s Room* a war novel seems to me like re-inventing the wheel.

On the other hand, *Envisioning Disease, Gender, and War* is a remarkably ambitious work that begins with World War I and the influenza pandemic, moves around the world and through the hundred years since to a “[c]ontemporary literature [that] still bears the traces of the 1918 combination of contagion, vision, and community,” and ends with Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours*, its concern with AIDS, and beyond, seamlessly bridging geographic and chronological boundaries, just like a pandemic. In contrast to deaths in the war, as Fisher notes, there are only a few isolated memorials to those who died during the pandemic (one of which is the cover-picture), although the fact is that more American soldiers died of influenza than in combat. But, as Fisher tellingly points out, “influenza and its indignities were not what the US military wanted the public to remember about the war” (29). By demonstrating in chapter 2 that Willa Cather’s *One of Ours* innovatively involves “gender incoherence, World War I, and pandemic disease” (70), Fisher lays the foundation for the chapter “Regarding War and Illness in *Mrs. Dalloway*,” where her reading of “On Being Ill,” Woolf’s 1926 essay, works with her reading of the novel to explain both the “transformative experience of illness” (74) and “the linkage of influenza with battle and war that persuasively links these two texts to the 1918 influenza pandemic” (76). But more interesting still, Fisher posits “the socially degraded status of illness, especially in relation to older women such as Clarissa Dalloway (and her author Virginia Woolf)” (77). Buoyed by Michel Foucault, Elaine Scarry, Christine Froula and Jennie-Rebecca Falcetta (83), this is but one strand of the complex fabric Fisher weaves as her study explores “mass ‘denial of repression’” (82) and the liminality of monuments (84), finally even seeing *Mrs. Dalloway* as the book Woolf had envisioned when she posited a novel where “illness could replace love as the plot of a novel” (99). My concentration on Woolf should not detract from the rest of this fascinating study, which makes important connections between the war and the pandemic, including, for example, Fisher’s observation that children’s writers have used the influenza “as a way of writing about World War I” (151) as well as her fascinating commentary on international casualty figures, including in Nigeria,

<sup>5</sup> The term is used in a *New York Times* review of the book and is reproduced on the back cover.

where the pandemic “remained a part of public discourse, surpassing World War I in significance” (178).

It is to the credit of Palgrave Macmillan that it has published two such distinctive volumes on the Great War as the centennial of its beginning is imminent. While it seems clear that these studies will be appreciated by distinct audiences, we are grateful to the publisher for giving us the choice.

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#### **REVIEW**

##### ***SHELL SHOCK AND THE MODERNIST IMAGINATION: THE DEATH DRIVE IN POST-WORLD WAR I BRITISH FICTION***

by Wyatt Bonikowski. Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2013. 192 pages. \$99.95 cloth.

With the coming centenary of the outbreak of the Great War, scholars and common readers will surely be interested in books about this catastrophic event. In *Shell Shock and the Modernist Imagination: The Death Drive in Post-World War I British Fiction*, Wyatt Bonikowski first examines the ways the British military medical profession responded to the troubling problem of shell shock, and then uses a psychoanalytic lens to consider the representation of shell-shocked soldiers in Ford Maddox Ford's *Parade's End*, Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*, and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Bonikowski's work is strongest when discussing the ways military doctors labored not only to identify the causes of and treatments for shell shock, but also struggled to find an appropriate name for this baffling psychological condition. For many of them, it was crucial to identify a term that was suitably masculine and not easily confused with feminine hysteria, which might undermine the heroic identity they sought to preserve. Bonikowski's description of the competing theories of Frederick Mott, Charles S. Myers, M. David Eder, W. H. R. Rivers, and others makes compelling reading. He provides a fascinating discussion of the difficulties “shell shocked” posed both for those suffering from it as well as for those trying to treat it within the military, political, and medical demands of wartime.

Depending on one's taste for literary theory, some readers will relish Bonikowski's intricate psychoanalytic analysis in the chapter on *Mrs. Dalloway*, while others may find it labored. Although most of the chapter draws from the work of Freud and Lacan, this literary argument is inspired by Geoffrey Hartman's contention in “On Traumatic Knowledge

and Literary Studies” that both “traumatic knowledge” and “literary knowledge” orbit an unknowable element of the human experience which always eludes one's attempt to represent it (Bonikowski 11). Bonikowski is particularly interested in Septimus Warren Smith as a character whose experience of madness and whose message to the world are both essentially unknowable. He contends that “interpreting [Septimus] means explaining away what is most powerful in him” (148). And while one may agree with Bonikowski that Septimus's “power and intensity come from an attempt to communicate that pushes the boundaries of meaning and sense,” some might detect overstatement in the claim that his language “escapes any determination that would try to contain it” (148). Woolf scholarship can boast of a number of rich readings of Septimus and his language.

Bonikowski also focuses his attention on perhaps one of the most puzzling features of Woolf's novel: Clarissa Dalloway's reaction to the news of Septimus's death. As he accurately observes, “at the very moment in which the novel appears to make its ultimate statement on the nature of life and death, its language becomes oracular and evasive” (165). Yet, I suspect readers will be deeply divided by his hypothesis that Woolf places “death at the center of the novel—not so that it may be mourned, but [...] so that it may be enjoyed” (146). It is, indeed, disconcerting that Clarissa Dalloway expresses approval (“she felt glad he had done it” [Woolf 283]) and something like pleasure (“he made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun” [284]) as she considers Septimus's suicide. But she also feels a rush of other emotions: guilt, marital bliss, and a keen desire to reunite with friends she has not seen for decades. Bonikowski ultimately posits that the relationship between Septimus and Clarissa does not provide the meaning each of them seeks. Neither, he claims, is able to restore the “something central which permeated”: Septimus cannot “heal the wound in the world” and Clarissa cannot “fully grasp the meaning of Septimus's suicide” (Bonikowski 168). The pleasure created by Septimus's death, he concludes, is the “pull of what is lacking,” a pleasure which involves “feeling the essential thing evade one's grasp” (168).

As theoretically tantalizing as this claim may be, it will not be satisfying for readers trying to understand the connection between this story of death and Clarissa's determination to be reunited with the figures of her rebellious past. It is not an ever disappearing Clarissa that fills Peter with terror, ecstasy, and “extraordinary excitement” in the very last words of the novel. It is not the pull of what is lacking, nor the evasion of the object from one's grasp, but the satisfaction of a long delayed desire. “For,” as Woolf writes, “there she was” (MD 296).

**Danell Jones**  
**University of Montana**

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## REVIEW

### **MOURNING MODERNISM: LITERATURE, CATASTROPHE, AND THE POLITICS OF CONSOLATION**

by Lecia Rosenthal. New York: Fordham University Press, 2011. 176 pages. \$52.00 cloth.

*Mourning Modernism: Literature, Catastrophe, and the Politics of Consolation*, a compact volume on writing, finitude, and futurity, spans the twentieth century. Lecia Rosenthal studies *To the Lighthouse* (1927) by Virginia Woolf, two neglected radio addresses for children by Walter Benjamin, namely “The Railway Disaster at the Firth of Tay” (1932) and “The Mississippi Flood, 1927” (1932), and *The Rings of Saturn* (1995; trans. 1998) by W. G. Sebald. In view of these heterogeneous materials and their varied preoccupations with the World War(s), the organization of the book assumes an “Anglo-German trajectory” (6). Rosenthal often adheres to poststructuralist practices, including deconstruction: she unsettles opposing terms, discerning rhetorical figures and tropes. To the extent that her chosen texts resist the binary logic of rupture and totality, they encompass the complex temporalities of catastrophe. Rosenthal also reflects on visual culture: a lithograph by Odilon Redon, “The Eye Like a Strange Balloon Mounts Toward Infinity” (1882), an illustration by J. J. Grandville from *Un Autre Monde* (1844), and a photograph by George Rodger, “Bodies at Bergen-Belsen” (1945), inform chapters on Woolf, Benjamin, and Sebald, respectively. This stimulating monograph offers subtle aesthetic investigations that disrupt conventional periodizations. Yet schematic analyses of contexts enable Rosenthal’s intricate interpretations of texts: the broad historical parameters of *Mourning Modernism* exceed its circumscribed formal investments.

Rosenthal resorts to eclectic thinkers ranging from Theodor Adorno to Slavoj Žižek. She revisits (mis)conceptions of Adorno’s ban on representation after Auschwitz in her examinations of literature and violence. Other key interlocutors include Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-François Lyotard; Rosenthal demonstrates theoretical acumen, selectively invoking the vocabularies of Marxism, poststructuralism, and psychoanalysis. The “sublime,” the “encounter with the unthinkable,” a longstanding focus of philosophical debate, inspires her intellectual framework (15). She distinguishes different modalities of the sublime, including the “war sublime,” the “modernist sublime,” and the “late sublime.” Rosenthal speculates on diverse experiences and occasions through this rubric, relegating research on trauma to a subsidiary role in the project. For the most part, she restricts her exploration to questions of aesthetic form, privileging rhetorical registers over historical contexts and social dynamics. In the process, she underestimates the demands of research on the First World War and the Holocaust, curtailing her engagements with cross-disciplinary scholarship in these areas. Throughout, Rosenthal pays tribute to avant-garde aesthetic practice and theory. She favors associative leaps, floating epigraphs, and theoretical glosses over systematic arguments, coherent syntheses, and inclusive bibliographies. At its best, this disjunctive style yields elegant formulations, and, at worst, tedious equivocations.

The chapter on Woolf prioritizes linguistic play and temporal uncertainty. Rosenthal deconstructs the phrase “war to end all wars,” showing that Edwardian discourses of aerial warfare prefigure this contradictory idiom of origins and ends. Conversely, Woolf grapples with the problem of belatedness by (re)turning to the blind spots of the present. Rosenthal delineates Woolf’s critical relationship to the aftermath and the archive in the prose pieces “On Not Knowing Greek” (1925) and “The Fascination of the Pool” (1929) respectively. These discussions enrich a close reading of “Time Passes” from *To the Lighthouse*, a mainstay of academic debate. James Haule, Karen Levenback, and, more recently, Sarah Cole ponder intersections between Woolf’s figurative language and historical circumstances. Rosenthal confines criticism by Levenback and Margot Norris to the notes; otherwise, she omits recent scholarship on this segment of the novel, generating commentaries that pivot upon the figure of the remainder. Occupying a space between finitude and

futurity, the dual directionality of catastrophe, Rosenthal suggests that Woolf’s “allegory of war” comprehends the ambivalence of apocalypse, complicating chronologies of interwar modernism (61). In part 7 of “Time Passes,” Woolf memorably evokes “gigantic chaos streaked with lightning [...] as if the universe were battling and tumbling, in brute confusion and wanton lust aimlessly by itself” (183). Rosenthal regards this orchestration of absence, order, and violence as a laudatory attempt to aestheticize war through recourse to the sublime. Overall, this abstract approach eschews a restorative vision of peace, notwithstanding the labors of Mrs. Bast and Mrs. McNab. The “feather” that might have “tipped the scale downwards” in part 9 upholds contingency, countering bids to emplot the Great War within a teleological narrative (Woolf 189).

Next, Rosenthal adumbrates phases in the emergence of the “late sublime” through chapters on Benjamin and Sebald. Looking backward and forward, Benjamin juxtaposes catastrophe and progress in his interwar meditations on technology: Rosenthal treats “the angel of history” as an emblem of “impasse” or “ending-without-end” in the twentieth century (76, 77). She also pairs his address on the Tay Bridge disaster of 1879 with *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940): Benjamin’s conflicting perspectives on Grandville’s illustration of Saturn exemplify “dialectic at a standstill,” the suspended possibilities within industrial capitalism. More ominously, Rosenthal’s synopsis of “The Mississippi Flood, 1927” relates the racial violence of the American South to the inception of the Third Reich. In turn, Rosenthal champions Sebald as an experimental writer who thematizes “the exhaustion of the sublime” in late capitalism (91). His tactics of displacement and parataxis in *The Rings of Saturn* engender the drift of the narrative. Most significantly, she contends that his unattributed reproduction of a photograph of exposed bodies within a flourishing wood enacts a subversive aestheticization of the dead. Unlike famous images of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps by Margaret Bourke-White or Stanislaw Mucha, Rodger’s photograph of Bergen-Belsen remains obscure. Thus Rosenthal illuminates the insufficiencies of the archive: Benjamin’s broadcasts anticipate the atrocities that Sebald (re)covers through the camera lens.

To clarify tacit assumptions and elucidate the implications of this book, Rosenthal might elaborate on the interrelated terms of the title, especially modernism, mourning, catastrophe, and politics. She frequently generalizes about the paradoxes of “modernism”: its drive toward novelty marks its necessary recourse to precedent. Even as this drive seeks to cross a limit, it risks becoming the convention that it aims to oppose. Rosenthal, however, neither subjects modernism and “mourning” to extensive review, nor does she affiliate Woolf, Benjamin, and Sebald through sustained consideration of “the politics of consolation.” With respect to “catastrophe,” a word that signifies “whatever is the worst, the most difficult to bear,” the term encompasses and/or exceeds designations such as “abyss,” “apocalypse,” “disaster,” “genocide,” “species-cide,” “void,” and “war” (31). Accordingly, Rosenthal concludes with “The Exhausted” (1992; trans. 1997), an essay by Gilles Deleuze: the rhetoric of exhaustion, rather than marking the limit of endurance, actually betokens a suspended state, “the longing for ending and the nonarrival of the end” (114). In the wake of Auschwitz, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina, proliferating crises characterize the “late sublime,” as Rosenthal notes. Yet her protean lexicon of disaster conflates disparate modes of destruction and possibility, effectively reducing the politics of “catastrophe” to affirmation and/or negation. *Mourning Modernism* raises compelling questions on timely subjects, deftly disclosing the formal instabilities of fascinating texts. In the end, however, the in-exhaustible validation of indeterminacy succumbs to the pitfalls of modernist innovation, whereby sameness supersedes novelty.

**Marlene Briggs**  
*University of British Columbia*



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### Below the Society Column continues from Page 52...

#### February, of course, means the Louisville Conference & the International Virginia Woolf Society Panel 2014, February 20-22

Panel Chair: Lauren Short, University of Louisville

Panelists and Paper Titles:

Denise A. Ayo, University of Notre Dame, "Staging (Self-)Censorship: Virginia Woolf's "Women Must Weep"

Kristina Reardon, University of Connecticut, "The Body of Word and Image in "Kew Gardens"

Illya Nokhrin, University of Toronto, Experiments with Virginia Woolf's "Own Voice": Narrative Style in the Manuscripts of *Night and Day*

Audrey M. Lehr, Kent State University, "Disability Aesthetics and 'The Human Apparatus' in *To the Lighthouse*"

"...March, and April. After April Comes May. June,..."

Flash forward more months, blitzing through blizzards, books and deadlines, and then...we all regroup in Chicago in June for the conference organized by Pamela Caughie and Diana Swanson. Not to miss!! (see page 4...)

"...July, August follow. Next is September. Then October, and so, behold, here we are back at November again, with a whole year accomplished."

#### Vancouver MLA 2015.

Ah, it is never too early to plan for next year's MLA in glorious Vancouver, temperate British Columbia.

The 2015 MLA will be in Vancouver, British Columbia, 8-10 January, especially delightful for those of us who cherish sweet memories of the most recent annual VW conference hosted by Helen Wussow in June 2013. Now is the time to brainstorm about ideas for proposals for the IVWS panels, and for possibilities for joint panels with Allied Organizations!

Deadline for sending panel proposals: January 15. The 129<sup>th</sup> MLA convention needs our brilliant panels. Our \*International Virginia Woolf Society\* will have one guaranteed panel, and we can submit one additional panel and which may or may not be accepted by MLA. We will also (as we have done for this upcoming MLA with the SHARP

Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing) collaborate with another society and submit a third panel, if all goes well.

You are invited to submit a \*panel topic\* for the Vancouver MLA.

Note that this is a call for **panels**, not individual paper proposals. Please submit only one topic. We will need from you:

- 1) a 35 word description (word count includes title) no longer!!!
- 2) the name(s) and contact information of the proposed organizer(s).

Submit to Leslie Kathleen Hankins electronically (**subject line: Woolf MLA Vancouver 2015**).

**Deadline:** January 15th for the receipt of proposals. (IVWS will vote on proposals in January, so as to meet MLA deadlines). Contact: Leslie Kathleen Hankins <[IVWSociety@gmail.com](mailto:IVWSociety@gmail.com)> (note there is only one 'S' in the address)>

The new year so full of events and delights beckons! In this whirl of intellectual and communal camaraderie, keep up the Woolf work: "*light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been. It is all half lights and profound shadows like those serpentine caves where one goes with a candle peering up and down, not knowing where one is stepping.*"

Best regards,

**Leslie Kathleen Hankins**  
*President, International Virginia Woolf Society*

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# the Virginia Woolf Society



## The Society Column:

*...Where was I? What has it all been about? A tree? A river? The Downs? Whitaker's Almanack? The fields of asphodel? I can't remember a thing. Everything's moving, falling, slipping, vanishing...*

And another year passes, with its chaos, with its charm; this is the close of 2013, all in all a fulfilling year for the International Virginia Woolf Society. *"We have done our best to piece out a meager summary from the charred fragments that remain; but often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even to make use of the imagination."*

2014 promises to be another such blur, beginning with fabulous festivities and intellectual feasts at the MLA in Chicago, where we have three dazzling sessions, an invitation to the Cash Bar of SHARP, the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing, and plans for an IVWS Society dinner early in the evening of January 11<sup>th</sup> (for the first 30 of you who respond to reserve a spot!).

Chicago twice!! What a unique opportunity for Woolfians to experience the razor's edge of balance between Chicago in January for MLA and Chicago in June for the VW conference; What a lark! What a plunge!

But it all hinges on you; be there.

## One bright gleam on our horizon:

### The Angelica Garnett VW Essay prize for undergraduates.

The IVWS would like to launch an annual VW essay contest for undergraduates in honor of Angelica Garnett. The winning essay (2500 words maximum, including all notes and Works Cited) will be published in the *Miscellany* and would earn a prize of \$200. We hope to set a submissions date for June, with the award in the fall. Please begin encouraging your undergraduates! Details are forthcoming on the listserv.

## Notes for your Calendars!

*"It was now November. After November, comes December. Then January..."*

## MLA CHICAGO: P

### Please mark these events on your calendar!

#### Thursday, 9 January 7:00–8:15 p.m.

183. Woolf, Wittgenstein, and Ordinary Language

Belmont, Chicago Marriott

Program arranged by the International Virginia Woolf Society

Presiding: Madelyn Detloff, Miami Univ., Oxford; Gaile Pohlhaus, Miami Univ., Oxford

1. "Woolf, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense: *The Voyage Out* as Therapy," Megan M. Quigley, Villanova Univ.
2. "'Stand Roughly Here': Woolf, Keynes, and Ordinary Language in the 1930s," Alice Keane, Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor
3. "Dumb Colloquy: The Aesthetics of Conversation and Conversational Aesthetics of *To the Lighthouse*," Erin Greer, Univ. of California, Berkeley

For abstracts, contact [detloffmm@miamioh.edu](mailto:detloffmm@miamioh.edu).

**CaSh Bar:** Thursday from 8:45-10 in the evening.: All IVWS members are invited to attend the SHARP cash bar on Thursday, Jan. 9, from 8:45-10pm in the Chicago IX room at the **Sheraton**. [SHARP = Society

for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing; we have a joint panel with them Friday!] This would be a great option after the Wittgenstein/Woolf panel & a wonderful way to see other Woolfians too. Hope to see you there.

#### Friday, 10 January 5:15–6:30 p.m.

398. Virginia Woolf and Book History

McHenry, Chicago Marriott

Program arranged by the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing and the International Virginia Woolf Society

Presiding: Leslie Kathleen Hankins, Cornell Coll.

1. "A Library of Her Own: Virginia Stephen's Books," Beth Rigel Daugherty, Otterbein Univ.
2. "An Experiment in Form and Content: Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf's 'Monday or Tuesday,'" Amanda Miller, Duquesne Univ.
3. "Blank Spaces: The Hogarth Press and 'Lost' Women Publishers," Alice E. Staveley, Stanford Univ.

Respondent: Karen V. Kukil, Smith Coll.

For abstracts, visit [sharpweb.org](http://sharpweb.org).

#### Saturday, 11 January 3:30–4:45 p.m.

609. Virginia Woolf and London's Colonial Writers

Belmont, Chicago Marriott

Program arranged by the International Virginia Woolf Society

Presiding: Elizabeth F. Evans, Univ. of Notre Dame

1. "Virginia Woolf, the Hogarth Press, and South African Modernism," Laura A. Winkiel, Univ. of Colorado, Boulder
2. "Virginia Woolf, Mulk Raj Anand, and the Novel of Political Transition," Jeannie Im, New York Univ.
3. "Virginia Woolf's Caribbean Connections," Mary Lou Emery, Univ. of Iowa

For abstracts, contact [evansef@gmail.com](mailto:evansef@gmail.com).

## Dinner plans for IVWS members and interested others:

Saturday 11 January after the VW & London's Colonial Writers panel; dinner planned for 6:15. We will saunter towards the restaurant after the session, or taxi, depending on the weather. The IVWS will contribute wine (*"Meanwhile the wineglasses had flushed yellow and flushed crimson; had been emptied; had been filled"*), the gratuity, and subsidize \$20 of the individual price for graduate students. The cost per individual is \$55. Please contact me if you are interested. The Restaurant is Shaw's Crab House, a local legend, with superb food, and we'll have a private room. Please email me TODAY because the first 30 to make reservations will be the lucky ones at the party. If you mentor graduate students, consider inviting them to the dinner and bringing them along. It is always so refreshing to share our camaraderie with new members or members-to-be.

*"Then January, February, March and April...."*

The Society Column continues on page 51....

