To the Readers: Virginia Woolf in the Modern Machine Age

The embeddedness of the mechanical in modernist art and everyday modernity has been the topic of such influential studies as Andrew Thacker’s Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism (2003), Modernism and the Culture of Efficiency: Ideology & Fiction by Evelyn Cobley (2009), and Literature in the First Media Age: Britain Between the Wars (2013) by David Trotter. Jeanne Dubino notes in her introduction to Virginia Woolf and the Literary Marketplace (2010) that Woolf’s operation of the Hogarth Press, not just her co-ownership, generated her “in-depth knowledge of and expertise in the entire realm of book production” (5), and it is this engagement with technologies, especially through their effects upon modernist art and its circulation, that is the topic of Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (2000), edited by Pamela L. Caughie. Building upon the work of critics such as Gillian Beer and Michele Pridmore-Brown, Caughie and her contributors draw attention to and thus estrange the mechanical from its habitual, near-tacit place in Woolf’s interactions with interwar culture. In dialogue with these and other literary and cultural studies, we present a special issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany, which explores technologies in Woolf’s work according to the delicate tension between individual and community.

…To return to the meaning—Are machines the devil, or do they introduce a discord…Ding dong, ding…by means of which we reach the final…Ding dong… (Between the Acts [BTA] 181)

The interrupted, incomplete, overheard question, posed in a syncopated, fragmented rhythm, leaves unanswered technology’s state in Woolf’s own writings for a modern machine age. It’s the balance between unwelcome intrusions and unanticipated openings that so many modernists address through the mechanized elements of their characters’ lives, their own lives, and their aesthetics. But for every “Brekekekeek coa-coa” that connects the Nord-Sud to Aristophanes’s The Frogs (Mirrlees 3),¹ there is the less brilliant text, such as the “tone-poem” performed and discussed in Dorothy L. Sayers’s Strong Poison: “The soul of rebellion in the crowd—the clash, the revolt at the heart of the machinery. It gives the bourgeois something to think of, oh, yes!” (88). Sayers’s parody of a revolutionary delight almost posed by Woolf’s pageant-goer, when a more critical listener points out that the music “is as old as the hills—you can sense the resolution at the back of all his discords. Mere harmony in camouflage” (89). To reflect this theme in a puddle of oil from Vile Bodies—where modern subjects careen Toad- and/or Marinetti-like into ditches—to what extent does technology disrupt “all sense of proportion and balance” (Loss 164), and to what extent does it liberate the individual’s energies, enabling the blessed “MACHINES that work the little boats across clean liquid space, in beelines” (Lewis 345)? Or a variation: to what extent does technology draw the individual into a renewed harmony with an established, traditional communal order, and to what extent is that accord an enforced and mechanistic orthodoxy?

The everyday machines in Woolf’s work rarely represent a “raging broom of madness” (Marinetti 185) or a vacuum sucking up the remnants of the past into a purifying vortex of the New. More often, they are modes used by individuals to negotiate identity in private and public spaces, which are themselves newly layered with industrial innovations. As Catherine Driscoll notes, “the modernist present is always saturated with various pasts and futures” (160), and even though “technology” is often read as “a signifier of modernity” (Caughie xxiv), the ends to which it is put are not necessarily modern. Technologies are imbricated in historical processes, but machines are also the properties through which the shifting nature of group identity and relatedness is performed, restaged, and critiqued. Whether it is the crowd assembled by the spectacle of the car on Bond Street or the consumers who are interpellated by the advertisement that is produced by the sky-writing plane; whether it is the village that is constituted by the hail of the gramophone and megaphone, or the subjects who are called into existence through the ghostly presence of voice in newspaper print and radio waves—and even through the sightlines created by car windows—identities emerge from the intersectional and, as Michele Pridmore-Brown suggests in her essay, subjective places of those who use and are used by machines.

The multiple applications and histories of technologies—their contradictory signifying roles, their unanticipated uses, their tenacity as well as their obsolescence—undo a clear opposition between historical moments and values. David Trotter has pointed out that such cultural complexities render less productive those approaches that take the “ubiquity” of machines and materials “merely as an index to the modern” (“Techno-Primitivism” 150). It is

¹ I am indebted to Joel Salt for this reading of Hope Mirrlees’s work.
not just that the revolutionary potential of technology could be and was harnessed to serve the same ends as it would have for the previous generation’s leaders (here, one is reminded of Bill Brown’s observation that, in Woolf’s diary entries of mid-1910s, “the things of the world, such as paper and paint, have become the materials of war” [16]); it is also that the potential of technology could be and was realized across the apparent binaries of modernity: city and country, street and home, male and female, upper- and working-class; high- and lowbrow, elites and masses—albeit differentially. Alison Light points out that by 1933, “the arrival of electric light, electric fires and a fridge at Monk’s House” resulted in “more independence for the Woolfs” but also unemployment for Nellie Boxall (207). The same gravelled country roads that Woolf defended against macadamization in 1924’s “The Cheapening of Motor-cars” (The Essays of Virginia Woolf 3 440) led past farms where, in 1936, residents were being counselled to buy two vehicles: “an older car could be used on the farm, but every farmer should also possess a good modern car for off-farm use” (O’Connell 171). And even as the construction “of a car factory and of an aerodrome in the neighbourhood” (BTA 68) results in new, seemingly undesirable members of the community and signals the ties between automobile manufacturers and the military (Martin 51-53), and even as church absences are blamed on “The motor bike, the motor bus, and the movies” (BTA 69), “Mr and Mrs Rupert Haines, detained by a breakdown on the road,” arrive at Pointz Hall only a little late for the communal experience of the village pageant because of their car’s smooth progress on paved roads (74).

Woolf’s own vehicles—two used Singers purchased in the late 1920s, followed by a new 1933 Lanchester 18—are the inspiration for Sandra Inskeep-Fox’s poem, “One’s Whole World a Cinema” and for Robert Hemmings’s essay “A Motorcar of One’s Own.” In reading the material object of the car as an enactment of the financial agency linked to women’s writing in A Room of One’s Own, Hemmings explores the discourse of the woman driver through Mary Petre Bruce’s celebration of women’s car ownership and of the new views available through the windscreen. Woolf’s purchase of a vehicle is linked to an emerging “syntax of velocity” and thus a materially-grounded form of the woman’s sentence.

The gendering of technology and literature also informs Ria Banerjee’s “The Uprising of the Anecdotes: Women’s Letters and Mass-Produced News,” where the private, handwritten, tear-stained letter represents a space of local community and thus alterity in an age of male-dominated national newspapers. Banerjee’s reading of Jacob’s Room and of Three Guineas draws upon Walter Benjamin to examine Woolf’s complication of official, regimented accounts of history. Representations of lived experience that are linked to the unpaid-for labor implicit in personal correspondence provide another perspective upon world events: the domestic layers understandings of the public sphere.

Gregory Dekter focuses on the home front too, where large-scale technological changes have profound effects on immediate experience. In “‘Perishable and Permanent’: Industry, Commodity, and Society in Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse,” the social connotations of milk are traced from Julia Stephen’s Notes From Sick Rooms through Mrs. Ramsay’s concerns with quality and ultimately to the sky-written advertisement for Glaxo dried milk. The purity of dairy products informs a nostalgia for personal and communal relationships with farmers and milkmen, but also a critique of processes that have become outdated in a post-war world. In its packaged form, milk becomes the conflicted sign of progress in a quasi-religious moment of global capitalism that links the domestic to the imperial.

The social strata drawn together or apart by technology are the topic of Celiese Lypka’s “Modern Machines: Intersecting Public and Private Spheres in Mrs. Dalloway,” in which machines, though rarely described in detail, affect subjects differently depending upon location and context. Where the social dimension of mechanistic spectacle appears to emphasize public roles and hierarchies, technologies in the home generate opportunities for personal reflection. Those liminal moments, then, at which characters reflect upon the self in public but in relation to machines signal the fluidity of identity, which ruptures clear distinctions between uses and spaces, and suggests an alternative to rigid demarcations of place.

It is the fluidity of radio waves and their effects upon Woolf’s understanding of presence and absence that Jeremy Lakoff addresses in “Virginia Woolf’s Absent Radio.” Lakoff’s point of departure is that the medium of the wireless is grounded in both tangible technology and intangible sound waves, a “paradox” that applies to the individual as a receiver, especially in Between the Acts. This reconfiguration of materiality and ephemeralism connects the subject to a large but diffuse network of signals, which at the same time disconnects the individual from a conventional apprehension of presence.

The disruptive potential of technology lies, then, not just in a reconfiguration of subjectivity but also in a reconfiguration of community. For Jonathan Naito, the clock time marked by the sounds of machines in Between the Acts signals the temporary nature of group affiliation. In “The Techno-Onomatopoeia of Woolf’s Machines,” Naito explores the distinction between sounds produced by the functional object that is the gramophone, and the noises emitted by the machine itself. Where music pushes the action along, the “tick” of the device brings the audience to an awareness of time and existence, and it results in a group suspended together in liminal stasis.

Allan Pero reads the provisionality of the group that is the audience of the pageant through Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of “being-with.” In this examination of the gramophone, Pero distinguishes its voice from its content. The voice of the gramophone is “a mediumistic relation” that underwrites the interruption-ridden performance of the pageant and the audience as community. As “an effect of the real,” the voice is a mediating presence that speaks from gaps and splits, and that suggests “the contingency that makes the recognition of a ‘we’ possible” even in a moment of fascistic conceptualizations of self and society.

One of the most influential essays for readings of sound and machines in Between the Acts is Michele Pridmore-Brown’s 1998 article, “1939-40: Of Virginia Woolf, Gramophones, and Fascism.” In her piece for this issue, Pridmore-Brown revisits Woolf to reflect upon media technologies and reproductive technologies as they disrupt patriarchal clocks and interrupt the rhythms of “totalizing experiences” and narratives. The subversive effects of leaning sideways, and of moving subjunctively not just linearly, thus invoke the creation of new syntaxes, the applications of mechanical possibilities in art and life, and the layered implications of technologies produced in and by the hegemonic systems of modernity.

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University of Saskatchewan

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Virginia Woolf and Heritage
The 26th Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf
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Leeds Trinity University is honoured to be hosting the 26th Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf: Virginia Woolf and Heritage.

This international conference will investigate how Virginia Woolf engaged with heritage, and how she understood and represented it. One strand will look at her experience of the heritage industry, for example: libraries, museums, art galleries, authors’ houses, artists’ houses, stately homes, London’s heritage sites, and tourist sites in Britain and abroad.

Alternatively, the topic encompasses Woolf’s constructions of heritage, including literary heritage, intellectual heritage, family histories, the history of women and the history of lesbians. The conference will also consider ways in which Woolf has been represented and even appropriated by the heritage industry, for example in virtual and physical exhibitions; libraries, archives and collections; plaques, memorials, and statues; and at National Trust or other properties such as Monk’s House and Knole.

When and where?
16-19 June 2016, Leeds Trinity University

Who should attend?
An international audience of academics, postgraduates, students, and general readers.

How to book
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The International Virginia Woolf Society announces the Second Annual Angelica Garnett Undergraduate Essay Prize

The International Virginia Woolf Society is pleased to host the second annual undergraduate essay competition in honor of Virginia Woolf and in memory of Angelica Garnett, writer, artist, and daughter of Woolf’s sister, Vanessa Bell.

For this competition, essays can be on any topic pertaining to the writings of Virginia Woolf. Essays should be between 2,000 and 2,500 words in length, including notes and works cited, with an original title of the entrant’s choosing. Essays will be judged by the officers of the International Virginia Woolf Society: Kristin Czarnecki, President; Ann Martin, Vice-President; Alice Keane, Secretary-Treasurer; and Drew Shannon, Historian-Bibliographer. The winner will receive $200 and have the essay published in the subsequent issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany.

Please send essays in the latest version of Word. All entries must be received by June 6th, 2016. To receive an entry form, please contact Kristin Czarnecki at kristin_czarnecki@georgetowncollege.edu.

Louisville Conference 2017—Call for Papers

The International Virginia Woolf Society is pleased to host its seventeenth consecutive panel at the University of Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900, from February 23-25, 2017. We invite proposals for critical papers on any topic concerning Woolf studies. A particular panel theme may be chosen depending on the proposals received.

Please submit by email a cover page with your name, email address, mailing address, phone number, professional affiliation (if any), and the title of your paper, and a second anonymous page containing a 250-word paper proposal to kristin_czarnecki@georgetowncollege.edu, by Monday, August 15, 2016.

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The Société d’Études Woolfiennes (SEW) is a French society which
promotes the study of Virginia Woolf, the Blooombery Group and Modernism.
It was founded in 1996 to develop Woolf studies in France and to create further
links between French specialists and their counterparts abroad. It welcomes
academics and students in the field of English and Comparative Literature who
share a strong interest in the different aspects of Virginia Woolf’s work (the
canonical as well as the lesser known works).

Over the years, the SEW has aimed to create a rich working atmosphere that is
both warm and generous to all involved, intellectually vibrant and challenging.
We are keen to maintain this complementary association of academic poise
and spontaneous enthusiasm, so that members, potential members and passing
guests all feel welcome and valued.

The dedication of its founding members and more recent participants has
enabled the SEW to make its mark in French academic circles, convening high
quality international conferences every two years and publishing a selection of the
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Since the foundation of the SEW in 1996, international conferences have focused on:

- “Métamorphose et écrit dans l’œuvre de Woolf” (1997)
- “Metamorphosis and narrative in Woolf’s works”
- “Things in Woolf’s works” (1999)
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- “The pure and the impure”
- “Conversation in Woolf’s works” (2003)
- “Woolf lectrice / Woolf critique” (2006 / 2008)
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- “Contemporary Woolf” (2010)
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Organisation: Adèle CASSIGNEUL (Bordeaux 2 University/CAS EA 801) with
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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.

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The Virginia Woolf Miscellany: Issues of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany from Spring 2003 (issue 63) to the present are available in a PDF format at: https://virginiawoolfmiscellany.wordpress.com. The Wordpress site also includes a range of scanned issues from Fall 1973, Issue 1 to Fall 2002, Issue 61. If you do not see the issue that you wish to access, please contact Vara Neverow at . (These issues are available to view through EBSCOhost as well.)

The Three Guineas Reading Notebooks Online: http://woolf-center.southernct.edu Contact Vara Neverow <neverowv1@southernct.edu> for more information about the site.

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And Virginia Woolf has other multiple Facebook pages that are not related to specific societies.

Blogs:
Visit Paula Maggio’s “Blogging Woolf!” at http://bloggingwoolf.wordpress.com for a broad range of valuable information such as key Woolfian resources, current and upcoming events, and an archive of Woolfian doings now past.

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Thank you for your interest in the Virginia Woolf Miscellany.
**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://virginiawoolfmiscellany.wordpress.com](http://virginiawoolfmiscellany.wordpress.com). A number of earlier issues from Fall 1973, Issue 1 to Fall 2002, Issue 61 are also available on this site. For access to an issue that has not yet been posted, please contact Vara Neverow at klevanback@sothernct.edu.

The IVWS was founded in 1973 as the Virginia Woolf Society. The society has a direct relationship with the Modern Language Association and has for many years 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://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/IVWS](http://library.vicu.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 VV Woolf 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. In the body of the email, you must write: subscribe VWOOLF Your firstname Your last name. You will receive a welcome message with further information about the list. To unsubscribe, please send a message *from the exact account that you originally subscribed with* to the same address: listproc@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu. In the body of the email, write: unsubscribe VWOOLF.

Materials from most of the sources mentioned above are included in the IVWS/VVWS 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 ivsarchive@att.net.

The Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf is an independent entity. It was envisioned by Mark Hussey and launched in 1991 at Pace University. The conference is overseen by a Steering Committee consisting of all previous conference organizers. Permission to host a Woolf conference is authorized by Mark Hussey, who chairs the Steering Committee. Those interested in hosting the conference should contact Mark Hussey at mhussey@pace.edu. Each annual conference is organized by one or more individuals associated with the host institution. The host institution finances the event and uses the registration fees of attendees to offset the costs of the event. The Annual Conference has no formal association with the International Virginia Woolf Society or the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain or any other Woolf society.

The Selected Papers from the Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf 2001-present (excluding 2004) are published by Clemson University Press (formerly 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](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 at [http://www.pace.edu/press](http://www.pace.edu/press).

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**The Virginia Woolf Miscellany Online**

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 [virginiawoolfmiscellany.wordpress.com](http://virginiawoolfmiscellany.wordpress.com).

A project to scan and post all earlier issues of the Miscellany (still in progress) is also currently underway at [virginiawoolfmiscellany.wordpress.com](http://virginiawoolfmiscellany.wordpress.com).

If you need access to a specific article that is not available online at this point, please contact Vara Neverow klevanback@sothernct.edu.

All issues to the present as well as those from Fall 1973-Fall 2002 are also available in digital format through EBSCOhost’s Humanities International Complete and EBSCOhost’s Literary Reference Center. More recent issues are also available through ProQuest Literature Online (LION) and Gale Group/Cengage.

An Index of the *VWM* from Fall 1973-Fall 2011 is available from Susan Devoe [susan.devoe@gmail.com](mailto:susan.devoe@gmail.com).
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The Society Column Kristin Czarnecki

Current and Former Officers and Members-at-Large of the IVWS
A Motor car of One’s Own

I. “Grossly material things”

This essay examines the role of the motor car in Woolf’s imaginative discourse by honing in on both its function as an “apparatus for the production of views” and its materiality (Trotter 220). Focusing on the late 1920s and the contiguity between the blushing of Woolf’s first ownership of a motor car and the contemplative period that produced A Room of One’s Own, “Evening over Sussex: Reflections in a Motor car,” and Orlando, I argue that the materiality of Woolf’s motor car shapes Woolf’s apperception of a gendered viewing agency and immerses her in a modernist syntax of velocity, an agency unavailable to her pre-motorizing self. In A Room of One’s Own, Woolf asserts that the words of extraordinary literature are not conjured by “incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the house we live in” (AROO 38)—and, Woolf didn’t add, but could have, the motor car we drive.

For a motor car to be a “grossly material thing,”” and much more a thing of privilege in 1927 than a pleasant lunch alone in a Cambridge café, which costs the speaker of A Room of One’s Own less than a ten shilling note. Attending to its privileged materiality sheds light upon not only its “suitability” of different models for different needs (15), not ignoring the practicality of a closed saloon (rather than an open top model) especially in England’s climate. Petre Bruce also recommends the relatively novel “payment by instalments” plan to protect drawing down capital investments—a hire purchase system being promoted by the industry to stimulate growth in sales (17). While Woolf did become a car owner, and she did take a number of lessons and learn to drive, she did not “make the plunge” into becoming the lady owner-driver, as Petre Bruce advocated (1). She preferred to have Leonard at the wheel: as a passenger, she had more opportunities to take in the views. But it was the financial success of her writing and publishing that allowed the privilege and mobilities of motoring into her life and her imagination.

The growing British motor car industry in the interwar years was unsurprisingly characterized by the kind of sexist attitudes Woolf interrogates in A Room of One’s Own, with the addition of a patronizing nod to the influence of middle-class women upon the family purse strings when it came to the purchase of this new technology (O’Connell 66-69).3 Motor car advertising in the 1920s was often directed towards women, though not necessarily women drivers. For example, a contemporary advertisement for Singer features the headline “I’m glad I got a Singer!” above an illustration of a saloon’s interior, where a formally dressed couple occupies the front seat, and another the back. The driver/speaker is the man, who looks across at his passenger/partner, a woman, speaking the lines of the ad’s copy which announces the car’s reliability and economical running costs, and its performance. He concludes by lapsing into the familiar feminization of the car itself: “Speed? There’s nothing on the road of her own size that she won’t leave standing” (Singer). The ad conveys the necessity of impressing upon the woman passenger (and reader of the ad) the idea of value. It may be hard to imagine Leonard and Virginia engaged in such a conversation, but once they purchased their first Singer, “The Car that Looks After Itself” (Singer), one never knows. As Virginia Woolf’s diary reveals: “We talk of nothing but cars” (D3 146).

Virginia Woolf acquired her first motor car the summer she began her “wool-gathering” about her book on fiction (Diary [D] 3 149), which influenced the subject of her upcoming lecture “Women and Fiction,” which would, in turn, evolve into A Room of One’s Own. Many scholars have commented upon the transformative experience motor car ownership wrought upon Leonard and Virginia Woolf’s experience of geographic spaces, particularly the spaces of rural England.2 Woolf herself acknowledges as much in her diaries: “This is the great opening up of our lives,” she wrote on July 10, 1927, and added a month later: “Yes, the motor is turning out the joy of our lives, an additional life, free & mobile & airy to live alongside our usual stationary industry”1

1 Editorial note: The variants “motor car,” “motor-car” and “motorcar” appear in the discussions of vehicles. Woolf herself uses the hyphenated format in her 1924 essay “The Cheapening of the Motor-car” and omits the hyphen in her posthumously published essay, “Evening over Sussex: Reflections in a Motor car.”


3 The notions that men were interested in reliability and economy and utility while women were interested only in style and comfort were based on rationalist models of consumer behavior that did not account for the more influential “non-rational and emotional” factors in purchase decisions (O’Connell 65, 69).
beyond sporting enthusiasts, traditionally upper and upper-middle class male motorists, by offering greater comforts and conveniences, and, through economies of scale, lower price points. Nevertheless, motoring purists looked upon attention to comfort rather than performance as a jejune “process of feminisation” of the industry (O’Connell 65). Consequently, the figure of the woman driver became a potent and “controversial symbol of changing gender relations” (51). Influential motoring trade magazines, like Autocar and Motor, ran regular articles during the interval period reinforcing the belief that driving skill was a “natural masculine attribute” (53). In 1927 motoring commentator Chandos Bidwell noted the relative merits of men compared to women drivers, which stands as an unambiguous reflection of the evidence assembled in A Room of One’s Own to explain the relative paucity of great women writers:

The tradition of womanhood is against their being competent drivers. In the past they have been brought up to fear rather than to face, to have things done for them rather than to do them for themselves. All that is changing, but tradition tells to a certain extent and, when the car, running at forty miles an hour, is within ten yards of a precipice, the woman driver is apt to say, “John what shall I do?” (qtd. in O’Connell 54)

Bidwell acknowledges that cultural tradition rather than biological difference is at play in gender dynamics. But, he argues, cultural tradition, though changing, cannot alter the unavoidable truth that a woman in automotive crisis must appeal to the man. Male mastery of the motoring situation is thereby reinforced. Bidwell goes on:

The word concentration is the great difference between a man and a woman learning to drive. He only has to be told things once. She will ask lots of unnecessary questions and then become interested in the horn or the colour of somebody else’s car. (54)

In other words, within interwar car culture, women drivers are once again “looking-glasses” to reflect the figure of the man “at twice his natural size” and “charge[e his] vitality” (AROO 32). His concentration and command over crises are reified against, in Woolf’s words, “the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, [men] would cease to enlarge” (32). That said, the motor car enables not just an ideological or cultural mirroring of gender issues, but also an actual process of revisioning or representing views framed by the reflective surfaces of automotive glass.

III. The Motoring Picturesque

The motor car’s mobile materiality produced novel, provocative ways of seeing the world, introducing its users to new landscapes mediated by new frames, in particular the windscreen, the car windows, and the rearview mirror. Mary Petre Bruce alerts readers that motor car ownership will draw them into unknown and unexpected terrain. She warns in her section “The Motoring Budget,” new owners must account for an increase in running expenses through using their motor cars for “outings which you would never dream of taking if you had no car” (13). And these new outings were certainly a phenomenon for the Woolfs:

“We spin off to Falmer, ride over the Downs, drop into Rottingden, then sweep over to Seaford, call, in pouring rain at Charleston[,]…return for tea, all as light & easy as a hawk in the air” (D3 151). Virginia Woolf was clearly taken by her newfound immersion into interwar British car culture, for it offered her, literally, a new way of looking as well as new things to see. Within a few weeks, she concedes that, “All images are now tinged with driving a motor. Here I think of letting my engine sweep over to Seaford, call, in pouring rain at Charleston[,]…return for tea, all as light & easy as a hawk in the air” (D3 149). The collapse here between the driving subject and the mechanical object reiterates in a different register Woolf’s fascination with the mutability of modern subjectivity. The motor car can change Woolf’s apprehension of her self, but this diary entry also indicates how quickly motoring has become implicated in her apprehension of images. Her essay, “Evening over Sussex: Reflections in a Motor Car,” written in that first year of her motoring life (Garrington 121), is on one level an explicit exploration of the connection between splitting selves and motoring, as has been thoroughly treated by other scholars, including Hilary Clark in the Virginia Woolf Miscellany (6-8). But on another level, Woolf’s essay recounts how the motor car enables and alters how she looks at what she sees.

The supply of “constantly moving panoram[a]” is one of the chief benefits of motor car travel, one that demands focused “mental activity” to properly “appreciate,” according to Mary Petre Bruce (58). Woolf attests that while motoring “one is overcome by beauty extravagantly greater than one could expect” (DM 7). For the speaker of “Evening Over Sussex,” being “overcome” produces an encumbrance of selves, but what produces the overcoming is the profusion of views. In her diary Woolf affirms “that one of the things, I like about motoring is the sense it gives one of lighting accidentally…upon scenes which would have gone on, have always gone on, will go on, unrecorded, save for this chance glimpse” (D3 153). Petre Bruce concurs that touring the countryside by motor car provides ample opportunity for first seeing and then capturing captivating and “unusual views” (64). Precisely how one records or captures the view glimpsed by chance may vary—an entry in a diary, or a snapshot with a camera—but as an “apparatus for the production of views,” the motor car affords the driver or passenger new ways of seeing, invariably through the lens of its windshield or windows. Petre Bruce professes that she has “an album of photographs taken through windscreen, side and rear windows which are surprisingly good, especially considering [the speed of the car]” (64). It is a synthesis of camera and motor car that calls to mind Sara Danius’s insightful work on “the modernist rhetoric of speed.” Danius argues that Marcel Proust at once deplores the technologies of cinema and photography yet adapts techniques from these media. His representations of a modern visuality shaped by passing vistas glimpsed through the windshield of a motor car (100), an “aesthetics of the windshield,” seem to resonate within Woolf’s integration the motor car into her own aesthetic vision. For, as Petre Bruce asserts explicitly and Woolf implies, the windshield and windows of a motor car become apertures for viewing “unusual views” of the countryside, for producing defamiliarizing effects.

Petre Bruce is especially fond of photographs taken from the backseat and over the shoulder of the driver, “with a view of the outside world seen through the windscreen in remarkably sharp definition” (64).4 Petre did not use a camera, it appears, and she doubts her ability to successfully “convey what one saw [from within one’s motor car] now over Sussex so that another person could share it” (DM 7). But one of the scenes she does glimpse features “pink clouds over Battle” (7), a view that serves to connect the increasingly popular motor touring to its pre-motoring ancestry in the walking tour. Battle, which featured a ruined abbey, was a notable view in William Gilpin’s Observations on the Coasts of Hampshire, Sussex, and Kent, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, based on his walking tours in the summer of 1774. While the picturesque can mean many things, it coalesces around an appreciation of irregularity and roughness in landscape, of which ruins were a chief feature (Copley 133). What struck Gilpin was not the sunset-illuminated clouds above the abbey, but the abbey itself, which had been “vicious[ly]” “deform[ed]” by its conversion “into a modern dwelling” (Gilpin 51). The ruin, ruined by renovation, spoils the picturesqueness of the view, and it was a view that Gilpin’s tourists often created using a unique optical instrument: the Claude-glass. The tourist, having turned her back on the prized rural scene, could hold up this convex mirror—often an oval of four to five inches, sometimes tinted—above her shoulder to capture and frame an image of the reflected view (Andrews 6). An instrument of inversion, the glass puts the view behind

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4 Petre Bruce’s description has a remarkable affinity with Henri Matisse’s Le Pare-bise: Sur la route de Villacoubly (1916-17). Danius describes this painting as study in perspective, a painting whose subject is the windshield and the perspectival views it composes and whose painter transforms “the automobile into a metaphor for the painter’s eye” (119).
the viewer. In the modern machine age, however, the motor car has taken over, “becom[ing] a viewing instrument on the order of, say the Claude-glass” (Danius 118), but retaining the strange power to place the view behind the viewer. Petre Bruce remarks on “surprisingly good” photographs taken out the rear windows. In Woolf’s essay, the speed of a motor car makes views difficult to successfully isolate: “beauty spread at one’s right hand, at one’s left; at one’s back too; it was escaping all the time” (DM 7; emphasis added). The view out the motor car window is conflated with an existential journey: “Gone, gone; over, over; past and down with, past and down with. I feel life left behind even as the road is left behind” (8). In Woolf’s essay, the significance of the view, renovated or otherwise, is inevitably anchored in the viewer.

IV. Conclusion: a new syntax

Partly influenced by the “machines of vision” (Danius 100), partly by the exhilarating experience of motoring at speed through the countryside, Proust realized that to capture the impact of this entirely modern experience of the visual field, a new type of writing was required. Danius calls this new writing Proust’s “syntax of velocity” in which “the inanimate becomes animate; the immobile becomes mobile” (110, 113-14). Given this linkage between the speed of the motor car, Proust, and sentences, it is noteworthy that Woolf’s attraction to Proust is rooted in the syntactic: “he will I suppose,” notes Woolf in her diary, “both influence me & make me out of temper with every sentence of my own” (D3 7). When she wrote this in 1925, Woolf was still a critic of the destructive impact of the motor car on the countryside, and wary of Proust’s influence and capacity to shake her confidence in her own syntax. But by the time she became a convert to motoring, she was, like the speaker of A Room of One’s Own, striving to discern a feminine syntax—a “perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use” (AROO 70)—and more willing to acquiesce to Proust’s presciently modernist rhetoric of speed. Woolf concludes Orlando, which she was writing with gusto during her first year of motor car ownership, with a modern, modish driving scene: “Streets widened and narrowed. Long vistas steadily shrunk together” (O 292). As in Proust before her, the immobile objects become mobilized, and the mobilized subject becomes an immobilized tatter of “chopp[ed] up identity” almost “entirely disassembled” (293). From the interior of the motor car, the driver, Orlando, like Woolf’s passenger in “Evening over Sussex,” appeals to other “selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled on a waiter’s hand” (294). It is a scene from a motor car of Orlando’s own, composed in Woolf’s own syntax of velocity.

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Works Cited


The Uprising of the Anecdotes:
Women’s Letters and Mass-Produced News in Jacob’s Room and Three Guineas

In the opening lines of Jacob’s Room, Betty Flanders sits on a beach in Cornwall writing home to Captain Barfoot in Scarborough. Recounting her recent trials, her eyes well with tears and, as she looks away, her fountain pen stays at a full stop, making a “horrid blot” on the page. She looks down, ignores the punctuation and continues, “but [sic] mercifully everything seems satisfactorily arranged” (Jacob’s Room [JR] 7). The story begins in medias res, the page stained with emotion, Betty’s casual overstepping of the bounds of written convention: in Woolf’s treatment, these become symbolic of her vision of letters as a site of resistant women’s writing. This concern recurs some sixteen years later with another series of letters in Three Guineas, in which Woolf privileges the private letter over popular formats such as newspapers and the biographies of great men. Personal letters are associated with femininity rather than masculinity, and they carry with them an always-incomplete desire to communicate felt experience. Despite its limitations, letter-writing is imbued with a certain power in that Betty symbolically overrides the barrier of the full stop to shape her thoughts. While books and newspapers are “pressed nightly over the brain and heart of the world” and addressed to a wide audience, taking “the impression of the whole” (JR 98), the personal letter has a restricted readership, which, in Woolf’s treatment, is its strength. In both the early fiction and later nonfiction, the feminized space of the personal letter counters the public, masculine sphere of the modern machine age.

5 In her 1924 essay “The Cheapening of Motor-cars,” Woolf describes the harmful impact of these new machines on the “character” of English roads (440).
Not that Woolf’s men don’t write letters—the Captain must have replied to Betty, as do Jacob and his brothers when they are older. Betty receives at least one love letter too (from Mr. Floyd [JR 20-21]). Still, Woolf’s feminine narrator claims personal letters to be “our stays and props” that “lace our days together and make of life a perfect globe” (JR 93).

In contrast, Jacob is always public-minded: his recurrent ambition is to address Parliament (JR 73, 139); he writes serious notes “upon the importance of history—upon democracy” (150), intending to solidify his position among the literati; and, in one hilarious instance of failed literary criticism, he finds an edition of William Wycherley’s plays so poorly edited by a Professor Bubleel of Leeds that he sends off indignant essays to three journals that are quickly returned. His writing is a pole apart in tone and content from his mother’s, a product of the public persona Jacob is consciously cultivating at Cambridge and then in London. However, Woolf makes no qualitative distinction between Betty’s tear-stained, semi-incoherent private ramblings and Jacob’s erudite, presumably rational public writing. Hers are gossipy, his boring; hers are short-sighted for being limited to her neighbors in Scarborough, and his equally short-sighted for parroting inaccurate ideas about Ancient Greece (JR 75-76). Such leveling echoes Woolf’s conviction in “Modern Fiction” that readers must not “take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small” (The Common Reader [CR] 150). Walter Benjamin, writing almost concurrently with Woolf, isolates the same literary device and names it “the street insurgence of the anecdote” (The Arcades Project [AP] 846), distinct from the more orderly constructions of history appearing in newspapers, conventional literature, and published accounts. Woolf and Benjamin, although unaware of each other’s work, arrive at a similar conclusion: that paid-for work (masculine/bourgeois) is held as more socially valuable than unpaid-for work (feminine/working class). Just as work is inflected with class and gender, so is writing: newspapers, being products of the extant economic system, are not simple reports of events but complex networks of politics and finance. Hence, Woolf says to the daughters of educated men, “[I]f you want to know any fact about politics you must read at least three different papers…and come in the end to your own conclusion” (Three Guineas [TG] 95).

Woolf repeatedly takes up the newspaper as an exemplar of modernity in early stories such as “The Mark on the Wall” or “Sympathy,” and in “An Unwritten Novel” it appears as the ubiquitous prop of everyday life. Like most men his age, Jacob regularly reads papers like The Globe, The Evening Standard, and the shorter-lived The Star (which ran from 1869-1900 [JR 90]) and seeks out London papers while travelling. Vincent Sherry points out that in these stories, the “culture of journalism” is “a medium equally unreliable and irresistible” (258). In Woolf’s early fiction this attitude of wariness towards news media is expressed as the narrator’s gentle mockery of Jacob’s upwardly-mobile writerly ambitions, of a part with his sketchy grasp of Greek and a “typically masculine desire for power” (Spiropoulou 71). By 1938, when Three Guineas appears in print, Woolf’s attitude has hardened. She acknowledges that, “daughters of educated men,” being “generalists not specialists…must rely upon such evidence as we can collect from history, biography, and from the daily paper” (TG 130). She then embarks on a sustained reading against the grain of masculinist historical accounts, biographies of men, and newspaper accounts. Merry Pawlowski has observed that Woolf’s inclusion of labeled and unlabeled newspaper images in her reading notebooks sets up an intricate destabilization of the truth claims of precisely those published accounts. Particularly in detailing her research on the newspapers’ treatment of the women’s suffrage movement, Woolf writes, “The power of the Press to burke discussion of any undesirable subject was, and still is, very formidable” (TG n16 162), and goes on to list police brutality and reporters’ scorn for women activists. Masculinity, the newspapers, and war are collated into an elegy for lost innocence in Jacob’s Room; they coalesce in A Room of One’s Own (1929) and then in Three Guineas to form a repressive cultural mass against which Woolf pits her record of the systematic persecution of the feminine. The experimental method of the early novel spurs the emphatic political bent of the later essays.

Benjamin’s view of the relationship between contemporary literature, the newspaper, and business in the twentieth century is useful in examining the further consequences of Woolf’s literary method. In “The Author as Producer” (1934), Benjamin hopes that the newspaper will be a forum in which the traditionally disenfranchised can wrest control of the written word away from its bourgeois owners. Like Woolf’s canny woman reader in Three Guineas, Benjamin is all too aware that the revolutionary potential of the newspaper has not been realized, since it “still belongs to capital” (Reflections [R] 225). In the newspaper, Benjamin writes, “Work itself has its turn to speak” (R 225). Woolf also states that although “the control of the Press—the decision what to print, what not to print—is entirely in the hands of [the male] sex” (TG 12), it is possible to envision a future in which “some daughter of an educated man who has enough to live upon…can read and write for her own pleasure” (TG 95) and does not have to acquiesce to the literary prostitution of popular romance writers like Mrs. Oliphant (TG 91-92). Woolf doesn’t shun the newspaper, for it is “history and biography in the raw…sometimes openly in the lines, sometimes covertly behind them” (TG 115). Instead of a retort damning the popular press, she offers a “counter-discourse” of the politics of reading using “an elastic, pluralistic prose that challenges the reader to think” (Cuddy-Keane 27) rather than agreeing with simplified oppositional binaries.

The crux of capital’s control of the newspaper, Benjamin suggests, is that it “makes everything abstract. ‘Empathy: this is what newspaper reading terminates in’” (AP 846; original emphasis). In his sense, empathy is not positive because it is an easy emotion indulged without real attachment or consequences, sustaining a detached empathy that is not positive because it is an easy emotion indulged in without real attachment or consequences, sustaining a detached empathy that “lace our days together and make of life a perfect globe.” In a parallel move, Woolf shines the “coloured light of biography” on her subjects in Three Guineas instead of the “white light of facts” (TG 45). War is on both their minds—Benjamin directly refers to history’s barricading of lived experience, above. Woolf utilizes a narrative method whose attention to domestic scenes counters the anonymized nature of war news or propaganda reports. The precise way she connotes the scene of writing—“how mothers down at Scarborough scribble over the fire with their feet on the fender, when tea’s cleared away” (JR 90)—emphasizes that Betty Flanders’s letters are lit through by the colored light of lived experience. Jacob’s Room dramatizes this conflict, pitching Jacob’s writing against his mother’s to mark the extent to which her work is ignored or dismissed.

Betty’s real purpose in writing to her sons is “probably this—Don’t go with bad women, do be a good boy; wear your thick shirts; and come back, come back, come back to me” (JR 90). What she actually says is quite different, a collection of seemingly inconsequential Scarborough gossip. As Anna Snaith has written, letters “both empower and limit women in [Woolf’s] writing” (1), and Betty’s letters can be seen as a site of failure, torn between the specter of sex that she wants to confront and the bonds of convention that dictate what a mother can properly ask her son. She is, like the culture she represents, an “amorphous bundle, swaddled up…in insincerity,
emitting half truths from her timid lips, sweetening and diluting her message with whatever sugar or water serves [her purpose]” (TG 99). Indeed, Woolf’s narrator seems almost convinced midway through Chapter Eight that Betty’s attempts to communicate are pointless: “[E]verywhere we go wires and tubes surround us to carry the voices that try to penetrate...[yet] something whispers, Is this all? Can I never know, share, be certain? Am I doomed all my days to write letters, send voices...while life dwindles...?” (JR 93). In this light, Jacob’s Room can sound like an elegy for thwarted motherhood and Betty Flanders’s “pale blue envelope lying by the biscuit-box” (JR 92) an icon of defeat.

Yet, Woolf reminds us in Three Guineas that culture “is, in reality, muscular, adventurous, free” (TG 99) if only it can break from its adherence to extant (masculinist, commercial) principles. Betty Flanders marks a beginning, not an end. She is a precursor to liberated new women like Jinny Carslake or Sandra Wentworth Williams, whom Jacob admires, and also to the daughters of educated men who embody an emergent culture and fresh intellectual freedom. Woolf’s third letter in Three Guineas makes an unambiguous distinction between “paid-for culture,” which includes formal learning and writing undertaken for money such as in the newspapers, and “unpaid-for culture,” which consists in being able to read and write [one’s] own tongue” (TG 90). The Oxbridge universities are unilaterally masculinist (recall that in Jacob’s Room Miss Umphelby, who sings Virgil just as well as the men, nevertheless attracts fewer students than Professor Cowan, [JR 42]) and so are most professions. Woolf, a “democratic highbrow” (Cuddy-Keane 13), sees the uprising of anecdotes and the freeing of culture coming from generalists like the daughters of educated men who know their own tongue but not always Latin and Greek. For Benjamin too the revolutionary potential of the newspapers exists because the average reporter’s “[l]iterary qualification is founded no longer on specialized but, rather, on polytechnic education and is thus public property” (R 225). He also locates hope for change in the dissolution of barriers to access, chief among which are those associated with higher learning and foreign languages. Finally, it is worth noting that Woolf was, in Benjaminian terms, at another revolutionary focal point. Where Benjamin postulates that “the best [opinions] are no use if they make nothing useful out of those that have them” (R 233), Woolf, as one of the few writers with control of a “private printing press...[within] a moderate income” (TG 98), emerges as a potential fulcrum for real change.

With an eye peeled for anecdotes, chapter 8 of Jacob’s Room reads in a more positive light despite the narrator’s momentary gloom. In the course of the chapter, Jacob leaves work and returns home after a walk with Richard Bonamy; his lover Florinda arrives at his lodgings and, seeing the letter downstairs, brings it up for him. Jacob recognizes his mother’s hand and ignores it in his ardor; later he reads it with half his attention, simultaneously musing that Florinda must care deeply for him because she “could no more pretend a feeling than swallow whisky” (JR 94). Woolf draws the mother and lover together through the blue envelope lying by the biscuit-box an icon of defeat. The maternal chimes displace the newspaper in Jacob’s sensory world, “stiffly and painfully the frozen earth was trodden under” and, awake worrying about her sons, she would hear the “worn voice of clocks repeating] the fact of the hour all night long.” There is another break in the narration that collapses space, as if Betty’s sensations reach her son in London: “Jacob, too, hear[s] them” (99) and goes to bed. Even though Jacob privileges the world of paid-for culture and devalues the women who love him, the feminine impulse rearranges the narrative. The maternal chimes displace the newspaper in Jacob’s sensory world, usurping his attention. As the chapter closes, it comes to mind that the narrator has earlier equated Betty’s failed letter with those of Byron and Cowper, “[m]asters of language, poets of long ages, [who have] addressed themselves to the task of reaching, touching, penetrating the individual heart. Would that it were possible!” (93). The failure is not of Betty’s intellect but of language worn threadbare into clichés. Anticipating the outraged letter-writer of Three Guineas, the narrator of Jacob’s Room widens the issue of women’s writing into a universal problem of language, showing the writer to be as worthy as anyone but her task uniquely impossible.

Woolf’s narrative method begins the task of breaking the control of the Press (and culture more generally) by a single gender by distinguishing the particular within the general. She encourages writers to “[f]ind out new ways of approaching ‘the public’: single it into separate people instead of massing it into one monster, gross in body, feeble in mind” (TG 98). There is perhaps no better example of writing than a personal letter that addresses people as individuals. I find it particularly resonant that Benjamin himself edited a collection of letters, German Men and Women (1936) as a snapshot of the educated middle class over the nineteenth century, unknowingly mirroring Woolf’s fictional method. The letters scattered throughout Jacob’s Room are an important symbol of unpaid-for women’s work whose power Woolf examines more systematically in Three Guineas. After the war, the devastated Jinny Carslake is reported to have become an eccentric who made “the strangest confidences to shy young Englishmen” who remind her of Jacob. Holding out a box of ordinary pebbles, Jinny says to whoever will listen: “[I]f you look at them steadily...multiplicity becomes unity, which is somehow the secret of life” (JR 131). At the end of Three Guineas, Woolf’s letter-writer says that to “make unity out of multiplicity...that would be to dream—to dream the recurring dream that has haunted the human mind since the beginning of time; the dream of peace, the dream of freedom” (TG 143). Jinny’s haunted ramblings delivered secondhand in Jacob’s Room are yet another anecdote in a text peppered with them. Despite the prosaic, masculine world of facts these little stories haunt our human minds.

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“Perishable and Permanent”: Industry, Commodity, and Society in Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse

Although the larger outputs of modern technology are often read as some of the most emblematic features of Virginia Woolf’s writing—in Mrs. Dalloway, the car with a punctured tire or the airplane tracing letters in the sky (2, 17); in To the Lighthouse, the mechanized lighthouse itself, pulsing cool and impersonal beams into the Ramsay cottage (109)—these describe only one part of the quickly changing material world Woolf observed and recorded in her novels. Indeed, the period spanning Woolf’s birth at the end of the nineteenth century through to the Second World War was one of significant change not just in terms of obvious mechanical technologies, but also in a more immediate and personal sense. Everything of material value, from clothing to milk, was applied to the mechanisms of industry in the hope that it could be improved. Part of Woolf’s formal project in both novels, then, is to exhibit the large and small concerns in equal measure, so that we read as much in the airplane itself as the message it delivers. To complement the range of scholarship examining the larger societal currents of change at play in Woolf’s writing, it is important to examine the smaller, more domestic ebbs as well.

In 1883, one year after her daughter Virginia was born, Julia Stephen published Notes From Sick Rooms, a series of practical ruminations on contemporary medicine intended for use by nurses, a profession Stephen herself once practiced. The handbook covers the general duties of a nurse, along with a range of treatments and remedies that, in her experience, Stephen found “useful, or useless, in such cases of illness as I have had the opportunity of watching” (Stephen 35). An important section on convalescence begins by discussing the preparation and administration of certain foods, and identifies, for example, that beef-tea is a good meal supplement due to its simplicity and soothing nature. Significant in her contribution to a long history of English domestic handbooks, and a feature that clearly situates it in the late nineteenth-century, is that these remedies are marked with references to contemporary consumer products: homemade beef-tea can be thickened with Groult’s tapioca, or replaced altogether by Brand’s essence of beef (38).

Because the contemporary understanding of nutrition was yet rudimentary, scientific explanations are lacking from Stephen’s procedures. Wisdom, in any case, was the nurse’s guide—not chemistry. For this reason—that it could not be relied on as common knowledge—Stephen carefully advises that for the patient needing milk, “the nurse must see the milkman herself and impress on him the importance of sweet fresh milk from one cow being always brought,” and that furthermore, she “must empty the milk into a flat pan[…this pan must be placed in a cold place, and must be well scalded each time it is emptied” (39). Implied but unstated are the manifold factors of sanitation and contamination to which milk is naturally susceptible, especially when lacking refrigeration. Stephen’s instructions are also an attempt, then, to protect against the intentional adulteration of milk, a crime so prevalent in England in 1882 that “one-fifth of the 20,000 milk analyses made by the 52 county and 172 borough analysts was adulterated” with such compounds as boric acid, chalk, and water, itself often contaminated (Wohl 21). And yet, despite these risks, milk remained a staple of the English diet, for both the sick and well, because of its social value of milk cannot be overemphasized.

The state of milk remained a contentious issue for the first half of the twentieth century, not just in London but throughout the rest of Britain as well. We might glean from Stephen’s knowledge on the subject, and because it was Woolf’s desire to insert her mother’s character into To the Lighthouse (Zwerdling 180), at least one reason for Woolf’s interest in the milk problem. As with Stephen, Mrs. Ramsay is upset by the “milk delivered at your door in London positively brown with dirt” (To the Lighthouse [TTL] 49), and at the dinner table advocates for reform: it was “a question (she was thoroughly roused […] and talked very empathetically) of real butter and clean milk. Speaking with warmth and eloquence she described the iniquity of the English dairy system, and in what state milk was delivered at the door” (84). The dairy system Mrs. Ramsay refers to was, by the first decade of the nineteenth century, vastly outdated. Since the mid-1800s populations in towns and cities relied largely on milk carried by rail, “its freshness […] dependent on
the speed with which it was delivered to the rail terminus and its passage through the wholesale and retail markets” (Flood 137). Moreover, the entire system was inadequately regulated, which lead both to its adulteration and to other types of corruption.

Owing to the passionate certitude of Mrs. Ramsay’s polemic, critic Megumi Kato locates in the character a personal ideology aligned with the greater schema of British imperialism: “Mrs. Ramsay represents a forceful mother, a white middle-class woman colonizer who repeats the imperialistic discourse propagating the ideology of motherhood” (104). Further, because Mrs. Ramsay concerns herself with the problem of milk, at the time of national importance, Kato finds clear evidence of “how politicized her character actually is” (104). And yet Mrs. Ramsay’s ideological adherence is asserted not imperially but domestically. Her desire for reliably clean milk, while implicitly predicated on a national infrastructure, is remarkably insulated. She hopes for “a model dairy and a hospital up here”: something to benefit the town and her family more (TTL 49). Even when Mrs. Ramsay’s domestic concerns are implicitly supportive of the engine of greater society, she considers these issues foreign. It is not her prerogative, but rather that of “the other sex” who “negotiated treaties, ruled India, [and] controlled finance” (9).

In contrast to Mrs. Ramsay’s insular view, British imperialism, which at its core was driven by a modern economy with modern commerce, advocated for new, cheaper, and more efficient alternatives in every facet of life. Regarding the large scale commoditization of milk, consumers were offered a range of condensed canned versions, along with the nationally popular Glaxo powdered milk, which, in the pre-war period, was widely marketed in Britain and throughout the Commonwealth to “supplant household milk in its entirety” for both children and adults (Davenport-Hines and Slinn 25). In attempting to ward off a future she intuits as harmful, Mrs. Ramsay roots her reform in a familiar and private domesticity. The imperialistic discourse Kato assigns to her character—intent on political advance and nation building—is a discourse far from her vocabulary.

Importantly, although we observe the domestic imperative guiding Mrs. Ramsay’s interest in the milk problem, we are not privy to her warm and eloquent description at the dinner table, nor to any suggestions she might have for solving it. Instead, her speech is truncated from both her family and the reader. For we have already learned she has no solution to the problem. Although Mrs. Ramsay wanted “A model dairy and a hospital up here[,] […] things she would have liked to do, herself,” she is forced to question her ambitions: “But how? With all these children? When they were older, then perhaps she would have time” (TTL 49).

In many ways Mrs. Ramsay relies on the problem remaining unsolved, because the indeterminate middle ground—acknowledging the unsolved issue and knowing she must shelf it for some future time—is the only space over which she has any control. The very luxury of having time to work on a solution would require the kind of change she abhors and would conflict with a deeper material desire: “she never wanted James to grow a day older or Cam either. These two she would have liked to keep for ever just as they were” (49). At the dinner table she is spared admitting ignorance, and her family reacts to the lesser sin: thinking her “incapable of caring for her children—rather that she never wanted James to grow a day older or Cam either” (112). Like the house itself, Mrs. Ramsay’s ideals must necessarily crumble.

Mrs. Ramsay’s death in the “Time Passes” section, while tragic for her husband and children, seems in many ways necessary—like the erasure of the milkman—for the progress of modernity. Her perspectives seem incompatible with the post-war world, even for Lily Briscoe, who ten years later finds it troublesome to imagine her in the present: “she did not want Mrs. Ramsay now” (160). Lily thinks this not begrudgingly, but to protect the firmly ensconced memory of a woman whom she respects, and whose death she will never fully resolve. Similarly, although the house is restored, and reoccupied by Mr. Ramsay and his guests, it is not the same house but the result of “some dusty laborious birth” (114), itself possible only when the end of war has affirmed a new era: “indeed peace had come” (116). In this sense, the rusty laborious birth mirrors the “birth of a new religion” that Septimus Warren Smith distills from the visual and aural cacophony of a spring morning in London in Mrs. Dalloway (19). In the former case, while Mrs. McNab succeeds in reclaiming a personal domesticity from the passage of time, simultaneous images of birth and rust remind us of Mrs. Ramsay’s contaminated milk, and her failure in the same pursuit.

In the latter, while the word “birth” still provokes the thought of milk, it is now necessarily commoditized, as the religion itself is one of modern industry. In both cases the imagery of birth is corrupted, indicating for Woolf a caution against reeding too deeply into a nostalgic past, and simultaneously, a suspicion of the present and the future it implies.

Mrs. Dalloway, although written before To the Lighthouse, is its thematic and cultural successor. The same war that has decimated the Ramsay family is now relegated to the background. Its aftermath is undeniable, but rather than dwell upon its implications, British society has coped materialistically. The narrative voice, closely tied to Clarissa Dalloway for the first section of the novel, confidently declares “the War was over” and even seems to deride those for whom its effects linger too greatly, “someone like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed” (Mrs. Dalloway; MD 4). Social issues that were regarded as crucial before the war, such as would occupy a Mrs. Ramsay, like the milk problem, have become mere trifles and been swept away by progress. Peter Walsh notices the same cultural shift: “Those five years—1918 to 1923—had been, he suspected, somehow very important. People looked different. Newspapers seemed different” (61). The important change signaling the difference in appearance of the London populace is exemplified not just by the use of “a stick of rouge, or a powder-puff” in public as the narrative next mentions (61), but also by those such as Elizabeth who, as with other girls her age, no longer wore white dresses, but chose instead colorful “straight frocks, perfectly tight, with skirts well above the ankles” available in abundance at any local department store (143). So too, newspapers are changed in content, engaging in bawdy talk of water-closets (61) and enlarged by the advertisements necessary to alert the public of the ever-growing selection of products now available to them. Taken together then, the difference Peter notices in the city’s milieu is the casual availability of “all the commodities of the world…perishable and permanent”: “accomplishments set and baby linen…hams, drugs, flowers, stationery” (113). Society had learned to rely, more than ever, on material objects: Miss Kilman’s compensatory éclair (110), easily and readily acquired from its alluring perch behind glass, is but one of many such commodities offering solace from the “shocks of suffering” associated with the aftermath of global conflict (113).

Woolf’s critique of consumerism is evident not only in the narrative’s sympathetic view of Miss Kilman, but also in its presentation of commercial spectacle, particularly in the airplane that writes letters in the sky above London. The skywriting scene emphasizes the varied perceptions of the onlookers, where the letters, which “curled and wreathed upon the sky” (17) trouse “in the watchers…thoughts, pleasures, and anxieties both glancing and profound” (Beer 160). In Gillian Beer’s view, of singular importance in this moment is the uniting act of interpretation: the airplane “becomes an image of equalization as opposed to hierarchy, of freedom and play” (161). Importantly, Beer
concludes, if the communal act of looking up and interpreting is what matters, then the literal message left by the plane is merely trivial. But since the narrative offers no definitive answer to the question of the plane’s literal message, we are asked to access this content through the onlooker’s perceptions, and thus those perceptions (and not just the act of perceiving) cannot be merely trivial.

What the onlookers see, in fact, reveals far more instrumental a meaning than many critics have so far acknowledged. At this moment, even if we allow ourselves to disregard Septimus’s paranoid suspicion of the modern world, we cannot ignore the biological and spiritual imperatives such change stresses, palpable here as a single word written in the sky. Mr. Bowley sees “toffee,” but such a word is too generic to justify the efforts of a skywriter. Mrs. Bletchley arranges “Kreemo” from the letters, perhaps because they are phonetically reminiscent of the word cream. Even supposing Kreemo is the name of a brand, however, this seems too obscure for the novelty of such a spectacle. Only Mrs. Coates derives the most probable—and effectual—lettering. She pronounces the word “in a strained, awe-stricken voice” as she gazes “straight up” at the letters: “Glaxo” (MD 17). The terms of her experience, both belabored and expressive, offer reminders of a religious encounter. But Mrs. Coates lacks Septimus’s analogous piety. Looking at the heavens, she sees industry, not God. Glaxo, a dried milk product, is the same well-known compound Mrs. Ramsay implicitly rejects a decade earlier as a solution to her milk problem. By the early 1920s the company had redoubled its advertising efforts with an evocative range of campaigns. In one advertisement, preying on the ingrained civic responsibility to ration in wartime, the company recommends storing the product against shortage: “With Glaxo in your store cupboard you need never worry about any interruption in the ordinary milk supply” (The Observer 1920). In another, an unnamed doctor is quoted recommending the product “in any case where a body building property is required, not for babies alone” (The Observer 1921). Given such benefits, and given the company’s considerable involvement in the war effort, the 1920s saw Glaxo earn its place as a household name (Davenport-Hines and Slinn 42). For Mrs. Coates, the mother of an infant, living in post-war London, the name of such a brand would have held a holistic significance equally important to Mrs. Ramsay’s concern for a local dairy.

Reflective, as well, of the colonial theme in Mrs. Dalloway, Glaxo had also made efforts overseas, especially in British India. There, in marketing Glaxo milk-food as an infant formula, advertisements proclaimed “Glaxo babies are the happiest and healthiest in the world” (Times of India). And so, just as the sound of the airplane “bore[s] ominously into the ears of the crowd,” the word Glaxo bores into the eyes and minds of citizens throughout the British Empire and Commonwealth as they bear testimony to the strength of its brand (MD 17). It is perhaps no surprise then, that Mrs. Coates’s baby “lying still and white in her arms,” likewise “gaze[s] straight up” in apparent bliss toward the word in the sky (17). The baby’s exposure to the product, to its name, to the incessant noise of its advertising engine, and all those like it, will only proliferate throughout his life. But unlike those who register concern, such as Mrs. Ramsay, Septimus, Julia Stephen, or indeed Woolf herself, the baby will see in it only progress. He will never need worry. This new religion of commerce will place him among the happiest and healthiest in the world.

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**Modern Machines:**  
**Intersecting Public and Private Spheres in *Mrs. Dalloway***

*Mrs. Dalloway*, one of Virginia Woolf’s most critical contributions to war literature, offers a fictionalized expression of modernity in the aftermath of the machine-driven First World War. Apart from the characterization of shell-shocked war veteran Septimus Warren Smith, Woolf’s portrayal of modern technologies within the novel reveals striking considerations of the unstable intersections of individuals and society in postwar life. Critics have primarily focused on the motorcar and the airplane, whether these images are read as motifs of latent struggle and alienation from a postwar perspective (see Beer; Dowling; Hagen) or as everyday objects that bring about brief moments of collective experience and unconscious connection (see Lee; Olson; Wang). However, modern machines permeate the novel, revealing further tension between social perceptions and private reflections. From omnibuses to telephones, technology’s placement in both public and domestic spaces signals the split subjectivity of characters such as Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith. While Woolf associates machines in the city of London with spectacle and social status that both connect and divide members of the crowd, machines in private settings prompt subjective contemplation and internal rather than externalized perceptions of the self. Indeed, the rare occurrences of private reflection that arise from individuals’ interactions with modern machines in public spaces suggest the potential of mechanical objects to temporarily bridge the gap between public and private spheres, thus allowing characters to dismantle social constructions and recognize the contingency of modern subjectivity.
In this light, Woolf’s modernist aesthetic and emphasis on the inner lives of her characters do not exclude considerations of material objects. Frequently the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* describe or comment upon the presence and actions of everyday machines in both the larger space of London and familiar spaces within the home. Woolf’s depictions of technology differ however according to these settings. Images of machines in the public sphere—airplanes, motor-cars, lifts—are rarely depicted in concrete terms or through the perspectives of the individuals directly in contact with the mechanisms themselves. Instead, Woolf foregrounds the crowd’s view of the mechanical object as spectacle, emphasizing its communal or social function. The instances of everyday technologies within private space are few, but, significantly, while Woolf situates these objects—typewriter, telephones, gramophone—in the peripheries of the characters’ experiences, with equally little physical description, domestic technologies become visceral means that engender meditations on life and being, whether directly from the sight or sound of the object or indirectly through the messages transmitted. In both instances, the public or the domestic sphere, Woolf constructs technology and machines as intermediary objects that offer characters the ability to transgress the immediacy of their social structures and spaces and to connect external, tangible experiences with internal, subjective thought.

The lack of physical description in relation to social and domestic objects is striking, despite the intense attention they receive and effects they trigger. For instance, both the motor-car and the airplane are heard before they are seen: the “violent explosion” from the street that Clarissa thinks of as “a pistol shot” alerts the crowd to the presence and importance of the car (55), just as the noise that “bored ominously into the ears of the crowd” causes “[e]very one” to look up at the airplane (60). Following these indirect introductions, Woolf provides minimal descriptions of the actual machines. The automobile’s “dove-grey upholstery” is quickly covered by an unknown hand, which pulls down a blind and shields the interior of the car with “a square of grey” (55). Likewise, Woolf provides no indication of the airplane’s size, color, or style; it is only made discernible through its relation to sound and to white, indiscernible, smoky words that are “rubbed out up in the sky” (61). Despite their high visibility, the objects’ depictions deny the reader any sense of their corporeality, as machines appear primarily through the characters’ relative views of the spectators in question and are left enigmatic, seen by the collective but reduced to scattered perceptions: “nothing but a bright spark; an inspiration; a concentration; a symbol” (67).

Directly following the motor-car and airplane scenes, Clarissa returns home, and it is the sound of a machine in that domestic space which sparks an internal reflection of her perceived self, overcoming the previous images of external spectacle by re-inscribing her physical presence released by the private space:

*She heard the click of the typewriter. It was her life, and, bending her head over the hall table, she bowed beneath the influence, felt blessed and purified, saying to herself, as she took the pad with the telephone message on it, how moments like this are buds on the tree of life, flowers of darkness they are, she thought (as if some lovely rose had blossomed for her eyes only)].] (68; emphasis mine)*

The typewriter elicits an immediate response from Clarissa, which unfolds an almost spiritual connection to her familiar surroundings and outlines a space in which she is able to open herself—her own sense of self and its relation to the outer universe—like a flower that methodically blooms. As in Woolf’s descriptions of machines in the public sphere, the sound of the typewriter is noted rather than the object’s physical appearance. And, as in the city-set scenes, no information is provided regarding who is directly interacting with the machine: who is using the typewriter; who is in the car; who is flying the airplane? While readers can infer these answers, they are of less significance than the role the machines play in relation to the characters’ experience of perception. In Clarissa’s interaction with the car, which she believes holds the Queen, she adopts an “air of extreme dignity” and reflects that the Queen is *also* hosting a party that evening (57). However, Clarissa’s interactions with the clicking of the typewriter and, subsequently, with the message written on the pad beside the telephone create moments of contemplation on her own life within the private sphere, a contrast to the reassertion of her social status triggered by the image of “the state” that is the car.

Septimus’s description and consideration of a gramophone in the privacy of his home extends the implications of the indeterminacy of modern technologies as they appear in *Mrs. Dalloway* and the subjective experiences that they prompt. “He began, very cautiously, to open his eyes, to see whether a gramophone was really there. But real things—real things were too exciting. He must be cautious. He would not go mad. First he looked at the fashion papers on the lower shelf, then, gradually at the gramophone with the green trumpet. Nothing could be more exact” (159). Though the description of the gramophone is sparse—it is simply a green trumpet—Septimus’s great effort to give the object form is an attempt to make it real for his own fragile sense of subjectivity. This moment, not unlike Clarissa’s momentary engagement with the sound of the typewriter, engenders a careful contemplation of Septimus’ physical presence within the domestic space in relation to his perceived assessment of his (ir)rational self. Woolf creates in both private moments a contrast to the earlier spectacles of public reaction, where their perceptions of everyday technologies allow Clarissa and Septimus to ruminate upon their relation to the physical world through the tension between external, physical being and internal, subjective response that unsettles structures of identity. However, these instances merely mark the potential of modern objects in the private sphere to incite inner reflections.

The dominant note for so many of the novel’s characters is a lacked connection between the individual and the social implications of the machine. The mass-produced vehicles that populate the novel designate the hierarchies implicit in London’s public spaces. Thus, Clarissa “stiffened a little on the kerb waiting for Durtnall’s van to pass” (45); and Sir Bradshaw’s grey luxury car illustrates his current state of buying flowers; Bradshaw’s luxury vehicle illustrates his high status as a “proportional” doctor; and Peter’s body “must contract” (45); and Sir Bradshaw’s grey luxury car prompts thoughts about his methodically blooming for her eyes only) (55). During this pause, Clarissa reflects upon her marriage to Richard—the youth and, in particular, reflects upon her past relationship with Peter and his comment that she would one day be “the perfect hostess” (49). During this pause, Clarissa reflects upon her marriage to Richard—the sense of “independence” she enjoys, the security of their position in society, the rewards of a more conventional union—while ruminating on Peter’s many failures. However, in the next moment, she “looks at the omnibuses in Piccadilly” and complicates her previous embrace of a normative role, insisting that she would not categorize; she “would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that” (50).

As the traffic of the city overwhelms Clarissa, and echoes the earlier hum of London that reaffirms her love for the chaotic rhythms and pulse...
of life, she is able to dismantle the social constructions that she has used to establish the stability and security of her external character. The rush of modern traffic reminds her of a “perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; […] yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that” (50). The omnibuses and taxis compose an intersectional space for Clarissa that enables her to layer the demands of her social role with an asocial desire merely to survive as part of “the ebb and flow of things” (50).

When Peter Walsh looks at himself in the window of a car manufacturer, he experiences the same split in subjectivity that Clarissa does and also uses a machine-prompted moment to complicate the social norms that would categorize him as a failure. Having left Clarissa’s home, frustrated by her life as a society wife and by perceptions of his own failure, Peter stops in front of a car manufacturer’s shop and sees a vision of his self reflected on the image of the cars:

And there he was, this fortunate man, himself, reflected in the plate-glass window of a motor-car manufacturer in Victoria Street. […] He, Peter Walsh; who was now really for the first time in his life, in love. Clarissa had grown hard, he thought; and a trifle sentimental into the bargain, he suspected, looking at the great motor-cars capable of doing—how many miles on how many gallons? (83)

Makiko Minow-Pinkney argues that Peter’s gaze at himself and the cars is an attempt to establish his sense of gendered authority, “as if such interest and knowledge somehow reassure him of his masculine, able, and progressive self-identity, which he is in great need to assert to Clarissa, who he has just seen” (161). But this scene also reveals a moment in which the modernity of the motor-car allows Peter to deconstruct the social constrictions and failures that his public status connotes in London society and, more specifically, to Clarissa. Looking in the glass, Peter views himself in much the same way that he sees Clarissa at the novel’s end; the passage even foreshadows the final sentence of Mrs. Dalloway: “for there she was” (200). Both iterations of “there she was” situate the characters as the selves associated with the private realm rather than the public performance of identity. This awareness of the layered self, made possible by the public display of cars in the manufacturer’s window, dismantles Peter’s image as a social failure. He is able, momentarily, to distinguish his own perspective from “the Dalloways’ sense” of his status (79).

Elizabeth Dalloway’s adventurous bus ride through London sparks a similar deconstruction of societal constraints. In this scene, Elizabeth explicitly expresses her desire to be free from the expectations placed upon her by gender and economic position. As Leslie Olson points out, Elizabeth’s desire to transgress, as enabled by fast-moving, modern machines in the public sphere, mirrors Clarissa’s: “Elizabeth inherits this attraction to the everyday flow of events: the ‘procession’ of people, as she calls it sitting atop an omnibus, constitutes the stuff of life” (54). When she mounts the omnibus and takes “a seat on top,” she feels that she is “riding” down Whitehall Street as if she were the “figure-head” to a pirate ship, and breaks free from being a young lady in society through such imagery and through her articulation of alternative desires: “she would like to have a profession. She would become a doctor, a farmer, possibly go into Parliament” (155). Just as Elizabeth mirrors Clarissa’s enjoyment of the fluidity of London, so too the passage echoes the earlier scene of Clarissa’s bus ride with Peter, as he remembers a moment from their youth: “But she said, sitting on the bus going up Shaftesbury Avenue, she felt herself everywhere; not here, here, here; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere. She was all that” (167).

While both women authenticate in these scenes a reluctance to conform to static, constructed identities, Elizabeth’s transgression of gender and social boundaries is temporary. Despite her desire to be free, her social obligations return, “the omnibuses suddenly lost their glow,” and she boards the Westminster bus in order to attend her mother’s party (157).
Virginia Woolf’s (Absent) Radio

Considering that Virginia Woolf was an astute observer of (and participant in) her contemporary media context, it is perplexing that the radio—an influential force in the modern cultural imagination—is all but unrepresented in her fiction. Critics such as Melba Cuddy-Keane and Pamela L. Caughie have suggested that we can locate the radio in the formal experimentation of her narratives. I agree that the listening techniques engendered by radio had a profound impact on Woolf’s style (Caughie) and on her reformulation of subjective experience within the modern mediated soundscape (Cuddy-Keane). In order to fully understand how this emerging form of mediation is encountered in Woolf’s texts, however, we must also view wireless transmission in terms of its effects on her conceptualization of presence and absence. Because it provides a figurative referent for new notions about how alien signals move stealthily through space, Woolf’s “absent” radio serves to destabilize the distinction between materiality and immateriality even in novels where the device never appears. Woolf’s work, in other words, is intimately concerned with an imaginative possibility suggested by radio: the possibility of channeling an unseen world and the risk of dissolving into it.

By the time that wireless technology had spread enough to have multiple operational transmitters and receivers (i.e., when it had become a medium rather than just a technology), it had already radically altered notions of presence and absence. The divide between public and private was shaken as distant voices from beyond were captured by the receiver and made intimately proximate in one’s home. In his 1936 book on radio’s expressive capabilities, German media critic Rudolf Arnheim repeatedly returns to the medium’s “unearthly character” (137), arguing that radio allows one to “listen to events that sound as earthly as if you had them in your own room, and yet as impossible and far as if they had never been” (20). The undeniably material radio set and undeniably present sounds it emits, in other words, can never completely do away with the paradox of the transmitted voice’s alien (and seemingly immaterial) origin. Steven Connor notes that these dichotomies marked a radical conceptual shift between the materiality of media like the telephone and microphone, and their successor, the “electromagnetic fluctuation” of wireless (208). Woolf’s fiction picks up the themes of this shift and the questions about mediation that it engenders. When she writes, for instance, that Miss La Trobe is “one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a re-created world” (Between the Acts [BTA] 153), she invokes the poles of materiality and immateriality via the artist’s ability to mediate between amorphous ideas and concrete experiences. The terms used here to articulate the artist’s aesthetic intervention gesture towards wireless transmission and its expressive capabilities, and yet there is no radio set in this scene. Even in its absence, however, the “unearthly” radio lingers in the thematic background of the text as an insistent reminder of its ability to re-create the world by capturing “impossible” sound.

Thus one early cultural formulation of radio sees it as accomplishing an impossible presence precisely because the mechanism itself is temporarily forgotten in pursuit of the illusion of a “vanishing mediator” (Sterne 218). Just as the device is thought to fade into the background of a rapt listener’s awareness (so long as the broadcast encounters minimal interference), so too do wireless receivers disappear from Woolf’s fiction, enabling her to close gaps of space and time. The radio does make a fleeting appearance in Woolf’s fiction in Orlando (1928) when the titular character stands in awe of a rapidly blooming modernity, reflecting on how she “listen[s] to voices in America” as if by “magic” (300). What is important to draw from this instance is not just that the radio is—along with the lift and aviation—a marker of modernity, but also that this marker is immediately tangled up with a distinctly modern form of mediated absence. The actual apparatus is, once again, not mentioned in this passage, as if Orlando hears, somehow, an unmediated apparition of voices from across the ocean. Orlando’s experience favors the voices’ presence, erasing the distancing effect of the receiver: a device that stands between speaker and listener. Radio makes an appearance in Orlando only to emphasize its ability to not be there fully, creating a mystical dislocation of cause and effect, of transmission and reception. Thus, the radio’s significance can be found not only in its formative role in Woolf’s aesthetic experimentation, but also in its ability to represent how modern technologies of wireless transmission allow for a reconceptualization of absence as a different form of presence.

Take, for instance, Between the Acts (1941), arguably one of Woolf’s noisetest books where sounds from various sources—the pageant’s cast, the “chuffing” and sputtering gramophone, the ambient sounds of the outdoor soundscape etc.—are constantly weaving together and fading. Sound is imagined along a spectrum of materiality that ranges from the words that pepper the audience like a “shower of hard little stones” (BTA 78) to the obliterated wisps of the chorus’s lines (BTA 78). For Miss La Trobe—who, as a curator of experience, pays careful attention to the way sound travels—the immaterial side of the spectrum is at once disturbing and invigorating. She does not want her pageant’s words to disappear into the soundscape, but voices, paradoxically, become sites of connection precisely when they are dematerialized. Visually separated from the audience during a break, she hears their free-floating words: “Over the tops of the bushes came stray voices, voices without bodies, symbolical voices they seemed to her, half hearing, seeing nothing, but still, over the bushes, feeling invisible threads connecting the bodiless voices” (BTA 151). Here the voice is detached from the materiality of the body and seems, to her, to be symbolic rather than substantial, denoting a kind of absence (insofar as the symbol reaches beyond itself). And yet, drifting, half-heard voices are simultaneously the site of a new connection whose link is present audibly, but visually absent—a dynamic that Michel Chion calls “acousmatic” sound (32). Arnheim stresses throughout his study that, because of the “blindness of wireless” (159), radio too must establish connections through sound alone. The connections of its network (which are akin to the “threads” of Miss La Trobe’s soundscape) are traced across indeterminate distances and contain a shifting multitude of signals. Tuning in at random, a listener, like the “absorbent” Miss La Trobe (BTA 152), must capture those signals into a new form of presence, distilled from a seemingly unorganized background of broadcasted voices. Cuddy-Keane, on one hand, describes this process as diffusion and auscultation—the widespread projection of sound and its subsequent re—“focalization” into

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2 See also Jeffrey Sconce’s Haunted Media, where he demonstrates extensively how the early association of radio and the occult (with regards to the conception of absence) is a trope that grows out of its constant channeling of presences in the electromagnetic spectrum.
a listener (70-71). Jean-Luc Nancy, on the other, speaks of an amorphous ground of phenomena being rendered as a distinct experience—that which can be delineated as an integral unit and, thus, focused upon (2-6). Both sets of terms can be useful here, but what needs to be stressed is how this cohering process simultaneously figures sound as both material (hard stones) and immaterial (disembodied voices). Wireless transmission, with its ability to mediate between those poles, is a conceptual tool that allows Woolf to “tune” the ears in her text to potentially unapprehended sound.

This particular form of reception emphasizes the need for a material mediator that can channel and sort what the auditor alone cannot hear. For the wireless medium, for instance, transfer from ether to apprehension occurs through the radio set. The receiver is a material incursion into the electromagnetic spectrum, a point at which distinct signals are channeled from the airwaves. The medium, in other words, asks us to imagine our world as being saturated with immaterial signals that await the organizing force of a material conduit. This kind of interposition is enacted on multiple occasions in Woolf’s writing and serves as a way for characters to re-imagine the parameters of their being-present in the world. *The Waves* (1931), for instance, depicts characters listening through material mediation, such as glass windows and dividers, to solidify a sense of place in an otherwise cacophonous world (51). This mediation has been noted by Cuddy-Keane, who, in writing about the semblance of the novel’s choric sounds to radiophonic art, points out that the voices are “a middle ground between our sharpened-edged constructions of individual selves […] and an unconscious dissolution into mystical oneness” (90). The sounds of *The Waves* are indeed caught up in this radiophonic middle ground, but we can also see individual characters dipping their toes into a semi-determinate, “radiophonic” environment.

The most striking image in this regard is when Louis imagines himself as a plant extending its roots into the “depths of the world” where “All tremors shake [him], and the weight of the earth is pressed to [his] ribs.” Tightly packed in all-encompassing and resonant earth, he hears “tramplings, tremblings, stirrings round [him],” distant sounds picked up from distant lands and rendered proximate at his nodal point (*The Waves* [W] 6). Jinny, likewise, speaks of “widened” senses and the “Membranes” and “webs of nerve” that “have filled and spread themselves and float round us like filaments, making the air tangible and catching in them far-away sounds unheard before” (W 98). For her, what is needed to capture the previously unheard is a specific kind of material mediation: threads (like Miss La Trobe’s) or a membrane, which is both solid and permeable at the same time, tangibly present and yet as seemingly absent. In both of these cases, as in many others in the novel, the air surrounding the characters can no longer be thought of as immaterial (which it never truly was) since it has transformed into a soundscape suffused with signals and waves coming from distant origins. Absence is inverted into too-much-presence. Louis and Jinny become, in a sense, radio receivers—conduits for the voices and sounds that circulate in the world, reducing them to order (W 68). Woolf, in other words, is using the radio’s ambiguous presence and absence to show how one can access the ephemeral through concrete mediation.

In a moment of channeling comparable to Louis’s and Jinny’s, Lucy Swithin, near the end of *Between the Acts*, stands “between two fluidities”—the air and water—caressing her cross and seeing the shapes of continents in leaves floating on the pond (204). While this instance does not invoke aural perception as in *The Waves*, we once again see a character extending her imagination beyond the immediately present, striving towards a global consciousness that obliterates distances. I would contend that Woolf is here appealing to the same set of radiophonic dichotomies discussed above. The fluidities of air and water,

which carry signals around and to the perceiver, are ambiguously both material and immaterial and contrast against Lucy’s material presence. With the reassuring solidity of her cross, she stands distinct from the chaos of what is akin to the electromagnetic field: an amorphous world into which the perceiver must dive so as to discern signal from noise.

The preceding examples gesture towards a larger concern in Woolf’s fiction with how mediation complicates an individual character’s communion with the world. The perceiver/receiver stands in contrast to their surroundings and grounds him- or herself in a seemingly resolute material presence. That certainty, however, also stands on the brink of being subsumed into immateriality and thus succumbing to the kind of individual and social dissolution and dispersion that shakes the pageant-goers at the end of *Between the Acts* (195-201). Similarly, wireless transmission is diffusion taken to an extreme: it makes one aware of signals that are absent to the ear, but ready to be present-at-hand with the intervention of a material apparatus to auscultate them (Beer 155). With the advent of that awareness and the ability to parse voices from “thin air,” the guarantor of presence is, for Woolf, shaken to the core. Her fiction depicts the difficulties of feeling out possible connections and the subsequent recognition of what it is like to be a single nodal point within a shifting network. “Radio was present even where it was absent, which is, of course, the paradox at the very heart of the medium” (Cohen, Coyle, and Lewty 3)—a paradox that is illustrated when the radio remains diegetically absent but continues to “transmit” through the text of a novel. Put differently, the radio apparatus may be an absent object in Woolf’s fiction, but the medium—the points of connection that await contact and the voices that circulate between them—is figuratively present in all its imaginative power.

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Steven Connor argues for sound’s importance to modernism by asserting that the modern self is a membrane permeable to the resonances of a bustling external world (207).
The Techno-Onomatopoeia of Woolf’s Machines

Scholars such as Melba Cuddy-Keane, Bonnie Kime Scott, and Angela Frattarola have noted Virginia Woolf’s growing fascination with sound over the course of her career, and its distinct role in her last novel, *Between the Acts*. Frattarola has been especially insistent on these points in her discussion of what she terms Woolf’s “found sound” sampling: the presentation rather than representation of real world sounds. To demonstrate the difference in the rendering of sound between Woolf’s last novel and her earlier works, Frattarola turns to the famous example of Big Ben in *Mrs. Dalloway*: “There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air” (4). Here, she notes, the novel “only describes the sound conceptually rather than represent[ing] the sound itself through a ‘found sound’ sample like the ‘ding, dong’ heard in *Between the Acts*” (138). But there is another way to describe “ding, dong,” “tick,” “chuff,” and other found sound samples. Approaching these words as words—as onomatopoeia, or, more specifically, techno-onomatopoeia—helps to draw out the novel’s specific critique of machines and the dilemmas that they pose. In part through the work of techno-onomatopoeia, *Between the Acts* suggests that machines provide an unwelcome reminder of clock time, a construct that can temporarily hold a collection of individuals together as a community, but ultimately calls the very existence of individuals into question.

Onomatopoeic words constitute an unusual category of language and one that would seem at odds with the Saussurean emphasis on the arbitrariness of the sign: “they are not symbolic in the way ordinary words are, for their semiotic approach to representation is a highly motivated attempt at direct identity, rather than an arbitrary or relatively motivated form of indirect analogy” (Brogan and Cocola). Onomatopoeia thus represents an idealized form of language; however, while linguists have identified some broad patterns in onomatopoeia across language groups, it is crucial to remember that such words merely represent an “attempt at direct identity.” Like ordinary language, onomatopoeic words are part of larger language systems and are shaped, initially and over time, by associations with other words.

Words that imitate the sounds of machines, what could be termed “techno-onomatopoeia,” constitute an important and in some ways distinct subcategory of onomatopoeia. Unlike words that aim to capture the sounds of nature, these words tend to be of more recent invention, and, as such, their relationship to the broader cultural currents out of which they have emerged is often more readily discernable. As they approach and depart from other words, onomatopoeic and otherwise, techno-onomatopoeic words offer insight into the ways in which individuals, communities, and cultures view machines. Tracking such words can be especially revealing during periods when the public takes a strong interest in the hopes and fears associated with technology, as was certainly the case in wartime Britain.

Given the role of technology in the war, it is perhaps not surprising that Woolf’s final novel is, in the words of Bonnie Kime Scott, more “beset with machines” than any of her other works (104). Yet one machine has tended to dominate discussions of technology in the novel: the gramophone. This is not only because of its key role in the pageant, but also because it represents the central example of audio technology in a text that is supersaturated with sound. In addition to two words that Woolf had long used to describe the sound of a gramophone, “blare” and “bray,” Melba Cuddy-Keane has noted the “astonishing variety of other active verbs […] also associated with its tones: ‘it chuff[ed],’ ‘wailed,’ ‘gently stated certain facts,’ ‘trilled and tinkled,’ ‘warbled,’ ‘asserted,’ ‘repeated,’ ‘informed them,’ ‘triumphed,’ ‘lamented,’ ‘gurgled,’ and finally ‘ceased’” (75). Moreover, as this list discloses, there is an undeniable doubleness to the gramophone; it has the potential to coerce and control—at times drawing close to another audio technology in the novel, the megaphone—while at other moments seeming to represent a subversive potential. Resolving the contradictions of the gramophone has been central to readings of the politics of the novel.

However, there is a crucial aspect of the gramophone that has gone largely unnoticed, in part because of the lack of attention to the specific role of techno-onomatopoeia. In *Between the Acts*, there is a difference between the gramophone and the machine, despite the fact that in the novel the word “machine” is used exclusively in reference to the gramophone. The gramophone “affirms,” “asserts,” and “informs”; “We dispersed we are,” the gramophone informed them. And dismissed “music that is comprehensible and known to its audience” (84, 86). It only falters at the end of the pageant, or, in a sense, after the pageant has ended: “The gramophone gurgled Unity—Disparsity. It gurgled Un...dis...And ceased” (136). In contrast, the “machine” issues a “tick, tick, tick” or a “chuff, chuff, chuff.” While the gramophone frequently comforts the audience with its affirmations, “the tick of the machine was maddening” (120). The gramophone is familiar, if at times authoritarian, while the machine is more mysterious. Yet it, too, represents a threat. If the machine is less overtly manipulative, its more indirect messages can lead to alienation.

With this splitting of the gramophone and the machine, Woolf’s novel registers not only the ominous potential of new audio technologies, but also the dangers posed by an increasingly mechanized existence. Significantly, it is the gramophone-as-machine rather than the gramophone-as-gramophone that periodically brings the pageant—and its audience—to crisis. One such crisis occurs as the pageant shifts from the Victorian era to the time occupied by its audience:

All their nerves were on edge. They sat exposed. The machine ticked. There was no music. The horns of cars on the high road were heard. And the swish of trees. They were neither one thing nor the other; neither Victorians nor themselves. They were suspended, without being, in limbo. Tick, tick, tick went the machine. (BTA 121)

Here it is easy to forget that the machine in question is a gramophone. With its musical function temporarily suspended, the audience can discern the sound of the machine as a machine. Note, too, that with the “tick, tick, tick,” the text renders the sound of a machine as the sound of a clock. The onomatopoeic “tick” has long been associated with machines, and more specifically with clocks and watches. The *OED* dates the first usage of “tick,” in the sense of “a quick light dry sound, distinct but not loud, as that caused by the sudden impact of a small hard body upon a hard surface,” to 1680 and offers a quotation that specifically references the mysterious sound made by a watch: “He [Thomas Allen] happened to leave his watch in the chamber window[.] [...] The maydes [...] hearing a thing in a case cry Tick, Tick, Tick, presently concluded that that was his Devil” (“Tick”). There is, though, an important difference between the ticking in *Between the Acts* and that of the 1680 account. While the ticking of the machine in the *Between the Acts* the Thomas Allen anecdote prompts the “maydes” to question the nature of its existence, the ticking of the machine in Woolf’s novel prompts an existential crisis on the part of the audience. Reminded of mechanical clock time, they are at once “exposed” and “suspended without being, in limbo.”

The association between “tick” and clocks and watches is quite strong in Woolf’s fiction; indeed, in her novels prior to *Between the Acts*, it is used exclusively with timekeeping devices. In *Between the Acts*, “tick” appears three times in connection with a clock (24, 144, 147); more often, “tick” describes the sound of the gramophone as machine.
Nevertheless, even when “tick” would seem to describe the sound of the gramophone as machine—as in the passage quoted above—it also draws upon its long association with the sound of a clock. A passage from early in the pageant helps to establish its dual resonance:

Tick, tick, tick the machine continued.

“Marking time,” said old Oliver beneath his breath.

“Which don’t exist for us,” Lucy murmured. “We’ve only the present.” (57)

Here the role of the machine in “marking time” heightens the sense that time itself is a construct, yet even if it “don’t exist for us,” Lucy’s final comment underscores the importance of the consciousness of the limits of human existence in relation to this abstraction. In Woolf’s novel, this is a profoundly felt dilemma. Time is both a construct and less ephemeral than lived experience, a paradox that places nerves on edge. Note, too, that this experience is not restricted to just one character. While the ticking of the machine leads directly to old Oliver’s remark, Lucy’s words merely appear to be a response to those of old Oliver. Like much of the dialogue in Between the Acts, the inaudible or barely audible words of the characters represent individual utterances inspired by similar, yet distinct responses to the pageant, or, in this case, the machine. The continuity between the two responses to the ticking attests to the broad recognition of its dual character.

Taken together, the Thomas Allen anecdote cited in the OED and the emphasis in Between the Acts on machines as time-keeping devices help to explain one of the more mysterious passages in the novel. As the members of the audience collect their cars and prepare to depart, the text dissolves into the “orts, scraps, and fragments” out of which Woolf’s novel has emerged. Between references to automobiles, the following sound collage appears: “Are machines the devil, or do they introduce a discord…Ding dong, ding…by means of which we reach the final…Ding dong…” (BTA 136). More than two and a half centuries after Thomas Allen’s watch, the machine, with its mysterious inner workings and the inaudible or barely audible words of the characters represent individual utterances inspired by similar, yet distinct responses to the pageant, or, in this case, the machine. The continuity between the two responses to the ticking attests to the broad recognition of its dual character.

A second example of techno-onomatopoeia strengthens the association of machines with the marking of clock time and existential crisis. In contrast to “tick,” “chuff” is a word of much more recent invention; “chuff”—of an engine or machine: to work with a regularly repeated sharp puffing sound”—the OED cites a sentence from D. H. Lawrence’s The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd (1914) as its first appearance in print (“Chuff”). Between the Acts is the only one of Woolf’s novels in which “chuff” appears. Perhaps in part because of its newness, “chuff, chuff, chuff”—it appears only in sets of three in the novel—remains attached not just to machines, as in the case of “tick,” but to the gramophone as machine specifically. Yet, from the outset, the text marks it as pertaining to machines in general rather than gramophones in particular and distances it from the individual functions that distinguish one machine from another. At its first mention, the narration specifically describes “chuff, chuff, chuff” as “the noise a machine makes when something has gone wrong” (53).

Given its highly restricted usage and its exclusive appearance in sets of three, which emphasizes its sound over its sense, “chuff” would seem to represent an even more straightforward example of onomatopoeia than “tick.” Indeed, “chuff” comes close to achieving the ideal authentic simplicity of natural language called for at the conclusion of the pageant—“let’s talk in words of one syllable, without larding, stuffing or cant” (127; original emphasis)—and privately praised by Miss La Trobe in the public house as “words of one syllable sank down in the mud,” “words without meaning—wonderful words” (144). Yet, “chuff” is less pure and independent, less non-arbitrary, than it seems. Two similar passages that appear in close proximity to one another bear this out. The first features “chuff”: “chuff, chuff, chuff went the machine. Time was passing. How long would time hold them together?” (103). The second, quite similar passage substitutes “tick” for “chuff”: “tick, tick, tick, the machine continued. Time was passing. The audience was wandering, dispersing. Only the tick, tick of the gramophone held them together” (105). As these passages demonstrate, the associations attached to the older word have begun to affix themselves to the newer one. Though “chuff,” unlike “tick,” does not immediately call to mind the sound of a clock, it too has become associated with the marking of time. This pair of passages also adds to the novel’s diagnosis of the dilemmas posed by machines: if the tick or chuff of machine-voiced clock time places nerves on edge, suspending the members of the audience in limbo, it is also what holds a community together.

Are all machines clocks? That is what the use of techno-onomatopoeia in Between the Acts would seem to suggest. Woolf’s last novel acknowledges the temptation of machine logic—the hope that the tick and chuff of the state-as-machine might enable it to endure—while it also stresses the negative impact of this mechanization on individuals. Moreover, the inability of even these “words of one syllable” to escape the whims of language systems conveys a considerable skepticism about the possibility of standing outside the well-publicized manipulations of language of the 1930s and 40s. Life and language have been forced to submit to machines, but the ultimate responsibility for this rests with the arbitrariness of human sense.

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1 On page 105, “gramophone” seems to function as shorthand for “gramophone needle.” See page 57.
“Dispersed are we”: Voice as Technology in *Between the Acts*

Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts* explores the complex relations between and among community, performance, and technology. What emerges is an idea of community that resists the blandishments of unity or sameness, but rests on the notion, as Jean-Luc Nancy suggests, of a “being-with” (*Being 4*). That is to say, there is no way of thinking about “being” or existence without an other; there is no “I” without a “We.” The performance of the pageant becomes an allegory of the contingency that makes the recognition of a “we” possible, in that its presentation of history is neither a procession of military victories nor a catalogue of the accomplishments of great men, but is an ironized, mediated bricolage of voices—private, cultural, and monarchical. History, then, is not determined by an “I” or a series of singular beings, but by what I shall call a *medium*—a being-with whose social effects are sustained by a relation. Accordingly the success of the performance is not based upon an ideal of togetherness or unified vision—a snare into which Miss La Trobe falls—but is instead predicated upon what Woolf repeatedly calls a “voice,” a mediumistic relation paradoxically founded on dispersal. This notion of community, coupled as it is to technologies of performance, rests in the ambiguity of the phrase “Dispersed are we” (*BTA* 59). For my purposes, I shall focus on the complexities of the gramophone as sound and speech: as a technology that plays back recorded voice and music and the “voice” of the gramophone itself, as object of the psychoanalytic drive. That said, we must acknowledge the distinction between the voice as medium and voice as object. As Melba Cuddy-Keane has pointed out, there are crucial differences between “listening to the gramophone as an intermediary for music and listening to the sounds of the gramophone as the music itself” (75). Woolf’s attentive ear for the sounds of the gramophone, coupled with the machine’s ambiguous role in the pageant’s unfolding, suggest that the voice of the gramophone (as opposed to its content) assumes a place in the community that is as much mediating as it is mediatory, is as much an effect as it is a tool.

But the place of the voice in community is based upon the notion that it *will disperse*, that is, paradoxically, founded upon dispersal. As Nancy contends, community is not a subject, or a homogeneous group of subjects. Ultimately, community resides in its resistance to immanent power; it is not a goal of communal production or a kind of fusion. Nancy insists that society or community is not the imposition of a plan, or the result of planning; indeed, the notion that one can plan or structure community in an absolute sense often produces its opposites—dissension, war, and terror. For Nancy, the “inoperative community” means that community is not the result of a production, be it through social, economic, or even political—which is to say, nationalist—technologies; it is not *une œuvre*, a work. Rather it is the unworking of the rigidities of unity, of isolation in favour of the openness of “being-with” or “being-in-common” (*Inoperative xxxix*). As Jessica Berman has suavely argued, Woolf’s concept of community anticipates Jean-Luc Nancy’s insofar as Woolf’s term “affiliation” is meant to function as a cautionary antidote to the suffocating hegemony of state or nation (122-23). Woolf’s final novel is famously a critique of the kind of community produced and imposed by fascism; it performs her frustration with being in a space between the wars, in which, as she put it in her diary, “One merely feels that the killing-machine has to be set into action” again (D5 235). *Between the Acts* can thus been seen to extend socially her project of replacing the authorial “I” with the pronoun “We.”

In rhetorical terms, one could say that Woolf is pitting two technologies against each other—setting the gramophone against “the killing machine” of war. The former is invoked to sustain a kind of openness that the latter viciously works to close down. What I would suggest is that this novel attempts to perform a kind of technological interruption of fascistic, nationalistic community through the voice as object. In other words, the voice of technology is not to be pitted against the human voice, nor is it to be understood merely as speech. The voice, and the gramophone makes this apparent, is not language, not symbolic, but is an effect of the real. If, as Jacques Lacan suggests, “the world of the symbolic is the world of the machine,” how does the real make itself known? In the gaps or differences for which the machine cannot account (47).

This is why the gramophone is simultaneously a site of fascination and anxiety. On the one hand, the machine itself veils the source of the voice, even as the voice gives the gramophone a symbolic reason for its existence. On the other hand, the voice functions as a “vanishing mediator” (Dolar 15). The voice supports the gramophone’s function, supports its capacity to produce meaning, but, in a troubling paradox, does not “contribute to it” (78). Woolf’s novel seizes upon this paradox in order to explore, in allegorical fashion, how performance and community are shaped by an anxious fascination with an object—a voice—that cannot be reduced to meaning, to machine, to representation. In this way, Woolf offers a voice that interrupts not in order to be heard, but in order to listen.

Indeed, Miss La Trobe’s anxiety about the pageant’s success centers repeatedly upon the text’s failure to acquire and sustain a voice. That is to say, the text must have a voice, a voice produced not only by the dialogue among actors, not only in the dialogue with the audience, but also through dialogue with the voice of the gramophone. It is our relation to voice that produces the possibility (and not the guarantee) of performance. Text, in a sense, is produced in order to capture the voice, which, in Nancy’s sense of community, must remain metaphorical; that is one reason why roles and plays have so many possible interpretations. Even the cutting of individual scenes, speeches, or lines may be necessary to let the particular performance “speak” to an audience. In this sense, the voice is not just a manifestation of sound—human and machinic—in space; it also produces a space that is necessary for rupture, for interruption.

Yet, as we see, Miss La Trobe is ambivalent about interruption. Before the performance, she stops suddenly—halts in her frantic pacing and turning—and says “It has the makings...” as if she is about to see the play behind the play, to lift the veil from reality; but then her vision is just as suddenly disrupted, deferred, and she again resumes her pacing (40). We could say that Miss La Trobe is searching for that which lies hidden behind performance and fails, at this moment, to understand that one cannot access the source directly; in a sense, she is mistaking the content for the medium, which, as Marshall McLuhan never tired of reminding us, is the message (23). Although she rages, pushes, tries to control community, the villagers “slip the noose” she has twisted for them and “split up into scraps and fragments” (*BTA* 74) produced by the necessary intervals—the interruptions—which she believes makes her “a slave to her audience” (58) and, worse, that she experiences the audience as a species of “torture” (50).

But Miss La Trobe’s ambivalence about the audience, about the limits of her ability to orchestrate audition, points towards the unconscious space or medium of the voice—an effect of the real—which needs to be kept open in order for the pageant to succeed as a whole. One of the effects of Miss La Trobe’s ambivalence prompts the spectators to adopt what Penny Farfan has called “an attitude of reconsideration” (93), which invites audience members to consider their own actions, words, and silences in relation to the Victorians who preceded them (94). First, one must recall that, in psychoanalysis, the idea that voice and identity, or that voice and subjectivity are self-identical—that they function in a one-to-one correspondence—is a fantasy. The voice is not simply the sonic transmission of identity, of desire, but is a remainder that, paradoxically, helps produce the fantasy of self-identity. But, of course, this fantasy can be radically disrupted. In psychological terms, hearing one’s own voice is no guarantee of self-identity. Often, it shatters the illusion. Using the voice, even when one is alone, perforce implies the presence of an other.
For example, when one hears one's mechanically recorded voice played back, one often experiences an uncanny moment of recognition; that is to say, one knows the voice is one's own, yet one cannot (or does not want to) recognize it as such. At moments like these, one comes to the realization that the voice one hears while speaking is not the same voice heard by the other. This disjunction points to a fundamental split between the voice and the ear; in a sense, it would seem that the other knows one's voice better, more intimately, than the subject does oneself. It is as if the voice is not located in the body of the subject, but is bifurcated, veiled, existing both in the subject and the other simultaneously. If we continue to follow this logic, the voice is not simply a vehicle for articulating our thoughts and desires; rather, it exists over and above language itself (Dolar 29-31). The object voice is the remainder that escapes location both in the material body and in the material machine, but is nevertheless crucial to performance. This, for me, is part of the function of the gramophone in the novel. The “tick[s],” “chuff chuffs,” “hums,” and “buzzes” that the gramophone makes have been read by scholars, such as Cuddy-Keane, Michele Pridmore-Brown, and Patricia Clements, as the means “to replace the humanly inhabited center with a space in which to imagine the voices of otherness and diversity in the universe” (Cuddy-Keane 93). Although I think this reading is a persuasive, useful one and would agree that the novel is working against a fascistic conception of community, I would like to push these insights farther. The presence of the gramophone demonstrates that the voice itself is always already divided; because the voice as object exists outside language, it is not only a metaphor for inclusion or for an openness to difference. Indeed, the gramophone record is, in its way, as bound by the paradox of the always already divided voice as its listeners are; its own voice is “uncanny” to itself. As Friedrich Kittler tells us, “If the phonograph could hear itself, it would learn to recognize the difference between the voice that came from outside and forced itself onto it and the voice that it itself is broadcasting and which is a simple echo of the first, following an already grooved path” (32). Yes, the other must be granted a space to be heard; but what I am calling the voice of the gramophone belongs, like community itself, to no one. This point is crucial. The voice is not the dominant subject’s to give precisely because the voice itself has no master. In its role as “vanishing mediator,” the emergence of the voice produces the possibility for a relation founded upon interruption. The gramophone’s power does not reside in its standing metaphorically for diversity; rather, it lies in its ability to perform the fundamental split in the object voice with which all subjects must contend.

What I find striking about the “voice” of the gramophone in the novel, and of its effect on the performance, is that it is virtually granted the status of a subject. There is, in other words, something uncanny about the gramophone in the text that goes beyond the affective power of music played (though that is important, too). The problem is that one cannot necessarily tie a particular voice to a particular body in the psychoanalytic sense because the voice, as medium, as effect of the real, is structured by its relation to another. A voice is not singular; it is a relation, a “voicing-with” an other’s body, which receives and “recognizes” the voice. In effect, the voice appears in the gap between subject and other, or between speech and the listening ear. The gramophone, with its uncanny, mechanical voice of reproduction, occupies that gap, producing “invisible threads connecting the bodiless voices” (BTA 91). The gramophone veils the voice without object, which I am calling the unconscious voice or medium of community and that which the novel nominates as “the other voice speaking, the voice that was no one’s voice” (107). Fittingly, Isa seems to recognize this voice as a site of possibility, even of sacrifice, as “Readily would she endow this voice with all her treasure if so be tears could be ended” (108).

The uncanny appearance of this voice—the voice of no one, the voice without body, a voice that cannot be fetishized as music—marks the paradoxical space of community the performance attempts to exploit and to occupy; it is perforate a site of anxiety—and not only for Miss La Trobe, but also for an often confused and startled audience, puzzled as they are by the voice without object, which temporally, invisibly binds them, even as it is the condition of their dispersal—because the voice cannot be domesticated, calmed down into the aesthetic pleasure of music, the rigidities of ideology, or the amusement of an afternoon’s entertainment. Nancy compares the appearance of such voice to a recording interrupted, but with an important difference:

The voice seems to play back the declarations of myth, for in the interruption there is nothing new to be heard, there is no new myth breaking through [...]. When a voice, or music, is suddenly interrupted, one hears just at that instant something else, a mixture of various silences and noises that had been covered over by the sound, but in this something else one hears again the voice or the music that has become in a way the voice or the music of its own interruption: a kind of echo, but one that does not repeat that of which it is the reverberation. (Inoperative 62)

For Nancy, this is the “voice of community, which in its way perhaps avows, without saying it, the unavowable” emerging within and without the interruption (62). It is an excess, producing both community and its unworking. Like the mirrors held up near the pageant’s conclusion, it unworks the illusion of absolute distinction between people and the illusion of subjective integrity between and among performers and audience. The voice as object opens up the interruptive space of the unspoken drama Giles and Isa must later improvise—and the choice they must make: either to repeat the scripts that have brought them to the crisis in their marriage, or listen to the unconscious voice that permits them the possibility of speaking their “unacted part[s]” (BTA 116).

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Thinking through Virginia Woolf: New Technologies and the Virtues of Leaning Sideways

The texts of our youth often become the channels through which we perceive and think. In 2014, a spate of widely popularized studies on media technologies brought me back to Virginia Woolf’s novel *Between the Acts*, which I had written about well over a decade ago (1998, 2001). Rather serendipitously, at about the same time, the editor of this special edition of *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, Ann Martin, asked if I would like to write a reflection piece on Woolf and technology. While my first thought was that I haven’t written about Woolf in years, my next was to marvel at just how much her insights and metaphors have haunted everything I’ve written—in particular with regard to how social and reproductive technologies shape “time passing” and the fixing and unfixing of identity.

Below I’ll address two seemingly disparate topics: the first, how the Internet renders newly relevant Woolf’s insights on media technology; and the second, how she has informed my work on reproductive technologies shape “time passing” and the fixing and unfixing of identity.

1. Media technologies: from charismatic leaders in the 1930s to algorithms in the twenty-first century

In July 2014, a write-up of a study by Timothy Wilson and his co-authors came out in *Science*. Entitled “Just Think: The Challenges of the Disengaged Mind,” it made the rounds of news outlets and Facebook. The headlines blurred versions of the notion that people prefer electric shocks to being alone with their thoughts. This wasn’t quite what the study said, and as Woolf would have pointed out, there was a significant gender difference behind the findings. Still, the headlines captured a truth of sorts: silence can be excruciating—and perhaps increasingly so, given how connected we are to our devices. People are likely to opt for electric shocks over disconnection. I was, naturally, reminded of how Woolf dramatized this point in a very different context, and in much more nuanced fashion, in *Between the Acts*, written at the outbreak of WWII. I revisit this dramatization in order to then return to the present.

The artist-director of the play within the novel is Miss La Trobe, a lesbian outsider to the community Woolf depicts and to which La Trobe’s actors and spectators belong. La Trobe’s play, an outdoor pageant, portrays England’s imperial history. In ironic fashion, it mirrors the pageant-goers’ own collective self-conception, culminating in the present, which is also the moment of Woolf herself writing in 1939 and of England’s likely downfall. Using a gramophone, La Trobe has her audience “afloat” on the “stream” of patriotic melodies and uplifting marches (*Between the Acts* [BTA] 79), only to jolt them—mid-beat, as it were—out of their conjoined, complacent reverie of ennobling imperialism. She does so inadvertently through the scraping of the gramophone’s needle—in other words, by making the transmission channel obvious—and she does so willfully by stopping the music and imposing silence on her audience: the silence when identity is unfixed and surplus realities obtrude into consciousness. Of the silence, written into the margins of her script, LaTrobe mutters “Realty too strong” and feels that the “Blood seemed to pour from her shoes.” La Trobe performe participates in her own experiment: “This is death, death, death, she noted in the margins of her mind” (BTA 180). The analogy is perhaps obvious. When we’re unfixed or unmoored from our guiding narratives—from what are called, in the current media context, our “devices,” or what journalist Nicholas Carr has termed our “glass cages”: the cockpits that insulate us from alternative realities and selves—we squirm and “fidget” and, as the study on silence in *Science* points out, distract ourselves by self-inflicted jolts of electricity. Again, in La Trobe’s words, “reality” is “too strong” (180). Similarly, as study after study insists, when we can’t check our cell phones—when we’re untherted—we experience profound physiological malaise of the sort La Trobe and her pageant-goers experience. We’re unable to navigate “surplus realities.”

As I’ve discussed before, Woolf was writing when the radio and gramophone had enabled new means of acoustic communion, and when the new physics had enabled novel ways of thinking about communion and separation as wave-like communion and particle-like separation, with the experimenter being, in the manner of La Trobe as it were, both outside and inside the experiment. Drawing on Gustave Le Bon, Woolf was also thinking of how the individual morphs into the herd; or, to use a cross-species analogy, how the solitary grasshopper, when cued by environmental inputs, morphs into the socially-mad locust. The locust’s genotype remains the same. Its phenotype by way of its outward behavior and appearance, however, is altered. In Woolf’s world, Hitler’s voice was doing the cuing, acting through a newly technologically-extended nervous system that had been created by radio waves sweeping across the ether. That “nervous system” was to the 1930s what the Internet has been to this century. To invoke Woolf’s metaphors, Hitler’s mad magnetic “braying” operated like a conductor’s baton, seamlessly playing on “the body of the people” and sending young men into the skies. Her genius was, in part, to insist that Churchill operated through similar mechanisms: through “rhythm” and “rhyme” and “magnetic” cuing.1 My point here is that, in writing about the radio and gramophone, Woolf anticipated much of the current social sciences research on the Internet, on Facebook more particularly, and on principles of social contagion: that is, on how behaviors spread and how bodies are cued by images, musical keys or rhymes, or other sensual stimuli that often operate below the threshold of conscious perception. These cues can, in short, turn communities of individuals into crowds with locust-like features. After the hellishness of the silences, Woolf depicts the “relax[ing] of fingers” and “uncross[ing] of legs” amongst the pageant-goers in *Between the Acts*, when an image of “the great wall” is shown on-stage (BTA 189). Ennobling images or symbols—of the wall, and also of the League of Nations in this instance—seem, at the end of La Trobe’s play, to lead to stuttering contemplation and a more thoughtful unity that includes hesitation and allows for multiplicity; but naturally such images also run the risk turning the audience back into a crowd.

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1 For textual analyses of the relevant passages, see my articles “1939-40: Of Virginia Woolf, Fascism and Gramophones” and “Public and Private Voices: The BBC and Virginia Woolf.”
The charismatic leader’s baton obviously remains relevant in some parts of the world, but it is the invisible hand of algorithms that transforms the rest of us, in a consumer context, into a “standing reserve” of sorts, even as we imagine that our particular intellectual niches protect us. The threat is not totalitarianism per se, but rather totalizing experiences: the addictive nature of algorithm-mediated experiences that circumvent thought. Again, Woolf’s analogy, even though rooted in an earlier media technology, retains its teeth: we’re like “filings magnetized” on virtual gramophones and, as suggested by a recent study entitled “Music induces universal emotion-related psychophysiological responses” (Egermann, et al.), “all alike” in our susceptibility to certain kinds of cues; indeed, the phrase in the article recalls the voice wafted over La Trobe’s gramophone affirming “O we’re all the same,” whether we’re, as the voice says, murderers, tyrants or “ladies of the manor” (BTA 186). Extrapolating to our contemporary context: we’re all the same, whether we’re, say, jihadists taking to the skies, “afloat” on variants of “hero-making emotion,” or fixed within some other costume in some other play, or indeed in our glass cages, tethered to our screens (BTA 79). Woolf’s methods of intervening politically remain exquisitely relevant. Subversion is about inhabiting the silence (not to mention the blank screen) that leads elsewhere—to subjunctive worlds and un-acted parts and to untried or unfixed identities. As she insisted, avverting catastrophe also entails acknowledging our inherent kinship with the locust, and with the “jihadist,” or whatever the figure of evil is at a given moment.

2. Reproductive technologies: from Woolf’s “Olivia” to new procreative algorithms

Another Woolf-derived topic I’ve excavated in various forms is the relationship between “The Angel in the House” and the fixed clock that underpins patriarchy. Woolf’s treatment of “time passing” has already been richly discussed by others. Here I’ll confine myself to a more glancing discussion of the “bio-cultural clock,” which I’ve used in the past to refer to the gendered reproductive clock purportedly ticking out time from puberty until midlife senescence (i.e., menopause) for women but not for men. It’s important to note here that the rise of biology as a discipline in the nineteenth century initially served to naturalize patriarchy and, as Woolf put it in her much-invoked phrase from Three Guineas, created “measurements to order” with respect to female brains (and bodies), measurements that reinforced notions of male superiority (Three Guineas [TG] 139).2 The clock itself as “zeitgeber” (time-giver) has had cultural implications, and it could be said that the bio-cultural clock is to gender what the biological (a.k.a. reproductive) clock is to sex. Spinsterness, for instance, was a cultural artifact of patriarchal interpretations of this biological clock, linked, as it was, to the alleged beginning of fertility decline in women in their mid to late 20s.

Woolf had famously argued in A Room of One’s Own that maternity and marriage, both pegged to the clock, have been impediments to “a room” and the right to earn a living. As she points out, nineteenth-century women writers including Jane Austen, George Eliot, and the Brontë sisters were “childless”: they existed outside reproductive time. Austen hardly had a material room of her own, but being childfree and unmarried gave her the cognitive freedom to think against the rhythm and rhyme of patriarchal institutions; that is, to inhabit silence; to dive into the unchecked multiplicity of possibility, into “serpentine caves” leading elsewhere (A Room of One’s Own [AROO] 83), and so to imagine marriage as a partnership of intellectual equals. This said, the link between childlessness and artistic production, while relevant in an individual or exceptionalist context, is less so in a larger cultural context. It is postponement en masse—the willed refusal of marriage and maternity until “the room” is purchased and the self established—that inexorably kills the Angel and kills old patriarchal constructions of the

spinster.” Maternal postponement alters the bio-cultural narrative in a structural way, from which there’s no turning back. In other words, over time, it normalizes “a room” first and then, from out of this new space, naturalizes a new organism. “Olivia,” as Woolf calls this organism, which “has been under the shadow of the rock these million years,” “feels light fall on it” in her youth, “and sees coming her way a piece of strange food—knowledge, adventure, art.” “As she reaches out for it, she must ‘devise some entirely new combination of her resources’” (AROO 83). Woolf deliberately invokes evolutionary time through the phrase “these million years”; her logic is Lamarkian, as Lynn Ardley argues in a forthcoming article, or what can be termed epigenetic. In other words, the organism, like the proverbial Lamarkian giraffe, reaches for the leaves, and its neck stretches upward. Phenotypic adaptation ensues—the neck gets longer—and is then transmitted to the next generations. If, as Freud put it in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, “biology is truly the land of unlimited possibilities” (83), then technē, as the philosopher Martin Heidegger put it later in his essay “The Question Concerning Technology,” was a form of revealing. My point is that technē, by way of actual reproductive technologies in tandem with social technologies, helped overturn the patriarchal clock and revealed new ways of inhabiting, construing, and performing “nature.” Reproductive technologies, which enable Olivia systematically to postpone reproduction, also enable, in Woolf’s words, “new combination[s] of […] resources,” and so new forms of self-organization or self-assembly for the whole organism.

Put differently and in more historical terms, early marriage and motherhood were the sine qua non of institutionalized sexual inequality. As I’ve argued elsewhere, maternal postponement contributed to levelling, at least somewhat, the playing field between procreative and non-procreative bodies, as well as among variously-sexed bodies, and it enabled the application of “rights” to new kinds of bodies (see Pridmore-Brown, “Consuming”). It’s no accident that the late-to-maternity mother, or indeed the childfree woman, was initially a threat to old establishment values: a threat that “science”—“infected” by what Woolf famously represented in Three Guineas as a patriarchal virus (127)—at first sought to neutralize by, for instance, equating unused ovaries with hysteria. By mid-century, somatic and mental ills in the child were attributed, in both psychiatric and popular literatures, to the “freezer mother” or the “Schizophrenogenic mother”—in other words, to the ambivalent “unnatural” mother, at once overprotective and rejecting: presumably the sort of woman who might crave “a room” and the time to grow in it first. The medical literature also explicitly stigmatized as “unnatural” the over-30 or over-35 year-old, first-time new mother, whose aged womb (and mind) compromised the health of her child, even though by the second half of the century the absolute number of babies born to older mothers had decreased since the era of large families. Throughout the ensuing decades, aging eggs were indicted for creating allegedly subpar babies, and their owners were denounced as selfish, whereas the sperm of aging men were free of scientific scrutiny and their owners celebrated as virile. This might be called deploying not just a patriarchal lens but also a strategic flashlight. When the sperm of aging men were finally put under the microscope in the 1990s, they were “revealed” as subpar; and by 2012, thanks to whole-genome sequencing technologies, they were in fact found to be chock-full of mutations, which increased in tandem with their owner’s age (Kong 2012). These mutations are now being implicated in mental diseases in offspring, including schizophrenia, previously attributed to freezer mothers. Such examples are legion (see Pridmore-Brown, “Consuming”). By the twenty-first century, the hypothetical Olivia’s brother—let’s call him “Oliver”—had acquired a reproductive clock of sorts even as Olivia’s own fertility was being
extended in new and potentially subversive ways.\(^4\) Of course, the point is not that there aren’t risks associated with midlife maternity, too. Certainly there are risks, but risks are now seen as context-dependent risks, not ethical stop signs. “Olivia” is wielding the research flashlight and asking the questions.

* * *

Returning to the study described in *Science* on silence and electric shocks with which I began, one-fourth of the female subjects preferred giving themselves shocks to inhabiting their thoughts, whereas a full two-thirds of the men did (Wilson 75). Does this mean the female brain is better at inhabiting silence, and by extension, subjective or surplus worlds? One small study undertaken on college students hardly provides an answer; it is merely suggestive. Woolf depicts Olivia as Larckian, however, with some reason: Olivia seems better adapted to inhabiting multiple subjective worlds, which, according to evolutionists, occurs precisely because of the complex cognitive and social demands that have shaped the brains of her female forebears who, to survive, had to corral and manage “helpers at the nest” to raise their offspring to adulthood (see Hrdy; Pridmore-Brown, “Pass”). A leading neuroscientist and anthropologist, Melvin Konner, has argued in his book entitled *Women After All: Sex, Evolution and the End of Male Supremacy* that men’s driven sexuality and, on average, far greater tendency to violence are more entrenched, thus more starkly Darwinian for lack of a better word; that is, more constrained by narrow evolutionary imperatives rather than expansive Larckian ones. The implication is that the male “brain” is less fitted to a world that demands elasticity and cooperative linkages across cultures and identities. Perhaps the most that can be said is that, at present, Olivia’s brain lends itself to Larckian descriptions and her brother Oliver’s to Darwinian ones. Even this is problematic, however. Indeed, following the passage describing Olivia’s growth in *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf reminds us that to speak of the superiority of one type of brain over the other, as Konner does, is “suspect” when it’s one’s own sex and myopic when it’s the other’s, even if the superiority now allegedly lies in women’s brains.

I’ll close with a final Woolfian image that has stayed with me. In *Between the Acts*, an elderly virginal aunt named Lucy and nicknamed “Flimsy” reads about prehistory. Her mental musings on prehistory in fact provide a backdrop for the pageant. At the end of the novel, La Trobe enters the village tavern and imagines the prehistoric “mud” of civilization germinating anew, but in ways that evade the *Götterdämmerung* of her present (BTA 212). Nowadays, the tavern or prehistoric cave is, in some ways, the scientist’s lab. It offers multiple ways of choreographing and *germinating* life out of literal “orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves” (BTA 188; original emphasis). It also offers a host of challenges linked to the commodification of gametes. I’ve always been intrigued as to why Lucy, prodded by La Trobe’s play, offers a host of challenges linked to the commodification of gametes.

4 Olivia might, for instance, freeze her eggs, and hope to combine them in midlife with the genetic material of her friend “Chloe’s,” a feat of genetic engineering that is certainly on the near horizon (see Greely, 103, 146), and that, in a sense, goes hand-in-hand with disestablishing the old reproductive clock. In other words, the midlife Olivia could, with her partner Chloe, choreograph the making of a child with their combined DNA, assuming one or the other is willing to carry a pregnancy.

to consume midlife maternity if they wish (possibly with their frozen eggs\(^5\)). The challenges they face are huge—and the stakes enormous. The old game board ruled by the old patriarchal clock is fading, but the Woolfian moral imperative, it seems to me, remains the same: to inhabit the silence of subjective worlds that lead elsewhere, to un-acted parts and creative alliances. It is to *lean sideways* when everyone else *leans in*. It is, as ever, to break the “rhythm” of straight lines and the “rhyme” of circular ones. It is to resist going, as Woolf puts it in *Three Guineas*, “like caterpillars head to tail, round and round the mulberry tree, the sacred tree, of property” (TG 74). It is, in short, to inhabit surplus realities.

**Michele Pridmore-Brown**

**University of California, Berkeley**

**Works Cited**


5 Sheryl Sandberg has famously argued in her book *Lean In* that professional women should “lean in” to their careers in youth, essentially to “go for the burn” as an earlier guru put it, in order to reap emotional and economic bargaining power in midlife and after. In late 2014, Silicon Valley companies such as Facebook, where Sandberg is CFO, and Apple, added egg freezing to their mix of benefits. The move was designed to enable women to lean in more effectively and less distractedly in their 30s and possibly their early 40s, by eliminating (in theory) the tick of their reproductive clocks. To be sure, it’s a welcome benefit, but fraught as well insofar as it creates new expectations for worker productivity and reproductive postponement.


One's Whole World a Cinema

"...that curious thing, the map of the world in ones mind."
Virginia Woolf, Diary 3, July 11, 1927

Hymn singing in the flats, a glimpse in passing;
Alive and alert, she and Leonard,
Shielded inside the blue Singer becoming one with the
Random uproar of the road &
Life out there framed but never still,
Making one's own cinema through windshields
From the everyday path of moving through life,
Jotting in commas all that &
All that emerges from the roadside flare and glare,
The eye asking the brain
What is this, what does it mean? The brain registering
But only in fleeting jest.
Every bump in the road,
Every hedge in the way,
Every free & mobile & airy moment
Recorded in some space/time consciousness;
The world there uncovered for the moment,
The flash of the real, the heat of the now,
The rack and the ruin & the rhythm of it all,
Tucked inside one's own atlas,
Indexed as it were for future viewing.
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Testimonies in Art & Action:
Igniting Pacifism in the Face of Total War

An ethical call resounded throughout the world when fascist forces repeatedly bombed civilians during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The evolution of total war—where civilians become military targets—and the attempted “obliteration” of entire civilian populations in Spain presented a challenge to the concerned global citizen: how does one respond ethically to the advent of total war? In answer to this ethical dilemma, a transnational network of pacifists composed of modernist artists, authors, thinkers, volunteers, and activists galvanized bold, highly dynamic concepts of pacifism through their art and actions. Many of them came together and created support and relief networks that aided the civilians and refugees on the ground in Spain. Artists, authors, and activists such as Virginia Woolf, Pablo Picasso, Muriel Rukeyser, and Langston Hughes, and Quaker volunteer workers, produced paintings, poetry, prose, and actions that contained powerful testimonies—a Quaker term that signifies the lived actions that manifest inner beliefs—of peace.

The digital humanities projects featured in this exhibition show that through their art and literature, each of these artists constructed a fierce, and at times highly divergent, “positive peace” based on gender, racial,

1 J. Ashley Foster, Visiting Assistant Professor of Writing and Fellow in the Writing Program at Haverford College, and the students from her “Peace Testimonies in Literature and Art Writing Seminar” have curated the interactive student digital humanities and Special Collections exhibition Testimonies in Art and Action: Igniting Pacifism in the Face of Total War, which ran in Magill Library from October 6-December 11, 2015 at Haverford College. The exhibition opening was preceded by a roundtable panel discussion entitled “Three Guineas, Pacifist Activism, and the Event of Total War,” featuring Jessica Berman, Farah Mendlesohn, Jean Mills, and Paul Saint-Amour, all of whose scholarship was read by the students of the Writing Seminar and was used as research in the projects for the exhibition. Below is the text from the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition. For the online component of the exhibition and to view the student projects, please visit ds.haverford.edu/testimonies.

2 Ian Patterson in Guernica and Total War identifies “total war” as “the belief that the most effective way of winning wars was by the obliteration, or the threat of obliteration, of the civilian population of the enemy’s towns and cities by means of an annihilating attack from the air” (2). Though this is our working definition of total war, it is important to note that Paul Saint-Amour, in his recently published Tense Future, complicates any simple rendering of the concept “total war.” He shows that the construct “total war” serves a narrative that historically privileges unequal distributions of global power, and that much of “total war” discourse relies on a concept of state or center where certain bodies are ‘counted’ as victims of total war and others do not. See especially Chapter 1, “On the Partiality of Total War.”

3 Tracing the discipline of Peace Studies, Jean Mills juxtaposes ‘positive peace’ with ‘negative peace’ in Virginia Woolf, Jane Ellen Harrison, and the Spirit of Modernist Classicism. She explains, “negative peace refers to the absence of direct violence, and places an emphasis on approaches for conflict management, such as peace-keeping, whereas, peace-building is an example of positive peace. By the mid-1990s, Peace Studies curricula in the West had shifted ‘from research and teaching about negative peace, the cessation of violence, to positive peace, the conditions that eliminate the causes of violence’ (Harris, Fisk and Rank)” (135-36).
and economic equality and social justice. Likewise, the Society of Friends (also known as the Quakers), a religious society with Protestant roots historically known for its pacifism, worked alongside and within modernist artistic networks and transnational communities to raise funds for and distribute food and goods on both sides of the fighting, embodying their peace testimonies in volunteer work that sought to relieve the effects of war on refugees and civilians. These pacifist stories are often written out of history and forgotten by many, but provide us with a model of essential non-military responses to the advent of total war. Testimonies in Art & Action recuperates these lost histories and reminds us that there is still a call to incorporate pacifist philosophies in politics and in the events that are unfolding daily into history.

Testimonies in Art & Action: Igniting Pacifism in the Face of Total War creates a historical juncture with our present moment, illuminating how philosophies of non-violence contained in art, literature, and action have been mobilized to stage a critical intervention in a progressively militarizing population. This exhibition juxtaposes primary source materials from the Quaker relief effort in Spain, much of which is from Haverford’s own Quaker & Special Collections, with student digital humanities projects that explore the peace testimonies embedded in the literature and art of the interwar period. In bringing together these multi-modal sources, this exhibition demonstrates the shared commitment to social justice and human rights that the pacifisms of the early twentieth century developed, particularly in the testimonial activism of the Society of Friends and public intellectuals. It aims to create a scholarly discussion focused on the themes of pacifism, activism, writing, and ethics; forms of resistance to total war; and social justice during the interwar period; and it demonstrates the interrelationship between “positive peace,” pacifism, and social justice.

From these thinkers and activists, we have learned the extreme repercussions of war on the lives of individuals, the need to teach our families and children to resist war, the need to support a politics that works towards equality, and the need to stay true to our values. Through their work, these authors, artists, and activists provide a vocabulary for peace, offering an alternative to the relentless war rhetoric of their era and our own. Their poetry, prose, art, and actions contain messages that can still help the people of the world stand up and advocate for peace today, as our contemporary moment continually witnesses outbreaks of total war.

**Total War in Spain**

In the 1930s, many progressive movements that promoted a concern for social justice and human rights, for racial and gender equality, and for world peace, were passionately working towards global freedom and elevation of “the rights of all.” In contrast, a rising fascist movement attempted to violently hurtle itself into the future by capitalizing on public nostalgia for a lost past, a golden age of empire and dominance. In Spain, the tensions of the era erupted on 17-18 July, 1936, when a group of generals, supported by the majority of the military, the Catholic Church, and the wealthy landowners, attempted to overthrow the democratically-elected, progressive Republican government. Eventually led by General Francisco Franco, the insurgents espoused a far-right, fascist political platform. The people of Spain formed workers’ militias and resisted the insurgent military, fending off the coup d’état long enough for international support, including Russian reinforcements and tens of thousands of people from around the world, to arrive. These International Brigades were a global grassroots movement against fascism and were volunteer battalions formed to fight in Spain in support of the Republican government.

Germany and Italy, led by Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, almost immediately supported the Francoists, providing air power and tanks to the insurgents. With Russia involved in defense of the Republic, Spain quickly became an international battleground where global tensions between the left and the right played out on Spanish soil. Ernest Hemingway famously described the struggle in Spain as “the dress rehearsal for the inevitable European war.” However, despite the transnational nature of the conflict, Great Britain, France, and the United States maintained a policy of neutrality. The international, intellectual left protested the war in Spain, the rise of fascism, and the failure of three world powers to intervene, while the right supported the insurgents in Spain, who saw themselves as engaged in a modern “crusade,” saving civilization from the godlessness of an increasingly secular society.

What started as a coup d’état erupted into a three-year total war that escalated into unprecedented violence. Various factions of the left, including anarchist, communist, socialist, democratic, and Republican parties, in a mass-movement of rage and collective paranoia, retaliated against centuries of oppression, starvation, and disenfranchisement by violently targeting priests and anyone suspected of being a collaborator in the coup. Franco’s forces, with the help of Hitler and Mussolini, unleashed a sustained aerial attack against civilians that inspired world outrage. The repeated bombings of Madrid, the destruction of Guernica, and the attacks against Valencia and Almeria turned the cities into a battlefront. These aerial attacks, and the mounting civilian deaths, sounded an ethical call throughout the world, demanding that concerned parties, in a mass-movement of rage and collective paranoia, retaliated against centuries of oppression, starvation, and disenfranchisement by violently targeting priests and anyone suspected of being a collaborator in the coup. Franco’s forces, with the help of Hitler and Mussolini, unleashed a sustained aerial attack against civilians that inspired world outrage. The repeated bombings of Madrid, the destruction of Guernica, and the attacks against Valencia and Almeria turned the cities into a battlefront. These aerial attacks, and the mounting civilian deaths, sounded an ethical call throughout the world, demanding that concerned

4. There were a plethora of societies and organizations working towards social justice and world peace. A sampling includes, for example, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, War Resisters International, the International Peace Campaign, the Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix, the Spanish feminist movement Mujeres Libres, the Indian National Congress, and the League of Nations Union.

5. See *Three Guineas*, where Virginia Woolf quotes Josephine Butler (121).

6. See *Conscience and Conflict* by Simon Martin (11).


8. For further information on the history of the Spanish Civil War, see Paul Preston’s *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution, and Revenge* and Helen Graham’s *The Spanish Civil War: A Very Short Introduction*. For more on the Spanish Civil War as a total war, see Paul Preston’s *The Spanish Holocaust*.


10. Jessica Berman, in *Modernist Commitments*, describes total war as “where commonplace distinctions between the home front and battlefront disintegrate and where the patterns of everyday life in the besieged areas become completely disrupted” (187).
citizens react and intervene. In spite of a progressively militarizing cultural climate, as *Testimonies in Art & Action* reveals, there were a number of people who responded to this ethical call through pacifist means, thus *Igniting Pacifism in the Face of Total War*.

**The Quaker Peace Testimony and the Spanish Civil War**

A transnational movement of pacifist activists that included the Quakers, artists, writers, public intellectuals, and relief workers organized to help the people under attack in Spain and to relieve the effects of war. At the heart of this movement was the Quaker peace testimony, a spiritual witness to the importance of every individual life. Historically, the peace testimony is based on the Quaker belief in the Inner Light—-that there is that of God, or that of God, in every person. Caroline Emelia Stephen, Virginia Woolf’s Quaker theologian aunt, explains this principle in her book *Light Arising*, writing that “there is given to every human being a measure, or germ, of something of an illuminating nature—something of which the early Friends often spoke as ‘a seed of life’—a measure of that ‘light, life spirit and grace of Christ’ which they recognized as the gift of God to all men” (2). For the Quakers, that “seed of life,” or “measure of ‘light,’” exists in one as it exists in all; therefore, they uphold that it is a duty to preserve and encourage the light to flourish in everyone. According to Quaker thought, the preservation and fostering of the Light requires lived actions; Friends feel that they must enact and manifest in their daily life what they believe. Therefore, the Quakers responded to total war in Spain by distributing goods, food, and clothes for civilians on the ground regardless of their political affiliations. In order to raise funds for this mission, the Friends worked with many international organizations, collaborating with a large network of concerned citizens that included many famous modernist artists and authors.

As Farah Mendlesohn discusses in her book *Quaker Relief Work in the Spanish Civil War*, social justice has become an increasingly important element to the Quaker peace testimony, starting in the late nineteenth century and through the modernist era. An integral part of pacifism merging with social justice is what the field of Peace Studies would now call “positive peace,” the belief that one must intentionally build peace. Quaker pacifists during the Spanish Civil War felt that they needed to actively create the conditions for peace, and they worked on the front lines in Spain to help preserve life and live as models for peace-building. The Quakers believed that educating children, distributing food and clothes, and assisting in the relief of hunger and suffering would create international goodwill and help to spread a pacifist message through a conflict-wrought, war-torn country. Alfred Jacob, the British Friends’ representative in Barcelona, wrote in a letter from Catalonia, “Our effort is simply to do the works of peace in the midst of war, affirming the right of the human personality which war denies. It is all that lovers of peace can do at a time like this.” For Jacob, and many Quakers, the only response to total war was to try to alleviate its effects in any way possible. At the end of the war another Quaker, John Rich (Haverford ’24), who coordinated relief in Spain for the American Friends Service Committee, wrote in his diary: “I am glad to have been involved in this Spanish War and to have contributed something to its pacification. If I died today I at least could say I’ve done something worthwhile,” showing the importance that Quakers attributed to relief work in Spain. The relief workers addressed not only the physical, but also the psychological needs of the people, particularly children, by enlisting them in a network of care that reminded them that, ultimately, they were still human.

**Peace Testimonies in Literature & Art**

In Virginia Woolf’s reading scrapbooks, compiled for her extensive pacifist project that includes the peace pamphlet *Three Guineas*, there is pasted a typed-out excerpt called “War and Writers” that addresses the interconnection between writing and political activism, between literature and the production of society. Writers, this passage asserts, have a major responsibility to society because they can shape the consciousness of the people. Therefore, it is the writer’s job, “War and Writers’ argues, to “spread the spirit of peace.” Thinking across the humanities, this exhibition, based on the “Peace Testimonies in Literature & Art” Writing Seminar at Haverford College, undertakes a study of the way in which writers, activists, and artists have utilized literature, art, and acts to “spread the spirit of peace.” Additionally, many artists, including Virginia Woolf and Pablo Picasso, also actively raised money for Spanish relief. Here we investigate the relationship between belief and daily conduct, and trace the way in which art, literature, and deeds perform and promote pacifist philosophies.

Figure 2: Illustration from *They Still Draw Pictures: A Collection of 60 Drawings Made by Spanish Children During the War*.


The digital humanities projects featured in this exhibition, created by students in the Spring and Fall 2015 Writing Seminars “Peace Testimonies in Literature & Art,” explore the ways in which writers and artists responded to the conflict in Spain, using their writing and art as a way of spreading peace. This course is structured around pacifist documentary projects that each have many layers of composition and compilation. For example, *Three Guineas*, which Jane Marcus has called a “major documentary project” and an “interactive” text, was compiled based upon three reading notebooks Woolf kept that included letters, newspaper articles, and typed-out excerpts. Muriel Rukeyser’s poem “Mediterranean” is part of a much larger series of writings on Spain, which include the experimental novel *Savage Coast*, news

11 For further reading on the testimonies, see the website *Quakers in Britain: Faith and Action*.


13 Diary 1 June, 1939. John Rich Papers. MC. 880, Box 1, Folder 4. Quaker & Special Collections at Haverford College.
articles, and prosaic-philosophical meditations. Pablo Picasso’s great mural Guernica has been documented by his partner, the surrealist photographer Dora Maar, allowing us to study the various stages of creation. Langston Hughes’s Spanish Civil War dispatches are in conversation with his poetry, creating an intricate dialogue of his time in Spain, encounter with total war, and anti-fascist beliefs.

Students of the “Peace Testimonies” classes have created scholarly annotations embedded in the texts themselves by taking the supplementary materials, for example the stages or studies from Guernica, or Virginia Woolf’s scrapbooks, and have digitally annotated the final products with a close-reading analysis of how these supplementary materials enhance or illuminate an understanding of the text. The students have hyperlinked their annotations, creating an intricate web of conceptual and historical connections between the texts, demonstrating and inventing a method for reading intertextually in the digital age. Through the intertextual analysis of Muriel Rukeyser’s poetry, Virginia Woolf’s writings, Pablo Picasso’s paintings, Langston Hughes’s Spanish Civil War dispatches and poetry, and the Quaker relief effort in Spain, this exhibition uncovers lost histories of pacifist thought and examines how artists, writers, and activists worked together to imagine and create a world without war.

From the students’ scholarly annotations, it becomes clear that the thinkers featured here have a shared value in forging an activist pacifism that cannot be divorced from either social justice or human rights concerns. Virginia Woolf combined socialism and feminism into a radical global pacifism that we have read in conversation with Langston Hughes’s internationalist images of peace based on social justice and racial equality, Muriel Rukeyser’s passionate, kinetic poetics that convey a longing for peace, and Pablo Picasso’s work publicly promoting peace and freedom. As pacifists, these artists and writers actively denounced the continuation of warfare. They deliberately used their art to display the suffering of civilians, many times transcending partisan ideologies, to promote the cause of pacifism. However, there is also a shared anti-fascist sentiment that these artists expressed after seeing the brutality of total war. Despite their differences, all of these artists believed that peace could be born from the free spread of ideas through art. By hyperlinking the modernist, pacifist documentary projects of Hughes, Rukeyser, Woolf, and Picasso, the students explore the intertextual threads of the works put forth, illustrating that each of these projects responded to and engaged with the cultural conversations of their time. This exhibition reveals the powerful Peace Testimonies embedded in the poetry, prose, paintings, and actions of the Spanish Civil War era and shows how artists, activists, and authors sought to create a world in which peace is possible.

Written by J. Ashley Foster
in collaboration with the Haverford College students of the Peace Testimonies in Literature & Art Spring 2015 Writing Seminar

Section 1: Madison Arnold-Scerbo, Alexandra Belfi, Miranda Bucky, Rosie Cohen, William Edwards, Adetomiwa Famodu, Joshua Hilscher, Emily Kingsley, Molly Lausten, Sophie McGlynn, Jiaming (Rosalind) Xu, Benjamin Yellin

Section 2: Christina Bowen, Charlotte Colantti, Mairéad Ferry, Ann-Victoria Isaac, Marcelo Jauregui-Volpe, Callie Kennedy, Devin Louis, Richard Phillips, Praxedes Quintana, Chelsea Richardson, Caroline Steriotes, Ian Wheeler

A note to the reader and viewer:
In line with the feminist pedagogical ethos espoused by Virginia Woolf, Jane Marcus, and many others, all writing for this exhibition has been of a collaborative nature. Though attributed to the author whose voice has set the tone of the item, teams of student editors in cooperation with class members, J. Ashley Foster, and the library staff have reviewed, fact-checked, and edited all the language and content of the exhibition.

Testimonies in Art & Action: Igniting Pacifism in the Face of Total War was made possible by the generous contributions of many. The “Peace Testimonies in Literature & Art” Writing Seminars would like to express gratitude to Magill Library. We would like to offer our appreciation for the Ethical Inquiry Course Development Fund awarded by the Office of the Provost, which allowed us to develop our digital platforms. We are also grateful to the Hurford Center for the Arts and Humanities, the Distinguished Visitor’s Office, and the Center for Peace and Global Citizenship for their sponsorship and assistance. Many thanks goes to the Writing Program, the Concentration in Peace, Justice & Human Rights, and the Quaker Affairs Office, and administration at Haverford College for their contributions and support of this endeavor. Our thanks also goes to the Society of Authors in Great Britain and Southern Connecticut State University for providing access to the digital archives of the Three Guineas Reading Notebooks, to the Library of the Religious Society of Friends at Friends House in London, to the archives of the American Friends Service Committee at Cherry Street in Philadelphia, and to the Royal Albert Hall Archives in London for allowing us to reproduce their archival images in the collage and on the walls. And a big thank you to students Christina Bowen, Adetomiwa Famodu, Ann-Victoria Isaac, Sophie McGlynn, Marcelo Jauregui-Volpe, and Ian Wheeler for dedicating their summer hours to help with this exhibition.

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Thoughts from a Chinese Study: Recent Talks and Translations

Woolf Studies began in the late twenties in China. The earliest commentary on Woolf can be found in Zhao Jingshen’s World Literature in 1929 in which Zhao celebrates Woolf as a “novelist Einstein.” But it was not until the 1980s that the translation of Woolf’s novels and the critical field flourished, according to Professor Shen Fuying of the School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Shandong University, at the Annual Virginia Woolf Conference at Bloomburg University this June.

In 1979, three years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, then-Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping announced reforms that changed publishing and translation practices in China as well public rhetoric concerning literature. Deng announced that literature would no longer serve politics as it had for the previous thirty years under Mao’s socialist-realist literary platform. During that time, there was virtually no contact with so-called Western literature and there were very few translations of Woolf’s works, though in 1962 “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” was published by the Writers Publishing House.

The interest in and increased translation of Virginia Woolf’s novels in China in the early 80s then is a story of literature and politics as well as a developing realization of shared affinities with Woolf’s poetic style as well as other cultural needs. Shen Fuying explained the change in her talk by providing a short history of “Woolf Study in China.” She highlighted two presses—the Shanghai Literature Translation Press and the SDX Joint Publishing Company—as leaders in the publication of Woolf’s novels, essays and letters. She cited major translators as Qu Shijing and Liu Bi.

Adding to this procession of translators is Professor Yiming Ren’s recent translation of Orlando encouraged by Professor Qu Shijing and included in Shanghai Translation Press’s Woolf collection. “Orlando was chosen,” Yiming Ren said, because “the collection seeks to represent Woolf multi-dimensionally” and because “its writing style and narrative are unique” among Woolf’s works. Ren noted that capturing Woolf’s rhythm was the most difficult part of the process of translation; she focused more on the “thoughts, emotions and inner struggles of the characters” as well as “the humor and mythical hue” of the work.

Shen Fuying also observed in her talk that for three decades (1980-2010), the literary study of Woolf’s works flourished in China and CNKI (China English Journal Database) lists 1730 journal articles, 26 doctoral dissertations and 431 MA theses. The trends in criticism are similar to those in America and England. Shen cited the major camps and some representative Chinese critics: modernist themes (Qu Shijing and Shen Fuxing); aesthetic explorations especially visual adaptations (Feng Wei, Zhang Zhongzai); feminist approaches (Lu Hongling, Lin Shuming, Pan Jian, Jiang Yunfei, Wu Qinghong, Li Juan); eco-critical explorations (Shen Fuxing and Shen Weiju); political and historical analysis (Du Zhiqing, Xie Jiangnan, Qin Hailua, Zhang Yan, Zhu Haifeng, Sui Xiaodi); comparative study of Woolf and Chinese writers Crescent Moon Society and Beijing group (Yang Lixin, Chai Ping, Du Juan) and theoretical studies of fiction (Gao Fen, Qu Shijing, Yin Qiping, Shen Ning, Hao Lin, Yang Lixin)—among others.

The continuing interest in Woolf in China suggests a shared aesthetic with traditional Chinese thought and poetry. Comparative studies of the Chinese and Western aesthetic, reception studies of Woolf in China, Chinese novelists’ engagement with Woolf, and “modernist” understandings and misunderstandings remain to be developed further. Importantly, a way of translating selected Woolf critics in each country would enhance understanding and stimulate more refined panels at the Annual Virginia Woolf Conference, and incorporation in the Virginia Woolf Miscellany and the Woolf Studies Annual.

Commentary by
Shen Fuying
Shandong University

Summarized by
Patricia Laurence
City University of New York
September 3, 2015

Loneliness - my sole lover

(After reading Mrs. Dalloway)

Loneliness!

Pushing myself into the deep, dark, cold, endless loneliness,
sometimes I feel chilly,
sometimes I’m filled with terror
and just want to run away, free from the nothingness abyss
which’s pulling out from me
all my soul and vitality.

Yet when my feet reaching the edge of light
I suddenly realize
the truth:
Part of my ego belongs to darkness,
part of my ego belongs to loneliness,
and this very loneliness is my sole lover
who’ll not ever betray me,
eterally.

Her cold lips lighten my soul with warm, passionate and creative fire
and that foggy vague body
tightly mingles with mine
in utmost pain and happiness

And I know Loneliness is my first love
also my last one

I embrace you, my dear Loneliness,
walking to the place where light exists no longer.
Oh Loneliness, dark and cold like a winter night,
the dull my eternally dreamy lover,
my amorous one who loves me only forever.

Nguyễn Thành Nhân
Writer, Poet, and Freelance Translator
Recent work includes the translation of Mrs. Dalloway and Orlando
https://plus.google.com/+Nguy%E1%BB%85nTh%C3%A2nhNh%C3%A2nwriter/posts
REVIEW

VIRGINIA WOOLF


Virginia Woolf’s life and the written record of it remains intriguing 75 years after her death—take, for example, the recent mainstream fictionalization of Woolf, Vanessa and Her Sister by Priya Parmar (2014). Until recently, for scholars and common readers who wished to grasp the facts of Woolf’s biography, the only viable option was Hermione Lee’s groundbreaking, bookstoppish classic Virginia Woolf (1996), clocking in at 893 pages. Before that, of course, there was Quentin Bell’s Virginia Woolf: A Biography (1974), a work tinged with amused fascination at the antics of his eccentric aunt. And then came Alexandra Harris’s slender version of Woolf’s years—Woolf on Slimfast, you might say. My curiosity was immediately piqued. How would Harris stack up to Lee? Could her biography stand on its own?

Harris herself acknowledges her debt to Lee in the opening pages of Virginia Woolf, explaining that her “concise” account of Woolf’s years is important because “the telescope as well as the microscope has its role” (8). The function of Woolf crystallizes further when the reader sees that the book is dedicated to Harris’s university students. And indeed, this is a perfect text to assign in the Woolf, Bloomsbury, or modernist classroom. That is its first and best function, as it focuses on only the “big stor[ies] of Woolf’s life” (119). A secondary function, other than a must-have volume for any Woolf scholar, would be as a gift to any interested common reader, for the hardcover edition is lovely. The dust jacket features two photos of an older Woolf peering out at the viewer, direct yet hooded, daring the reader to approach her while making it clear that she will keep her secrets. The pages are thick and creamy, scattered liberally with extraordinary black-and-white photos. The slim volume even comes with a ribbon bookmark—much more needed in Lee’s account, but appreciated here nonetheless!

The book is divided into 10 compulsively readable chapters of roughly 15 pages each, detailing the major events and relationships in Woolf’s life. Events move quickly, keeping the reader engaged; in just a matter of pages, we are diving into the significance of Woolf’s Talland House summers. The prose is sprinkled throughout with references and quotes to Woolf’s many diaries, letters, and published works. Harris takes the time to linger on each text published by Woolf for several pages, enumerating the biographical references and explaining the communion between, for example, Woolf’s St Ives experiences and the beach scenes in Jacob’s Room. Harris also offers exceptional analyses of each work. Regarding The Voyage Out, Harris explains that it “becomes obscure, slippery, abstract, hinting at things that don’t quite crystallize, refusing to resolve into any solidly discernable shape” (50). If there is a better summary of Woolf’s writing style, I don’t know what it is.

Later on, Chapter Eight opens with one of the best three-page discussions of The Waves currently in existence. Harris explains that the perplexing novel is “insistently impersonal” (113), that it “develops Clarissa Dalloway’s potent idea that we are all many things” (114), and that Woolf explained that she was “writing to a rhythm and not to a plot’’ (114, quoting Woolf). Before long, the reader is confronted with Woolf’s death, which is explained in a staccato burst of events: Woolf writes. She feels ill. She struggles against despair. She returns from a walk “soaking wet” (155). She marches into a river the next day.

A brief “Aftershocks” concludes the book, detailing Woolf’s many biographers and academic critics who present “an interpretation and not a final reckoning” (164) of Woolf’s life and writing. This section is an excellent introduction to the criticism surrounding Woolf; it even mentions film treatments like The Hours (2002) and theatrical incarnations like Katie Mitchell’s 2006 play drawing from The Waves. Next comes the Notes section, then a wonderful “Suggestions for Further Reading” section, which is divided into helpful categories like “Books By and About Woolf’s Family and Friends” and “Virginia Woolf On Film.” Harris explains the significance of many of the books in this section in an annotated bibliography style.

How does one sum up this lovely little book? Harris writes that Woolf “leaves [Lily Briscoe] as a purposely obscure figure whose life we do not know” (95), and this seems an appropriate summation of Harris’s portrait of Woolf. Reading it seems like a pleasant dream; images and scenes are mentioned but never fully illuminated, and one closes the book feeling as if Woolf herself is “purposely obscure,” with a life that the reader can never know. A weakness of Harris’s book, perhaps, but also a success, for Woolf constantly reminds her readers that the nature of biography is to shine a light on some areas while obscuring others into shadow. In this biography, Harris faithfully copies Woolf’s iconic form.

If there is any real weakness to the book, perhaps it is that it moves too quickly. “But wait!” the reader protests. “We are already moving into the Bloomsbury years and it is only page 39!” But of course a new reader of Woolf’s biography would not protest so much. It is only in direct comparison to Lee, whose account of Bloomsbury begins on page 199, that the reader realizes just how fast Harris moves. And her speed isn’t necessarily a weakness, for as I stated above, the book serves as a perfect text to assign in any undergraduate or graduate classroom.

Another casualty of the speed is the lack of information the reader gleams about any character that is not Virginia Woolf. Names like Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, and Lytton Strachey go whistling by at the speed of light, and the uninitiated reader will take away little or no knowledge about them when they conclude Harris’s book. But her book is titled Virginia Woolf after all, and that is what you get: the life of Virginia Woolf, with few forays into the other lives teeming around her.

It occurs to me as I struggle to pare down this review that perhaps Harris has accomplished the most triumphant biography of Woolf yet. As any writer knows, the most difficult aspect of writing is often in the editing, sweeping and slicing away until you get at the heart of the thing. Harris has composed her biography with an eagle-eye toward clarity, readability, and conciseness. This book is no small feat. It is remarkable, in fact, the amount of knowledge Harris must have about Woolf, and how comparatively little she chose to include. “We are still in pursuit
of Woolf,” Harris admits at the conclusion of her biography (170), and while this may be true, Harris’s lovely tribute to Woolf’s life is a welcome chapter in the chase.

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Review
The Cambridge Companion to To the Lighthouse

Reading The Cambridge Companion to To the Lighthouse put me in mind of The Waves, whose six distinct figures together represent a composite human being. Similarly, each of the Companion’s thirteen essays focuses on a specific topic, yet they speak in concert with each other to shape a holistic portrait of Woolf’s modernist masterpiece. In her introduction, editor Allison Pease states that the Companion “seeks to illuminate the novel’s genesis, major ideas, and formal innovations while also summarizing and advancing important critical debate” (1). The chapters explore “(1) the novel in relation to Woolf’s life, (2) its form and formal innovations, (3) its thematic and philosophical preoccupations, and (4) its political configurations of gender, race, and class” (2). The collection’s varied perspectives evoke Woolf’s declaration to Roger Fry (one of several recurring touchstones throughout the Companion): “I meant nothing by The Lighthouse….I saw that all sorts of feelings would accrue to this…and trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotions—which they have done, one thinking it means one thing another another” (Letters 3 385). The Companion stays true to Woolf’s expectation of multiple readings.

Leading off the volume, Anne E. Fernald’s essay, “To the Lighthouse in the Context of Virginia Woolf’s Life and Diaries,” looks to Woolf’s personal writings for biographical accounts of Julia and Leslie Stephen that help us understand the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay. Fernald then examines Woolf’s tracking of her writing process: “how she structured her days—and her [three separate and thematically different] notebooks” (11). Woolf knew that life is not so easily compartmentalized, however, and so, Fernald states, “it makes sense that we find her crucial sketch of the structure of To the Lighthouse in a writing notebook, but her comments on how the novel is to reflect ‘father’s character done complete’ (Diary 3 18) in the diaries” (12). Fernald also learns from Woolf’s diaries of significant socio-cultural events occurring during the composition of the novel, such as the General Strike of May 1926, which Fernald finds instrumental in helping Woolf conceive of the novel’s middle section. “‘Time Passes’ is not about the Strike,” Fernald writes, “but knowing it was composed during the Strike, we find parallels between the national and the familial. The section strives to capture what changes and what endures when a family has suffered great loss, something that the Strike seems to have helped her imagine” (12). Fernald goes on to mine the diaries for new insights into Lily Briscoe’s character. I discuss this chapter at some length to illustrate the expertise, innovation, and accessibility of each of the Companion’s essays. In addition, Fernald’s essay resonates with Hans Walter Gabler’s piece on To the Lighthouse and genetic criticism, which examines the diaries along with Woolf’s two-year writing process to trace how “fiction written against an autobiographical foil attain[s] the autonomy of a work of art” (147).

Particularly fascinating is Melba Cuddy-Keane’s essay on embodied cognition, a recent field of study that “poses that bodies do not merely express, communicate, or influence thought; bodily experience is the shape of thought itself” (58). Cuddy-Keane explores whether To the Lighthouse “depic[t]s the body as a means of altering our responses to experience” (59) by drawing on two specific examples from the novel’s third section: Lily Briscoe’s manipulation of an anthill while pondering the Ramsays’ marriage and the nature of her art, and Cam Ramsay’s running her fingers through the water on the long-deferred sail to the lighthouse. Recalling having once seen Mr. Ramsay reach out a hand to his wife, “Lily sees in his gesture a characteristically repeated act, and she makes the accompanying gesture of ‘smoothing a way for her ants’ (305). . . . Smoothing the physical pathway smooths her own agitation” (Cuddy-Keane 60). Cam, too, experiences embodied cognition upon dipping her hand into the sea while working through her complex emotions towards her father. “Embodiment here enacts letting go, releasing, and opening up,” Cuddy-Keane writes: “‘with the sea streaming through her fingers,’ Cam finds that her father’s ‘anger,’ her brother’s ‘obstinance,’ ‘her own anguish’ – ‘all had slipped, all had passed, all had streamed away’ (289, 290). Opening her hand facilitates the streaming away of obstacles she had been clenching; it also enables new perceptions to spring up in open space” (60).

Learning about embodied cognition enhances readings of later essays that discuss Woolf’s own concepts of the body, such as Kathryn Simpson’s “Social Class in To the Lighthouse,” a thorough, balanced discussion of what remains a fraught issue in Woolf studies. Simpson notes the “prevalent middle-class bias in [Woolf’s] work” as well as “an acute understanding of the material and ideological forces impacting on all aspects of experience and opportunity” (110). This paradox emerges in Woolf’s “depiction of Maggie McNab as inane and uncouth as well as a powerful, vital force” (116). Simpson also references Woolf’s introduction to Life as We Have Known It, a 1931 Hogarth Press publication, in which Woolf appears to pinpoint “working-class bodily experience” as constituting an indelible boundary between her worldview and that of the working class. Simpson warns us not to take the comment at face value, however, and employs it as a springboard for further exploring the novel’s class issues. Also reflecting on what the body meant for Woolf, Gabler cites a draft of To the Lighthouse noting “these emotions of the body” and “one’s body feeling, not one’s mind” (qtd. in Gabler 150). He finds that “the retracing of the processes of composition induces just such a bodily sensation in us. It allows us all the better in turn to sense how Virginia Woolf’s writing...emerged from out of an immediacy of bodily feeling” (150-1).

Also emblematic of the Companion’s intertextuality is Urmila Seshagiri’s “To the Lighthouse and the Art of Race,” immediately preceding Simpson’s chapter. While the novel “is the least explicitly ‘about’ race or Empire,” Seshagiri writes, “[t]he historical, aesthetic, and imperial discourses running through it [meet at the site of racial difference]” (95-96). Considering Lily Briscoe’s “little Chinese eyes,” Seshagiri finds “Woolf secure[ing] a new English feminism by attributing non-Western characteristics and perspectives to Lily” (96). Seshagiri also provides historical background on Great Britain’s appropriation and commodification of tea and porcelain from China to reflect on the
Ramsay’s household goods, namely their chipped and broken china described in “Time Passes,” for the “minutae” of this section, she writes, “like the colonial artifacts that appear in ‘The Lighthouse,’ describe an imperial Englishness that has depended historically on the not-English and the not-white” (99). In this manner, Seshagiri underscores the colonial and imperial violence providing families like the Ramsays with class- and race-privilege.

Michael Levenson’s chapter on narrative perspective considers Woolf’s “assertion of the privileges of omniscience” to highlight the dangers of egotism and solipsism (21). Jane Goldman’s essay on language and form examines the formalist concept of mosaicking manifest in the novel, “the multiple possibilities suggested by” the novel’s triadic structure (34), and Woolf’s revolutionary use of square brackets. Paul Sheehan’s piece on time as protagonist considers the three distinct portrayals of time and memory in “The Window,” “Time Passes,” and “The Lighthouse,” while Emily Dalgarno’s essay on philosophical approaches examines the novel’s raising of numerous questions about truth and meaning, in turn emphasizing doubt as an important philosophical tenet.

In her chapter on feminism and gender, Gabrielle McIntire finds that “the gender roles [Woolf] presents are traditional but the poetics are not” (83), her argument pairing well with Ana Parejo Vadillo’s essay on generational difference, for the novel is about “the passing of time and what that brings with it, generational change,” Parejo Vadillo writes (122). For instance, “Lily’s progression from the conception of her painting, a Madonna portrait of Mrs. Ramsay and her son James, to the materialization of the final work marks the process of generational change” (123). Suzanne Bellamy’s essay on the visual arts evinces how “the textures of the novel are deeply visual” (136), centered as they are on a woman painter and the “evocation of a painting in process” (122). For instance, “Lily’s progression from the conception of her painting, a Madonna portrait of Mrs. Ramsay and her son James, to the materialization of the final work marks the process of generational change” (123). Suzanne Bellamy’s essay on the visual arts evinces how “the textures of the novel are deeply visual” (136), centered as they are on a woman painter and the “evocation of a painting in process” (136). Additionally, “Extremes of emotion are expressed visually, through objects, colors, actions, and strange and surreal juxtapositions outside surface realities,” Bellamy states (137). The Companion’s final chapter on the novel’s critical heritage, by Jean Mills, traces “nearly nine decades of commentary” (158) and considers current and future directions in To the Lighthouse criticism, including innovations in digital and social media and increasingly global perspectives on Woolf.

Mills reminds us that “Rather than a passive, receptive audience listening at the feet of a respected lecturer or literary expert... [Woolf] saw, instead, in every reader, an equal and potential critic” (159). The essays in The Cambridge Companion to To the Lighthouse reify Woolf’s stance, as Pease states, “the ever-replenishing meanings yielded by the novel” will send us “to the lighthouse again and again, in time, in place, in body, in perspective. What is best about each ‘vision’ is that it need never be ‘simply one thing’” (5).

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The book-length study aims to put Jane Harrison in the spotlight by demonstrating the multifaceted nature of her shared interests: languages (Greek and Russian); anthropology of religion; feminism, pacifism and socialism. Mills notes that although Harrison was from an earlier generation from Woolf (they were 54 and 22, respectively, when they first met in 1904), their relationship shifted from mentorship to friendship and collegiality. Mills analyses their relationship in terms of the “transpersonal,” as defined by Nancy K. Miller. Though further delineation of this theory would have been helpful (in particular to distinguish it from intertextuality), Mills uses it to present Harrison and Woolf working collaboratively and in dialogue, so that similarities between their works are read in terms of synergy and correspondence rather than through linear or hierarchical dynamics of influence.

Mills’ introduction is useful for summarizing Harrison’s life and intellectual contribution, and for its insight to her context as a member of the first generation of women to gain a college education. Harrison’s career is a testimony to a low glass ceiling: she was repeatedly overlooked for teaching posts at Cambridge and a Professorship at London, and retired to Paris in 1922 after Cambridge voted against admitting women for degrees. More positively, Harrison created a fellowship of intellectual women and pioneered a teaching style that influenced Janet Case and thus shaped the Greek education that the young Virginia Stephen received.

“Cross-reading” Woolf’s Greek notebooks with Harrison’s classical research, chiefly in Themis, Mills argues that Harrison gave Woolf an alternative to the hero-centred narratives of classical Greece by emphasizing the importance of group dynamics in religion and ritual, thus championing values of interaction and collaboration over violence, jealousies and war. It thus offered Woolf a more life-affirming outlook than conventional approaches to classical studies:

Woolf crafts her Greek education seeking out and attracted to the possibilities of counter narratives which would have allowed her mother to break the bonds of “the angel in the house” and live; sources for an alternative social system which would have potentially offered her half-sister Stella another option than sacrifice to the marital bed; and a world conceived upon values of “both/and” thinking rather than an insistence on hierarchies, competition and jealousies, which quite possibly could have saved Thoby, and, perhaps, her nephew Julian, but certainly Jacob Flanders, the character, in Jacob’s Room based upon her brother from a heroic but needless death. (54)

This is, however, one of many tantalizing claims made by the book that require further explanation. Another example is Mills’ discussion of
how Woolf took a cue from Harrison in reinterpreting Greek myths to emphasize goddess figures in Night and Day, and in alluding to ritual structures in Jacob’s Room, Mrs Dalloway and The Waves, which needed further analysis (as well as consideration of how this interpretation builds on the earlier analyses of matriarchies in Woolf’s work, such as Marcus, Barrett, Cramer and Carpentier).

The most convincing pair of chapters explores parallels between feminist essays by the pair. In a “cross-reading” of A Room of One’s Own and Harrison’s “Scientiae Sacrae Fames” (1913) Mills convincingly argues that this “remains one of the earlier articulations” of Woolf’s position that a woman needs financial support and a room of her own if she is to write (110), also showing that, for both, the solution lay in greater collaboration between the sexes: Harrison’s “binocular vision of the two sexes” prefiguring Woolf’s championing of androgyny in Room (127). Mills traces parallels between their pacifist politics by “cross-reading” Harrison’s 1915 “Epilogue to the War: Peace and Patriotism” with Three Guineas. Many intriguing points of correspondence emerge. Harrison, like Woolf, sees education as the root cause of war, attacking a competitive approach to learning that teaches children from an early age to hurt and demean others (147). Both criticize the professional men of their day for supporting war and both questioned patriotism, Harrison championing the “world citizen” as Woolf was later to declare that “as a woman I have no country” (136), while also recognizing that there were positive ways of loving one’s country and culture. This chapter also helpfully sets Harrison and Woolf in a longitudinal context, as forerunners of the academic discipline of Peace Studies and as contributors to the woman’s international peace movement.

The final chapter gives credit to Harrison for forging connections between Russia and Bloomsbury, through her support of Russian émigrés in Paris. Mills discusses Harrison’s relatively neglected translation of The Life of the Archpriest Avvakum, by Himself, which the Woolfs published at Hogarth, and suggests that Woolf developed a more nuanced view of the Russians as, through Harrison’s aegis, she began translating Russian texts and making a deeper study of the language.

This book will be effective in re-opening discussion about Woolf’s relationship with Harrison, both for the research it presents and also for the suggestions it leaves to be explored.

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describes what she sees as the “tendrils of similarity” between the newspaper’s inaccuracies and shifting logic. Daugherty cleverly British establishment—for its sympathy with the South and catalogs pamphlet, Stephen castigates the radical thinker, many years before Virginia Stephen was born. In this Study, is a conversation that Virginia Woolf would surely be pleased to see herself was “uncomfortably and ambiguously engaged” (xii), but it Reader the wide-ranging essays of was born” (x). This assessment rings true, as does their conclusion that conflicts, multiple and discontinuous.”

But several essays also take issue with the consistency of Woolf’s stance as an “outsider.” Elsa Hogberg’s convincing essay “Modernism Across the Commonwealth: Virginia Woolf’s and Arundhati Roy’s Critique of Empire” argues that Roy and Woolf, in their stance as “outsiders,” take positions that challenge traditional historiography, that criticize imperialism, and that “explore the capacity of intimacy to unsettle the discourses and hierarchies of empire” (117). Paula Maggio, in “Woolf Blogging, Blogging Woolf,” makes the point that the blogosphere has the capacity to draw marginalized populations into shared discourse, and that Woolf, who saw herself as a marginalized outsider, did the same in Three Guineas “when she challenged women to unite in opposition to the patriarchy” (236).

The editors of this excellent collection—Helen Wussow and Mary Ann Pauls focus on war, adopt an ironic tone, use ample footnotes, and—as a conscious stylistic device—express “outright anger and its strategic transmutation into piled-on quotations.” Perhaps most important, in both books the writer positions the authorial self as an “outsider,” a stance adopted by Leslie Stephen in many of his other works, too.

As similar as the disciplinary perspectives are, the collections, as the titles indicate, differ in emphases. The “history, philosophy, and achievements” (Rosner 11) of the entire Bloomsbury Group are the subjects of The Cambridge Companion; Woolf is at the center of Virginia Woolf’s Bloomsbury. The Cambridge Companions tend to be introductory, and that is true of Rosner’s Companion. Indeed, its price and format—it is in paperback—make the book a practical and useful addition to class reading lists on Woolf and Bloomsbury. The Companion’s organization into five clusters—the origins, everyday life, ‘s organization into five clusters—the origins, everyday life, politics, arts, and reflections—helps to orient readers’ understanding of the book’s contents, and its continuing reverberations. With its members’ multifarious interests, Bloomsbury as a group was, to use the language of today, interdisciplinary, and so too are the approaches in both collections: biographical, geographical, theatrical, visual, psychoanalytical, ecological, historical, political, artistic, and of course literary.

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The editors of this excellent collection—Helen Wussow and Mary Ann Gillies—sum up these contradictions quite aptly when they remark on Virginia Woolf’s sense of superiority and confusion when it came to interacting with Jews, people of color, servants and even writers from other countries. As they put it, perhaps we are witnessing the “discomfiture” of an “insider who defines herself as an outsider yet feels challenged by those who are truly outside the world in which she was born” (x). This assessment rings true, as does their conclusion that the wide-ranging essays of Virginia Woolf and the Commonwealth Reader remind us that we are all engaged in “Writing In/Against” the “Commonwealth” of letters. This activity is one in which Woolf herself was “uncomfortably and ambiguously engaged” (xii), but it is a conversation that Virginia Woolf would surely be pleased to see continue, as it does every year at the Annual Virginia Woolf Conference.

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REVIEW

Virginia Woolf’s Bloomsbury, Volume 1: Aesthetic Theory and Literary Practice

edited by Gina Potts and Lisa Shahriari. Houndmills, Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 188 pages. $100.00 Cloth.

The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group


In her essay, “Bloomsbury and Empire,” Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina writes that the “most striking trend in Bloomsbury studies in recent years has been to move away from looking inward at the group’s personal relationships to examining the wider context of the world they occupied” (Rosner 112). These two collections, The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group, edited by Victoria Rosner, and Virginia Woolf’s Bloomsbury, edited by Gina Potts and Lisa Shahriari, bear out this observation. The twelve essays in The Cambridge Companion and the twelve in Virginia Woolf’s Bloomsbury look both “back to” and “beyond” (Potts and Shahriari ix) Bloomsbury—at its beginnings, its wider contexts, and its continuing reverberations. With its members’ multifarious interests, Bloomsbury as a group was, to use the language of today, interdisciplinary, and so too are the approaches in both collections: biographical, geographical, theatrical, visual, psychoanalytical, ecological, historical, political, artistic, and of course literary.

This review highlights the “back and beyond” perspectives of both collections, but also “outside” and “within.” In the first half of the review I look at the way the essays in the Companion consider 1. Bloomsbury’s relationships with other periods and groups, 2. the relationships within Bloomsbury itself, and 3. Bloomsbury’s continuing reverberations. After a brief interlude, in which I consider two sets of essays from both collections that overlap with one another, I move onto Woolf’s Bloomsbury and address the essays’ explorations of 1. biography, 2. Woolf’s writing process, and 3. “beyond Bloomsbury.”

Katherine Mullin’s “Victorian Bloomsbury,” the first essay in The Cambridge Companion, sets the tone for several of the other pieces in this collection. Mullin reminds us that Bloomsbury did not simply revolt against their Victorian predecessors; “Victorian allegiances” continued through the writing, especially the life writing, of Bloomsbury members.
Domestic Bloomsbury,” she analyzes the rooms in Woolf’s writing as physical spaces shaped the cultural imagination of modernists (57) in Benjamin Harvey’s “Woolf, Fry and the Psycho-Aesthetics of Solidity” (23). Other essays in Rosner’s collection speak to the complicated relationships between Bloomsbury and its complex affiliations and influences. Ann Banfield’s “Cambridge Bloomsbury” examines both Cambridge’s contributions to Bloomsbury—politics and philosophy—but more interestingly, Bloomsbury’s contributions to Cambridge—the society of women, the visual arts, and “the wider world” (34). Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina’s “Bloomsbury and Empire” emphasizes that though the Bloomsbury Group rejected most of what empire stood for (113), “their distaste for empire did not reach the level of the embrace of the colonized” (124). Brenda R. Silver’s “Intellectual Crossings and Reception” investigates the problematic nature of Bloomsbury’s role in disseminating the works of Freud throughout the English-speaking world. Silver argues that one cannot ignore Bloomsbury’s position as an elite coterie and that, in general, one cannot separate the “intellectual crossings” of her title from cultural class.

Several essays in The Cambridge Companion focus more on the working relationships within the Bloomsbury Group itself. Mary Ann Caws’s “Pens and Paintbrushes” examines the interrelations essential to Bloomsbury’s creative work. Painters wrote, and writers were keenly interested in the visual (131). In “The Bloomsbury Group and the Book Arts,” Helen Southworth also delves into the interactions between authors and artists, and notes the way “book art” in particular “creates a conversation involving writer, illustrator, editor, publisher, and reader” (144). Vesna Goldsworthy’s “The Bloomsbury Narcissus” considers the “daunting ocean” (183) of life writing by the Bloomsbury Group, about themselves and about each other, and how “it would now take more than a year to read a year’s production of Bloomsbury studies” (183). Like Goldsworthy’s essay, “Bloomsbury’s Afterlife” by Regina Marler addresses legacies, namely Bloomsbury’s reputation through the decades. Starting in the 1910s, Bloomsbury was a “private joke” (217). In the 1920s, Bloomsbury was greeted with derision, and then, as the decades moved along, was regarded as “increasingly irrelevant” (218). Marler also discusses the reputation of individual members, such as Lytton Strachey, whose standing, having been the most elevated, collapsed the quickest and has never recovered (219). In “Bloomsbury as Queer Subculture,” Christopher Reed addresses Bloomsbury’s sexual identity. Reed’s attacks feminists for “normativizing” (84) the Bloomsberries, or for straitjacketing their sexuality into two categories, hetero- and homosexual. He instead argues on behalf of Bloomsbury as a “queer subculture,” a “society of buggers,” one disrupts not just heteronormativity, but the very dichotomy of either/or, gay or straight (71). Christina Froula in “War, Peace, and Internationalism” seeks to rescue Bloomsbury from the misperception that the Group was disinterested in questions of war and peace. It is wrong, as historians do, to fail to make mention of their work, when so many Bloomsbury associates—such as John Maynard Keynes, and Leonard and Virginia Woolf, to name a few—engaged in public discourse on war and peace (97).

At least two pairs of essays overlap between the two collections. Morag Shiach contributed the essay “Domestic Bloomsbury” to Rosner’s volume and another, “London Rooms,” to Potts’ and Shahriari’s. Laura Marcus’s “Bloomsbury Aesthetics” appears in Rosner’s collection, and Benjamin Harvey’s “Woolf, Fry and the Psycho-Aesthetics of Solidity” is included in Potts and Shahriari. Where Shiach describes the way physical spaces shaped the cultural imagination of modernists (57) in “Domestic Bloomsbury,” she analyzes the rooms in Woolf’s writing as sites of memory and identity, integrity and security, and also, perhaps, as something more threatening (51) in “London Rooms.” Marcus devotes most of “Bloomsbury Aesthetics” to Roger Fry and his “commitment to enduring aesthetic and formal principles” (163). One of Fry’s “critical touchstones” was a “fidelity” to the “essence” of objects (164), and it is this essence, in terms of solidity, to which Harvey closely attends in his fascinating essay. He looks at the “solid” as an aesthetic concept in the writing of Fry and Woolf, and links it to the “ psycho-aesthetics of solid waste”—as in excrement—in a brilliant reading of Woolf’s short story “Solid Objects” (113).

Potts and Shahriari launch their collection with a biographical look backward—a transcript of a speech that Cecil Woolf gave at the 2004 Virginia Woolf conference that inspired this collection, and which was also the theme of the conference: “Back to Bloomsbury.” I was present at this speech, and I clearly remember how Woolf kept his audience mesmerized as he answered a question he is often asked, “What was she like?” (1). Beth Rigell Daugherty attempts, one might say, to answer one part of this question in “Young writers might do worse,” “where she shows the profound impact Anne Thackeray Ritchie had on her niece Virginia. In Ritchie, Daugherty writes, the young Virginia Stephen could “see a professional woman of letters” (22). In “My own ghost met me” Maggie Humm moves ahead in time, to the final decade of Woolf’s life, when Woolf and her friends took repeated photos of each other and thus revealed the “need for a constant visual discourse of friendship” (86). Here one is reminded that Woolf would have done well in our age of Instagram.

Though Suzanne Raït’s “The Voyage Back” could just as easily fit into the “biography” category above, it also reveals Woolf’s writing process. For Woolf, revising and rewriting meant “voyaging back,” and this mental journeying made her vulnerable; she risked “the onslaught of loss” (16). On a happier note, Caroline Marie’s “Sense of Self and Sense of Place in Orlando” reminds us of how immersed Woolf was in the popular culture of her day, starting when she was a young girl. Like other modernists, Woolf borrowed not only from stage practices, such as pantomime, but also from the technology that made these practices possible, including the magic lantern and the “epidiascope,” for her own modernist techniques of “looking through & over” (79). Makiko Minow-Pinkney addresses the importance of place in Woolf’s writing process. In her psychoanalytic-inflected essay “Sketches of Carlyle’s House by Two Visitors,” Minow-Pinkney compares the young Woolf to a Japanese contemporary novelist, Sōseki Natsume. Woolf and Natsume never met each other, but through their multiple visits to Carlyle’s home in Chelsea, which occurred roughly at the same time, they both questioned the universal subjectivity that one finds in dominant male-authored literary texts (167).

In an essay that clearly takes the reader “beyond Bloomsbury,” Kristin Czarneczi compares two other contemporaneous subjects, Bloomsbury and the Harlem Renaissance, in “Comparative Modernism.” Though the paths of these two groups never converged, Bloomsbury and the Harlem Renaissance shared remarkable similarities, including an outpouring of creative expression, a politics and aesthetics of resistance, an ongoing and sometimes controversial legacy, and female leading figures: Woolf and Zora Neale Hurston. Closer to Bloomsbury, Anna Bogen considers the relationship between London and Cambridge in “Mapping the Ghostly City.” In this interesting essay, Bogen compares Cambridge and London as they were represented in contemporary popular fiction to the Oxbridge and London of A Room of One’s Own. In short, contemporary popular novelists demarcate Cambridge and London; in Room, on the other hand, Woolf breaks down the division that university literature had taken for granted (45). Elisa Kay Sparks’ “Leonard and Virginia’s London Library” is an examination of the real city, or more specifically, of more than a dozen London guide books and maps that were part of the Woolfs’ working library. Sparks describes the way these books, which Woolf began to acquire when she was the young Virginia Stephen, are the basis for the London that appears in Woolf’s writing (67). Finally, Christina Alt’s “Virginia Woolf and Changing Conceptions of Nature” takes us beyond the urban and into the natural—or more exactly, into the way the changing practices of natural history can be seen within Woolf’s own work. From gathering and preserving zoological specimens, a practice which fell into disrepute following the publication of Darwin’s Origin of Species (124-25), Woolf came to embrace the...
observation of living organisms (127). In short, Alt emphasizes that Woolf’s writing was very much informed by the scientific practices of her day.

The Cambridge Companion and Virginia Woolf’s Bloomsbury bring together invaluable insights and understandings about Bloomsbury in its own time and its reception up to the present day. Two small points: first, both collections could have used more careful copyediting. Secondly, Woolf’s Bloomsbury could have used a stronger introduction and a more clearly defined theoretical framework. Otherwise, all 23 contributors present varied, well-researched and engaging perspectives on Bloomsbury and Woolf in Bloomsbury. Building on the invaluable work of S. P. Rosenbaum, the contributors themselves leave a legacy for other scholars on Bloomsbury. They are evidence that Bloomsbury will reverberate in the years to come. For now, I eagerly await Virginia Woolf’s Bloomsbury: Volume II.

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REVIEWS


Modernist literature’s strained relationship to feminist studies in gender and sexuality is well documented. Despite the arduous and abundant work of excavation and re-visioning of the last three decades, feminism and modernism are still terms at odds with each other—often relegated to the status of subfield or substituted by the less threatening category of “women authors.” In this light, Pease’s and Ziarek’s respective analyses of modernist literature and feminism are a welcome contribution to the field of modernist studies. Of special interest to readers of the Miscellany is the part played by Virginia Woolf in each analysis.

Pease’s monograph opens with a useful introductory chapter addressing a peculiar category seldom identified with literary modernism: boredom. The impetus for the book is the remark that “Anglo-American modernist literature is full of bored characters” (1). But the descriptive character of this observation is deftly turned into a questioning of what boredom means in the context of literature and whether boredom can be resituated as a theoretical tool to analyze its possible shaping of British literature in the period 1900-1940. This refocusing of the lenses of literary analysis recasts the discussion of modernist literature from a concern with authorship, markets, and publishing history—particularly fertile in the last decade of modernist studies—to what Raymond Williams terms “structures of feeling” and, therefore, the larger and unshapely field of affect theory. Pease begins her discussion with a history of the qualities associated with boredom since antiquity and the Middle Ages, the absorption of the term into English, and its modern rise during the culture of the Enlightenment in conjunction with what Michel Foucault identifies as the practice of the self. Her inclusion of a wide range of discourses is commendable. She addresses the relationship of boredom to subjectivity—from Kant, Freudian and contemporary psychoanalysis, nihilism, and Heidegger to sociology, medical studies, and the history of women’s movements and education—which she relates throughout to different modernist women’s texts. But the scope of the analysis, though highly relevant to her discussion, is not always brought back to her central claim that “the representation of boredom can function as political dissent” (8), and the different discourses often remain dissonant to one other, rather than being put in conversation. This limitation also affects the rest of the book though it does not invalidate its important project and the ambitious engagement with a broad range of discourses.

The following chapters focus on case studies of male-authored female boredom and fiction by May Sinclair, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf. Chapter 2, titled “Overcoming Nihilism: Male-Authored Female Boredom,” addresses both canonical and popular works that have received little critical attention. Pease discusses the independent heroines of Arnold Bennett’s Hilda Lessways (1911), E. M. Forster’s A Room with a View (1908) and A Passage to India (1924), H. G. Wells’s Ann Veronica (1908), D. H. Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover (1928), and Robert Hichens’ bestseller The Garden of Allah (1904). She reads these narratives as presenting “structural similarities that further define the difficult task modernist women authors had in representing and challenging ideas about female identities through boredom” (38). The “nihilistic outlook early in their stories” is interpreted by Pease as being functional to the setting up of “narrative tension that must be resolved through the action of the plot” (39), thus gendering the literary structure through a passive/active paradigm in which boredom appears as a problem to be solved by the (male) author’s narrative construction.

Though strongly connected to other representatives of modernist writing culture, May Sinclair has not been the subject of extensive scholarship. Pease’s discussion in Chapter 3 of the impotence and boredom of the female protagonists of Sinclair’s three most acclaimed novels (The Three Sisters [1914], Mary Olivier: A Life [1919], and The Life and Death of Harriett Frean [1922]) shows with remarkable perception how their apparently “passive” attitude—easily read as a sign of escapist behavior—can in fact be analyzed as a sign of the political. The “morbid inactivity” of middle- and upper-class women is read through Freudian psychoanalysis as a defense mechanism against feelings of aggression or repressed desire and thus a marker of the constraints upon women’s lives, but also an implicit critique against the “waste” of bored women’s time proposed by capitalism’s utilitarian ideologies (here Adorno’s theory on subjectivity in “On Lyric Poetry and Society” would have offered beneficial points of development to Pease’s argument).

Chapter 4 and 5 focus on Dorothy Richardson’s Pilgrimage and Virginia Woolf’s The Voyage Out in relation to narrative style—boredom as “frustration of meaning” (79) in Pilgrimage and the “yawning gaps” (100) in the narrative of The Voyage Out. But the narrative analysis of these chapters is quite limited and does not hold up to its promises. Instead, Pease recur to the boredom experienced by the authors, especially Woolf, without elaborating on the relationship between biographical authorship and textual reading. The brief Conclusion wraps up the discussion by including the mention of canonical feminist works by Betty Friedan, Shari Benstock, Bonnie Kime Scott, Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Rita Felski, Marianne DeKoven, Mary Poovey and Lauren Berlant but its minimal engagement with feminist scholarship is somehow at odds with the objective of the book. Why leave these works at the very end of the discussion? Why not address Berlant’s work more extensively, given her important contribution to feminist and affect theory? All in all, Pease’s book offers many points of reflection of boredom and modernism in relation to women’s lives but the feminist potential of the enquiry underwriting her project (the gendering of boredom, its disruptive potential in relation to female subjectivity, and boredom as the subversion of a ‘waste’ of time gendered in the feminine), is not developed in full.

Ewa Płonowska Ziarek’s book provides an overdue analysis of feminist aesthetics, which she discusses in relation to the work of Virginia Woolf and Nella Larsen. As she points out in her introduction, feminist aesthetics is constrained by the double impossibility of the term: the view of aesthetics as an “apolitical” and “seemingly gender-neutral” category places it at odds with feminist politics. Thus her investigation is posited as revolving between the possibilities and impossibilities of
feminist aesthetics which, despite their apparent contradiction, open new avenues of understanding for the political. Ziarek’s discussion does not shy away from the controversial nature of her project, which aims to recover, in Arendtian fashion, the revolutionary potential of acts of literature habitually read through the framework of melancholia and re-envision the apparent opposition of “material injuries and experimental forms” and “aesthetic form/political content” (3).

Ziarek’s study is divided into three parts. In part I, she addresses the relationship between the political theory of revolution and female subjectivity by rereading the suffragettes’ demand for the right to vote as “the right to revolt” in light of Hannah Arendt’s theory of revolution and Theodor Adorno’s aesthetic theory, which are then set in conversation with discussions of mourning and melancholia across different discourses (psychoanalysis, modernist aesthetic theory, and narrative theory). In the context of women’s writing, melancholia is an important framework to articulate loss and finitude, yet one that also risks “paralyzing” the female subject. Ziarek moves at ease across different theories of melancholia and brings together disparate studies on melancholia, race, and psychoanalysis (especially Kristeva) to show how the historical praxis responds to the crisis and “death of art” (49) identified by German philosophies (Hegel, Marx, and Adorno) through an “aesthetics of potentiality” (86). This section delves more on the theoretical framework of her discussion but also brings it to bear on Woolf’s To the Lighthouse (1927) and A Room of One’s Own (1929) and Nella Larsen’s Quicksand (1928) and Passing (1929).

In part II, this discussion focuses on the problematic of materiality, violence, and form. Taking its bearing from Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler’s critique of the form/matter divide, and specifically the discursive constitution of bodies, Ziarek addresses the problematic of bodily violence in relation to sexual/racial differences by recourse to Foucault’s theory of biopower and Agamben’s articulation of the biopolitics of bare life via Adorno’s dialectics. The author brings together “two seemingly unrelated social phenomena: the hunger strike of British suffragettes and the struggle against antiblack racism on the one hand, and the formal experimentation of modern literature, on the other hand” to show how “the seemingly neutral form/matter opposition is at stake in both feminist political struggles and aesthetic interventions, and, therefore, that matter and form are both aesthetic and political categories” (187). Ziarek’s overview of different political and poststructuralist theories of biopolitics is ambitious and promising in its attempt to rescue modern literature and history from the confines of a strictly literary and historical reading, but this section does not fulfill its promises. As readers, we are left to ponder the implications of Ziarek’s critique. While “the relationship between female embodiment, aesthetic form, and political violence” (123) is confronted by the author, as announced in the introduction to this section, it is not developed any further. Where does this confrontation lead us? A new critical approach to the reading of literature? A different conceptualization of the politics of the body? Which transformations and possibilities are being opened up through this critique?

Part III is dedicated to Nella Larsen’s aesthetics and her rejection/reworking of racialized violent language, as well as the language of commodification, to provide a new form for a political aesthetics of black female subjectivity and experimental art. Although shorter in its breath, this section contains an important materialist discussion of the discourse of racialization and the politics of art, which resituates Larsen’s work within a complex web of discursive relationships.

Ziarek’s study offers many points of reflection and should be commended for her attempt to move the debate from a new historical perspective to one that is oriented toward political and philosophical debates. At the same time, the individual sections do not always answer the important questions that Ziarek raises in her introduction—the relation between material injury and experimental literary form does not pursue the “feminine aesthetics of potentiality” that it announces any further. This should not be read as a negative critique: Ziarek’s work is a significant contribution to the field of modernist and feminist studies, hopefully spurring a new approach to this field of research.

We are grateful to both Allison Pease and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek for work that will be of great value to modernists, feminists, and Woolfians.

Alessandra Capperdoni
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REVIEW
MARRIAGE, PROPERTY AND WOMEN’S NARRATIVES

What has Marriage, Property and Women’s Narratives, which is included in Palgrave Macmillan’s “The New Middle Ages” series, and largely involves medieval women and property, have to do with Virginia Woolf, apart from, perhaps, evoking thoughts of Orlando’s immediate ancestors? Actually there’s a great deal more to consider, particularly in chapter six, “Virginia Woolf’s Women, Trapped and Freed,” of this seven-chapter book. As Livingston demonstrates, drawing on her background as an “investment advisor” (5), many of Woolf’s works deal with property, its ownership, and its inheritance — and particularly its ownership and inheritance by women. In fact, Livingston credits “the scores of women who were my investment clients for over twenty years and made me realize that Woolf’s question “Why are women poor” is one worth trying to answer” (xiv). Woolf herself was not poor, but was concerned with the implications of that question in A Room of One’s Own, and she might not be surprised to find this sadly enduring question of importance today. It is worthwhile to remember how proud Woolf was to pay for things with her own money: “I think with pride that 7 people depend, largely, upon my hand writing on a sheet of paper…Its not scribbling; its keeping 7 people fed & housed” (Diary 3: 221).

What Livingston seeks to know is “how historians have framed the legal rights of women” (6) and the first chapter deals with the vast, ancient seas between laws to pass property on to men, like primogeniture, and laws designed to protect a woman’s family’s property, like a dower. A widow might have, allegedly, the use of property and land under usufruct, but as Livingston matter-of-factly notes, “Selfish children could restrict the ability of a widow to control her property, as could a second husband” (10). It is salutary to think of the Wife of Bath, with both her money and her freedom to travel (as long as she was traveling for putatively religious reasons), but the realities Livingston details for non-fictional women are both harder and long-lived. Exploring the parallels and split between fact and fiction, Livingston finds that women writers are bound together by being either “fiercely realistic” or “transform[ing] their reality through fiction” (3). In supporting the first line, Livingston does close readings of the letters of Heloise (who, in her first letter to Abelard, “equates marriage with chains, preferring instead to be his concubine” 35); the lais of Marie de France (35); and Margery Kempe’s autobiography (63). Moving from medieval women (chapters 3 and 4) to the fiction of Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, and George Eliot (chapter 5), Livingston suggests that “[w]hat happened 900 years ago…has had a very long and profound effect” (6), the centrality of the marriage plot being used to “subvert its traditional authority” (75), particularly in Austen’s use of female character who are “almost caricatures” (87); and, Eliot’s ever-painful constraining of Dorothea Brook Casaubon Ladislaw.

In her chapter on Woolf, Livingston deals with A Room of One’s Own, Three Guineas, Mrs. Dalloway, and Orlando. “In regard to women and property,” says Livingston,
Woolf argues that although things have changed they have actually stayed the same. Thus, in her nonfiction she can argue for women’s right to work and own property, while at the same time she can portray her fictional female characters as utterly lacking in the capabilities to carry out this agenda. (100)

Culturally, surely, England—like other countries—takes awhile for de facto law to catch up with freshly passed laws de jure. While flourishing in her own individual talent, Woolf was also in many ways, including as a writer, bound by—and happy in—tradition.

But, importantly, Livingston reminds us that Woolf does not float the £500-a-year figure lightly in A Room of One’s Own, and, acknowledging Aphra Behn, Woolf “instructs her readers that it is even better to earn five hundred pounds a year” than to inherit it (102, emphasis added). Livingston’s analysis of Mrs. Dalloway is compelling and engaging, particularly where Clarissa and Peter are concerned, but it is marred by Livingston’s mystifying determination to find in (of all places) Grizzle’s howls Woolf’s own views about Elizabeth Dalloway:

She cares more for Grizzle than for anything else in the world and would rather be in the country with him than at her mother’s dinner party. Grizzle’s crying vocalizes Woolf’s own feelings about Elizabeth’s inevitable end. (113)

I find the reasoning here not to be persuasive. (What about Elizabeth sailing along London’s streets in that bus, like a figurehead on a warship?)

The equation of female inability to own property with being dead is at the heart of Livingston’s discussion of Orlando, as it is at the heart of the novel. The truth of the matter, concludes Livingston, is that “Woolf recognized that the bonds of history could not be broken simply by a legal change” (120). My sense is that Woolf recognized far more than that: any legal change, though it might be current in a contemporary court, would take a very long time, if ever, to catch up or be implemented even in a fictional England.

As best as I can determine, Woolf herself was involved in a courtroom appearance only once, when she and Leonard, together with a couple of other Tavistock Square neighbors, filed a lawsuit in 1929 against their diagonal neighbors in Woburn Square, the Imperial Hotel, whose jazz band was troublesome at night. Woolf remarked in her diary on the formality, and theatricality, of the proceeding. The courtroom had, predictably, an admirable manly atmosphere—schoolboys come to the responsibility they seemed; all so aquiline & definite under their frizzled grey wigs. Then the Judge came in. We rose. He bowed. He looked superhumanly sage, dignified, sad; the wig again cutting off his forehead & accentuating the deep reflective eyes—a sallow, sodden wearied face; so intent that he was monosyllabic—could not afford to open his mouth unnecessarily; merely nodded. All was over in 10 minutes I suppose. I felt the stress of it all; that man sitting there intent under his canopy in the small crowded court, never dropping a word, till 4 in the afternoon (D3 273).

Her eye for detail might be called Dickensian; her appreciation of circumstances both humorous and sober. Finally, the patriarchal word was pronounced: the Woolfs and friends won their case, and the jazz club was instructed to curtail the sound level and lateness of its thoroughly modern music.

Yet Woolf’s most famous courtroom appearance is not factual, but fictitious, and self-created. For her to be a writer, the Angel in the House had to go. “My excuse—if I were to be had up in a law court and charged with murder—would be that I acted in self-defence. If I had not killed her, she would have killed me” (“Professions for Women” 481). As she well knew, and as Livingston’s critical analysis echoes, “Even when the path is nominally open—when there is nothing to prevent a woman from being a doctor, a lawyer, a civil servant—there are many phantoms and obstacles, as I believe, looming in her way” (483). The phantoms are just as real as the obstacles, and more enduring.

Anne Margaret Daniel
The New School University

Works Cited
Woolf, Virginia. The Diary of Virginia Woolf.

Virginia Woolf Miscellany
Special Topics and Calls for Papers

CFP: Virginia Woolf Miscellany
Issue #90, Fall 2016
Special Topic: Woolf and Illness
Submissions Due: 15 July 2016 (date extended)
Guest Editor: Cheryl Hindrichs
Virginia Woolf’s 1926 essay “On Being Ill” questions why illness has failed to feature as a prime theme of literature, alongside love, battle, and jealousy. This issue of VWMS seeks contributions on Woolf’s exploration of illness in her life and work, as a paradigm for reexamining modernist literature and art, and its influence on subsequent writers. Topics might include questions such as: How does the literature of illness challenge or enhance theories of trauma, narrative ethics, and disability studies? How does Woolf’s focus on the politics and aesthetics of the ill body inform our understanding of the period, including in relation to Victorian values, in relation to the 1918-19 flu pandemic, and in relation to mechanized modernity’s drive toward professionalization and specialization? How has the contemporary literary landscape changed to contribute to the popularity of Woolf’s focus—from the success of the medical humanities to the proliferation of autopathographies? What might be inspiring or potentially problematic in Woolf’s theory of illness as a site for creative rebellion?

Send submissions of no more than 2500 words by 15 July 2016 to: Cheryl Hindrichs at cherylhindle@boisestate.edu

CFP: Virginia Woolf Miscellany
Issue #91, Spring 2017
Special Topic: Virginia Woolf, Bloomsbury, and the War to End War
Submissions Due: 30 September 2016
Guest Editor: Karen Levenback
This issue commemorates the advent of the Great War and its representation by Virginia Woolf and her friends and colleagues in Bloomsbury and beyond (even H.G. Wells, who wrote a 1914 pamphlet called The War that Will End War)—noncombatants, combatants, and conscientious objectors; writers of prose, poetry, and drama; fiction and memoirs; criticism, reviews, and social commentary; journalists, historians, philosophers, and humanists. Contributions need not necessarily involve work done during the war, but gauge the war’s ongoing effect on a wide range of topics and perspectives: cultural, socio-economic, modernist, feminist, to name the most obvious. How did war-consciousness, for example, affect views of mass culture and consumerism? Articles on other topics (e.g., constructions of self and identity in wartime, and post-war aesthetics) are also welcome.

Send enquiries and submissions of not more than 2500 words by 1 August 2016 to: Karen Levenback at karenlevenback@att.net

CFP: Virginia Woolf Miscellany
Issue #92, Fall 2017
Special Topic: Virginia Woolf and Indigenous Literatures
Submissions Due: 31 March 2017 (date extended)
Editor: Kristin Czarnecki
This issue of VWMS seeks essays that consider Woolf’s oeuvre in dialogue with works by Native American, First Nations, Australian, and New Zealander authors, among others. What kind of dialogue emerges when placing Woolf’s writings alongside those of indigenous writers? How might indigenous literatures enhance interpretations of Woolf’s modernist, feminist, and pacifist poetics? How might such comparisons affect or inform understandings of subjectivity in women’s lives and literature, and the interconnections between narrative innovation and socio-political activism? Does Woolf’s ecological vision align with those of
indigenous writers responding to threats of global destruction and mass extinctions? Could such comparative and intersectional work chip away at the boundaries still often imposed upon literary studies—the “West” versus the “Rest”? Other approaches are welcome.

Please send submissions of no more than 2500 words, including notes and works cited, in the latest version of Word by 31 March 2017 to: Kristin Czarnecki kristin_czarnecki@georgetowncollege.edu.

CFP: Virginia Woolf Miscellany Issue #93, Spring/Summer 2018
Special Topic: Virginia Woolf and Biofiction
Submission Due: 15 July 2017
Guest Editors: Todd Avery and Michael Lackey

Biofiction, literature that names its protagonist after an actual historical figure, has become a dominant literary form in recent years. Margaret Atwood, J.M. Coetzee, Joyce Carol Oates, Colum McCann, Colm Tóibín, Peter Carey, and Hilary Mantel are just a few luminaries who have authored spectacular biographical novels and won major awards, including the Pulitzer Prize, the Man Booker Prize, the National Book Critics Circle Award, the PEN Faulkner Award, and the National Book Award. With regard to the rise and legitimization of biofiction, Michael Cunningham’s The Hours is a crucial text not just because it won the Pulitzer Prize in fiction but also because it features Virginia Woolf as a character. Since the publication of The Hours in 1998, there have been numerous biographical novels about Woolf, including Gillian Freeman’s But Nobody Lives in Bloomsbury (2006), Susan Sellers’ Vanessa and Virginia (2009), Priya Parmar’s Vanessa and her Sister (2015), Norah Vincent’s Adeline (2015), and Maggie Gee’s Virginia Woolf in Manhattan (2015). While there have been multiple novels about other historical figures, such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Emily Dickinson, Nat Turner, Eliza Lynch, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henry James, and Katherine Mansfield, it appears that Woolf has inspired the most and some of the best biographical novels.

This is ironic, because while Woolf is known for bending and blending genres, she was never able to imagine her way to the biographical novel—she certainly came close in Orlando, which is not a biographical novel because she does not name the protagonist Vita, and Flush, which fits the definition of a classical historical novel rather than a biographical novel. However, Woolf’s theoretical approach to imaginative biography (voiced especially in her essays “The New Biography” [1927] and “The Art of Biography” [1939], prompted by Harold Nicolson’s and Lytton Strachey’s contemporary biographical productions), encouraged writers to push the Victorian limits of the genre and explore new (“odd”) possibilities. Her discussions on the new directions and liberties that biography took at the beginning of the twentieth century has certainly paved the way for the current postmodernist literary genre of biofiction.

The Virginia Woolf Miscellany seeks submissions about Woolf, Bloomsbury, and biofiction. Questions to consider include: To what degree has Woolf’s work inspired aesthetic developments that led to the rise and legitimization of contemporary biofiction? What in Woolf’s life makes her particularly suited as a protagonist of biofiction? How does contemporary biofiction give us new access to Woolf, her family and friends, and Bloomsbury? How do contemporary biofictions challenge and reimagine traditional ways of thinking about Woolf’s life and works? How is Woolf’s work and life used in biofiction to advance ways of thinking that even Woolf could not have imagined? Is it ethical to use Woolf’s life in a contemporary novel? Can an author simply make things up about an actual historical figure such as Woolf? And is it ethical for an author to alter facts about a person’s life in order to communicate what is considered a more important “truth”? These are just a few questions the rise of biofictions about Woolf raise. Please feel free to generate and answer your own set of questions.

Submissions should be no longer than 2500 words. Send inquiries and submissions to Michael Lackey lacke010@morris.umn.edu or Todd Avery Todd_Avery@uml.edu by 15 July 2017.

CFP: Virginia Woolf Miscellany Issue #94, Fall 2018
Special Topic: Almost a Century: Reading Jacob’s Room
Submission Due: 1 March 2018
Guest Editor: Alexandra Deluise

This issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany invites contributions focused on aspects of Jacob’s Room. Suggested topics include, but are not limited to: modernism and the structural form of the novel; the critical reception of the novel; Woolf’s elusive narrator; themes of loss and absence; the use of gaps or omission to say what cannot be written in print; nature and the outdoors; the portrayal of Greece in this and other works by the Bloomsbury Group; sexuality (explicit or otherwise); and commentary on the Great War. Papers which consider Jacob’s Room in comparison to other novels by Woolf or her contemporaries are especially welcome. Please send enquiries and submissions no longer than 2500 words by 32 August 2017 to: Alexandra Deluise a.deluise@aol.com.
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The Virginia Woolf Society

The Society Column

I hope this new issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany finds everyone well—enjoying their spring semester, getting ready for the summer, and reading, teaching, researching, writing about, and reveling in the life and writings of Virginia Woolf!

We had our own bit of revelry recently as the International Virginia Woolf Society sponsored two fantastic panels at MLA in January in Austin, Texas. Our guaranteed panel was Mark Hussey’s Textual Woolf, which addressed two facets of our twenty-first-century literary world: how Woolf scholarship might benefit from today’s digital tools and from new scholarly editions of her works, and how to respond when our students download unreliable electronic texts of Woolf—some of which purposely contain typos and nonsense words and phrases in order to avoid copyright infringement.

The first panelist was John Young of Marshall University, whose paper “How Should One Read A Draft? Virginia Woolf and Moments of Publication” explored Woolf’s propensity to revise her drafts extensively the closer they moved toward publication. Thus John presents a “newly detailed way of understanding the act of publication in Woolf’s career.” Next, Benjamin Hagen of the University of South Dakota presented “Kindling Taste, or How I Tried Going Paperless and (Finally) Became a Common Reader.” A long commute by rail to and from work in his “Kindling Taste, or How I Tried Going Paperless and (Finally) Became a Common Reader.” A long commute by rail to and from work in his recent past inspired Benjamin to begin reading Woolf on his iPhone 6’s Kindle application. Focusing on electronic variants of “Kew Gardens,” his paper reflected on his experience of reading on the move “to highlight a tension between the scholarly mission of producing expensive academic editions of Woolf’s writings . . . and a 21st-century activity of common e-reading.” In “Macroanalyzing Woolf,” Jana Miller Usiskin of the University of Victoria, Canada, discussed her findings upon analyzing Woolf’s novels “algorithmically by using word correlation, weight, and frequency to find textual similarities and differences across Woolf’s corpus of texts.” Via such machine learning methods along with historical analysis, Jana and her colleague were able to track the ebb and flow of Woolf’s most pressing concerns in her novels, including space, war, and gender.

Maren Linett presided over Woolf and Disability, the IVWS’s joint panel with the Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession. The panel began with Louise Hornby from UCLA presenting “On Being Still: Woolf, Illness, and Immobility,” which examined moments in Woolf’s oeuvre, such as “On Being Ill,” when lying prone and still becomes an act of resistance and a means of greater objectivity. “Woolf casts the inability to move,” Louise states, “…as an epistemological position that dismantles traditional modes of embodied subjectivity.” In his paper “Labor Pains: Disability, Work, and Reproduction in To the Lighthouse,” Matt Frank of the University of West Georgia explored the intersection of disability with race, class, and gender in the novel, noting that the mental and physical disabilities of Mrs. McNab, who labors to render the Ramsays’ summer home fit for visitors, “are all materially and aesthetically productive.”

Because one of her panelists had to bow out, Maren presented on the panel as well. In “Deformity in Virginia Woolf’s The Years,” part of a larger project on disability in Woolf, Maren argues that two types of deformity arise in the novel: “a spiritual deformity that comes from participating too eagerly in patriarchal capitalist culture, and an artistic deformity that characterizes late modernism.” She finds the character Sara, with a spinal curvature leaving one shoulder higher than the other, “dissociated from the former, paradoxically because her disability casts her out of the mainstream of that culture; but...associated with the latter, indeed serving as the fulcrum around which Woolf explores and critiques modernism’s compromises with history as Europe marches back toward war.”

On Saturday, January 9th, a group of Wooflians gathered for a lively Society dinner in Austin at Fonda San Miguel, a fabulous venue consistently named one of the best Mexican restaurants in the United States. Sixteen of us enjoyed conversation, laughter, and, of course margaritas, tacos, enchiladas, and never-ending bowls of chips and salsa while surrounded by colorful art and décor.

We now eagerly look forward to Woolfian events in the spring, including the second annual Angelica Garnett Essay Prize for Undergraduates. Essays can be on any topic pertaining to the writings of Virginia Woolf, between 2,000 and 2,500 words in length, including notes and works cited, with an original title of the entrant’s choosing. Essays will be judged by the officers of the International Virginia Woolf Society: Kristin Czarnecki, President; Ann Martin, Vice-President; Alice Keane, Secretary-Treasurer; and Drew Shannon, Historian-Bibliographer. The winner will receive $200 and have the essay published in the Virginia Woolf Miscellany. Please send essays to Kristin Czarnecki, <kristin_czarnecki@georgetowncollege.edu>, in the latest version of Word. All entries must be received by June 6th, 2016. To receive an entry form, please also contact Kristin.

Here’s wishing all of you a wonderful, safe, happy, and productive summer!

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