TO THE READERS:

The Board of Trustees of the Virginia Woolf Society elected the following new officers at their December meeting in New York:

President: Mitchell A. Leaska
Secretary: Grace Radin - Treasurer: Louise DeSalvo

For the first time since its creation in 1975, the Society has requested a renewal of dues. The new, increased rates will be $8 for regular members, $3 for students. Membership, which includes a subscription to Virginia Woolf Miscellany, may be obtained by writing:

The Virginia Woolf Society - c/o Louise DeSalvo
1045 Oakland Court - Teaneck, New Jersey 07666

Dr. Frances Spalding informs us from England that an exhibition commemorating the centenary of Vanessa Bell's birth will be held at the Mappin Art Gallery, Sheffield, and at Portsmouth City Art Gallery and Museum from September to November of this year. The exhibition will display her most representative paintings, drawn from both public and private collections. The catalogue, with Dr. Spalding's introduction, can be ordered from James Hamilton, Keeper of the Mappin Art Gallery, Mappin Art Gallery, Weston Park, Sheffield 10, England. Dr. Spalding is completing a biography of Roger Fry scheduled for publication (Elek Books Inc.) in the winter of 1979-80.

The special Virginia Woolf issue of Twentieth Century Literature devoted to unpublished Woolf manuscripts will appear this fall. Readers can look forward to "Friendships Gallery," an untitled 44 page story Woolf wrote in 1906 describing a fictional woman's researches into the land tenure system of medieval England; some 50 pages of the Knole Orlando manuscript; an outline for a critical work, "Notes for Reading at Random;" and a transcription of "Anon" and "The Reader."

The spring issue of the Yale Review will include an unpublished introductory chapter to the book Woolf first called "Reading." Entitled "Byron and Mr. Briggs," the essay is edited and introduced by Ed Hungerford.

Morris Beja, retiring secretary of the Virginia Woolf Society, quotes in his last bulletin actor Dirk Bogarde's childhood recollection of Virginia Woolf. The passage occurs in A Postillion Struck By Lightning (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977). The novelist, named only in the index, is described walking by, "tall and thin, with a long, woolly, and fairish hair which looked rather wispy as if she had just washed it. She was carrying a walking stick and a bunch of wild flowers." Bogarde was seated with some of his friends on the bank of a Sussex pond and the lady had stopped to talk with them. Later, one boy, Perce, said that the woman was "from over there at Rodmell...They say she's a bit do-lally-tap...she writes books...Every time I sees meself down by that little pond-place along she comes wagging her stick and talking away to herself. Potty she is, so would anyone be living next to a graveyard."

In response to a reader's query, playwright Edward Albee writes Miscellany that he does not recall a specific instance in which her work influenced his own. He acknowledges, however, that he read her early and that she possesses a fairly good unconscious recall.

Finally let me thank those contributors, in particular the Graduate Division of Stanford University and Sonoma State's English Department, whose generosity has made this edition of Miscellany possible. New readers who wish to subscribe to future issues may do so by writing Professor J.J. Wilson, Department of English, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, California 94928. Donations toward printing and mailing costs remain our continuing need.

Lucio Ruotolo
Stanford University

Professor Dunbar recently found three letters—two by Virginia Woolf and the other a detailed description of her. Professor Dunbar's comments on these two letters occur in two so closely related articles that we have chosen to put them together.

VIRGINIA WOOLF TO T.S. ELIOT: Two Letters

But what about Eliot? Will he become 'Tom'? What happens with friendships undertaken at the age of 40? Do they flourish and live long?

(Sunday, 13 March 1921, in O. Bell, ed., Diary, II, 100)

The particular mixture of affection and distance which characterizes the relationship of Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot is evident in two letters by her to Eliot which I recently discovered in the Ella Strong Denison Library of Scripps College, Claremont, California. These letters illuminate their friendship as it had probably in November 1916, they are among the sources which reveal Virginia's attitude to Eliot after he had left The Hogarth Press, and, most important, they give insight into Virginia Woolf's attitude to the teaching of English at Universities and to the whole enterprise of literary criticism.

The first letter, dated 1930 by Quentin and Olivier Bell, is especially interesting. Jest ing and serious at once, Virginia Woolf plays upon the image of a "smoke screen" to suggest the complexity not only of her relation to Eliot but also of literary judgment itself.

Nov. 2nd [1930] 52 T [avistock] S [quare]

Yes, my dear Tom, come to tea on Thursday next, at four thirty, and you will find your ancient and attached Wolves very glad to see you. No, I'm not generally held to be ambiguous by the clients of the Hogarth Press—I give much pain and receive much abuse. But then Mr Eliot is not a candidate for publication—far from it; and I can't (no false modesty intended) suspect him of any very great concern about Mrs Woolf's opinion; and Mrs Woolf would have to dig among the roots of what it pleases her to call her mind were she to give it; and she is lazy; and catch Mr Eliot committing himself about Mrs Woolf in the same circumstances. But my smoke screen isn't made of doubts of you, but doubts of myself rather, and of the whole business of criticising prose or poetry. Perhaps in talk—but then we never meet. Not for a whole year I think—except visions in streets which though inspiring aren't substantial. Such is life. But one of these days we may somehow contrive to say something in spite of the smoke—who knows? And anyway I have the honor to sign myself with sincerity your devoted and humble admirer.

Virginia

Virginia Woolf Miscellany

Spring 1979
Virginia Woolf’s statement, “No, I am not generally held to be ambiguous by the clients of the Hogarth Press,” was prompted by a comment Eliot made to her in a letter of 30th October 1930. Mrs. T. S. Eliot, who is editing her husband’s correspondence for Faber from the unpublished letter. Eliot wrote that what he feared more than being disregarded was Virginia’s skill, like F. H. Bradley’s, at protesting in well wrought sentences that she was unable to understand; this, Eliot said, was to escape the duty to criticise. He wondered, he added, if she presented all her friends engaged in wit and simplicity, but is sobering and impressive coming from one’s own work, Eliot’s statements and her reply point with sharp wit to her work. In a letter of 22 May 1921 she exclaimed: “for Eliot and Faber, has kindly allowed me to paraphrase this comment to her work.”

AshWednesday editor of the

The mixture of affection and irony in this letter of 1930 appears again in a letter of 15 January 1933, and is blended with Virginia Woolf’s particular gaiety and command of vivid detail. The letter was written to Eliot while he was in the United States in 1932-33, when he gave the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard.

My dear Tom,

I am shocked to see that your letter is dated 20th Nov. 1932. Here it is 1933. And you are now on the Santa Fe Railway. But why? Where are you off to? Anyhow in Feb. you are starting English 26 a course limited to 15 students. But why? I cant imagine any possible answer, so I must leave this among the unsolved riddles. Here we are rather damp, and to speak plainly, Leonard has the itch. That is, we went to a fancy dress party at Vanessas; and he had the temerity to dress up as an English gentleman of the old school in hired clothes. I say it served him right; the itch was in the stock. Naturally, it would be. I should tell this story to your Americans. But thats the sad part of our story. The other and brighter side is that we have bought a new Lanchester—with a fluid fly wheel. It came after two months delay, last night. We drive up this afternoon. I wish we had the English professor with us. Your letter told me all I can absorb of life at Harvard. The Cabots and the Sedwicks and the Wolcotts and the soap. And the sponge shaped like a brick. London is much as usual, or was when I left it on Dec. 20th. Ottoline was giving her parties; but I don’t go because of Mr Stephens. Ottoline alone is much better than Ottoline mixed. If you are going to talk about Bloomsbury—if they gave you the 250 dollars—I should say this. Woburn Square is falling down falling down. London University is rising. I saw Mary Hutch. Jack has been defending Compton Mackenzie. Roger is off to Tangier because a gentleman of Tangier wants to know whether his neighbour’s ceiling is painted by Tiepolo or not—a fact which Roger alone can certify.

And of course we go on reading MSS; and of course they are mostly about a man called Eliot, or in the manner of a man called Eliot—how I detest that man called Eliot! Eliot for breakfast. Eliot for dinner—thank God Eliot is at Harvard. But why? Come back soon; and write again, to your old humble servant Virginia.

In this letter Virginia Woolf takes delight in jesting at the academic teaching of English in universities. This is not primarily a sally against Eliot himself, although she did at moments think him “pedagogic,” an “American schoolmaster” (O. Bell, ed., Diary, II, 302). Nor is it simply inspired by her own critical attitude toward America. “But why?” The question is echoed in her letter to Julian Bell two years later when he accepted a chair of English: “But why teach English? . . . all one can do is to herd books into groups . . . and thus we get English Literature into A B C; one, two, three; and lose all sense of what its about” (Bell, Biography, II, 173n).

The wit with which she questions academic life is sharp and it sparkles, as it does in the news she relates. Virginia Woolf avoided Lady Ottoline Morrell’s parties at this time because among the guests was James Stephens (1882-1950), the Irish writer of poetry and story, whom she found too “loquacious,” a “little barrel organ monkey man” (Letters, III, 1868). Writing to Eliot, she would include news of a mutual friend close to him, Mary Hutchinson, and her husband Jack (St. John Hutchinson). She chronicles an adventure of Roger Fry. Lighthearted in the ironic distance it reveals, the letter also shows an affectionate ease with “that man called Eliot.”

The two letters I have published here are in the Ella Strong Denison Library, Scripps College, Claremont, California. I have presented the letters, which are typewritten, with no alteration except for the silent correction of obvious typographical errors. The letters were given by T. S. Eliot to his close friend Emily Hale (1891-1969), who taught English at Scripps College from 1932 to 1934; she gave them to Ruth George (1880-1959), a teacher of English at Scripps from 1930 to 1946. They were given to the Denison Library by Ruth George after her retirement in 1946 or in a bequest after her death in 1959. I wish to thank Judy Harvey Sahak, Librarian; Dorothy Drake, former Librarian; and other staff of the Ella Strong Denison Library, for their valuable help. And I am grateful to Quentin Bell and Nigel Nicolson for their generous permission to publish these letters.

NOTES


2. Quentin Bell writes to me (20th September 1977): “it would appear that the letter dated ‘52 T.S. Nov. 2nd.’ relates to a meeting which took place on Thursday, Nov. 6th, 1930, when T. S. Eliot and Vivienne came to tea at Tavistock Square.”

3. Except where otherwise indicated, all references to Virginia Woolf’s letters will be to the first three volumes of The Letters of Virginia Woolf, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, published by Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich in 1975, 1976, and 1977 respectively.

4. The entry for Friday 23 June 1922 in O. Bell, ed., Diary, II, 178, describes Eliot’s reading The Waste Land; Leonard Woolf, Downhill all the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919 to 1939 (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, Inc., 1967), pp. 109-10, refers to Eliot’s reading Ash Wednesday. For other references to Eliot’s praise of Virginia Woolf see O. Bell, ed., Diary, II, 125 (on Monday or Tuesday), and Bell, Biography, II, 88 (on Jacob’s
VIRGINIA WOOLF: A Contemporary Portrait

Portraits of Virginia Woolf by her contemporaries and by those who knew her as an acquaintance, friend, or member of the family, have most often been written after her death. This is true, for example, of the pieces Joan Russell Noble edited in Recollections of Virginia Woolf (New York: William Morrow, 1972). It may be of particular interest, then, to read a portrait of Virginia Woolf written during her lifetime, especially a portrait made without the demands of publication, which did not have to take into account the attitudes of a large audience. We have such a portrait in a letter of 6 December 1935, by Emily Hale.

Emily Hale, who knew T. S. Eliot most of his life, from the time he was an undergraduate at Harvard, accompanied Eliot on 26 November 19351 to visit Leonard and Virginia Woolf at 52 Tavistock Square. From London, Miss Hale, who had recently completed two years' teaching (1932-34) at Scripps College (Claremont, California), wrote a detailed description of the visit in a letter to her former colleague at Scripps, Ruth George.2 The letter is valuable not because it gives fundamentally different impressions of Virginia Woolf from those of many later portraits by people who knew her better, but precisely because, on the whole, it confirms them. And Emily Hale's perceptions are often acute and her account has fresh particularity. She begins by saying that she wishes "...to try inadequately to tell you of my taking tea with Virginia Woolf and Mr Woolf, last week Tuesday."

Of course this was done in the company of Tom Eliot, who is one of a closer circle of friends, admitted to their life. They live in the upper floors of their press, the Hogarth, and in ample tree shaded Tavistock Square. We mounted one flight of stairs to a narrow door locked, till opened by a neatly dressed charwoman who led us up another flight, narrow and steep, at the top of which we removed our wraps. Taking breath, we ascended yet again, to the small, low-ceilinged dining-room, where our hosts had preceded us, with the other guest, young Stephen Spender. In the soft light of a small lamp on the square tea table, Mrs Woolf rose to greet me, and I thought of you, even then, as I faced a very tall slender woman, dressed in a dark non-descript dress, over which was worn a short dark velvet coat. The simple dark clothes set off to advantage the small head carrying a wealth of gray hair, thick, but soft, which she wears simply off the forehead, and massed in a great Rossetti like coil at the nape of the very long slender neck. A narrow dark ribbon binds the hair accentuating the very aquiline but not necessarily Hebraic, the expression warmer than hers, especially the eyes which to me revealed a number of qualities, as patience, weariness and isolation. Her look is at shoulder, not an atlas world of care, but a tiny marmoset, who lives on this human hill crest, all day long, peering out at one, first from one side, then the other; this tiny furry ball has a long tail which hangs down from his master's neck almost like a short queue, slightly confusing at first. I found myself getting on very well with Mr Woolf, who consciously or not puts one soon at ease. After an introductory theme of marmoset and affectionate spaniel Sally, who was at our feet, he took up a more serious note of conversation, asking thoughtful questions about America, questions almost naive, like an inquiry 'whether the American Indian mingled in our good society?'. For the most part, the conversation was upon topics and personalities, known to the other four, Stephen Spender being very much at home with his hosts also, and by his very boyish open eyed, gentle manner, affording an interesting contrast to the profundity of his remarks. Tea was simple, but abundant, a comb of honey from the Woolfs country place, receiving second place of honor with Mr Ws. birthday cake which his very old mother never fails to send to each of her children on the anniversaries; there is a very odd assortment of furnishing in the dining room and in the larger drawing room below, whose walls are covered with decorative panels by Mrs Ws. sister, Vanessa Bell. There is a slight French flavor in this room, but I had the impression that their surroundings make little difference to either of the owners, or at best are artistic too unconventionally to be admired by the average visitor. Downstairs Mrs W addressed several questions directly to me, suddenly but very carefully, so to speak, as if it really mattered what you answered her, and you found yourself wanting very much to make it matter and were curiously aware of your English as you answered her. She sat quite gracefully, on a small sofa at the further end from S.S. and me (I had hoped she would be next to me) and smoked languidly but in a very practised way. The impression of cool, half mocking detachment began to lessen, it became a reserve, a shyness, a husbanding of fine abilities for the moments when they must be used and tested. As one felt the atmosphere warming and jollier, an interruption unwelcome to all of us, I believe, came in the shape of two French visitors, a man connected with the Revue des Deux Mondes, and his wife. Mrs W. began in French with him, which I am told she does not like to speak although she does it well. There seemed no need for us to stay, nor promise of a return to the earlier mood of the afternoon, so we said good-bye.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Olivier Bell for confirming this date from entries in unpublished portions of both Leonard and Virginia Woolf's diaries.

2. Contra T. S. Matthews, Great Tom (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), who states (p.141) that Miss Hale was teaching at Smith College in 1912 when Eliot returned to Harvard to give the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures. I have used, however, his suggestion that Emily Hale and Eliot "met perhaps as early as 1908" (p.140).

3. I am grateful to Edward L. Bigelow, Jr., of Minot, DeBlois, and Maddison, Inc. (Boston, Mass.), executor of Miss Hale's estate, for permission to publish this letter. I have followed their silent corrections of obvious typographical errors and the omission of its introductory two paragraphs and concluding fourteen lines, which are not relevant here. The letter was given by Ruth George either after her retirement in 1946 or in the bequest after her death in 1959 to the Ella Strong Denison Library of Scripps College, where I found it.

M. J. Dunbar
University of Santa Clara
REVIEWS


This third volume of Virginia Woolf's letters opens in January 1923, the month of Katherine Mansfield's death, and closes in December 1928, a few months after Virginia Woolf's trip to France with Vita Sackville-West. These are the years in which she wrote and published Mrs. Dalloway, The Common Reader, To the Lighthouse, Orlando. During these years she gave the two lectures at Cambridge which became A Room of One's Own and "Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet," her best known feminist and critical statements. But this is definitely not where the weight falls. These letters give us an essentially domestic view of the novelist, for they are full of her feelings for her young niece Angelica, who is enchanted with Uncle Leonard Woolf, her schoolboy nephew Quentin, her Cambridge undergraduate nephew Julian, who reminds her of his dead Uncle Thoby, and, of course, their mother, her adored sister Vanessa.

The publication of To the Lighthouse in 1927 underscores the centrality of family in her thoughts during this period. Wisely the editors include in an appendix Vanessa's letter to her sister responding to the tremendously vivid portraits of their parents in that novel. Their mother, "raised from the dead," most touched Vanessa: "It was like meeting her again with oneself grown up and on equal terms..." Now in her forties, Virginia Woolf recognized the finality of her own childlessness, realizing "with horror in the night that Angelica is the last child in the family." She is angry with herself "for not having forced Leonard to take the risk in spite of doctors; he was afraid for me and wouldn't; but if I'd had rather more self-control no doubt it would have been all right." Since these five years were among her happiest and most stable, these misgivings about a decision prompted by concern for her sanity are quite natural. They are mitigated, however, by her awareness that the maternal passion is "immeasurable and unscrupulous," "more destructive and limiting" even than marriage.

But her own marriage was a source of great strength during these years. In commiserating with Vita Sackville-West over Harold Nicolson's absence while ambassador to Persia, she describes herself and Vita as the only two women in London who "like being married." The love of Vita and Virginia was never a threat to either marriage. Although Harold seems more approving of the relation between the two women, Leonard was—at the very least—not disapproving. The love is more exciting than the love she feels for Vanessa, but certainly not deeper. Virginia bathed in Vita's affection, in her gifts of flowers, jewelry, books, experiencing perhaps a greater sense of reciprocity than she did in her relations with Vanessa, whom Virginia often chides for her aloofness. Again the editors perform a valuable service by including in the appendix Vita's letter to Virginia after she has read Orlando.

The letters to Jacques Raverat, dying in France, and to Gerald Brenan, living in Spain and later visiting England, are among the chief pleasures in this volume. With these two men she reveals a warm capacity to soften pain and give comfort. After his death, Virginia writes Jacques' wife that she "told him more than anyone, from the first days of their marriage, Leonard made up his mind in advance, has fitted the patient into a slot long before he opens his mouth, and everything the patient says only confirms his original diagnosis" (185).

This study is first offered as a "hypothesis" which later becomes a "theory" which finally congeals into Dr. Poole's "case"—"clinch ed" by the publication of Moments of Being—that Virginia Woolf's condition was never that of "insanity" or "madness" as Leonard Woolf and Quentin Bell have called it, respectively. From the very start we have what appears to be a semantic problem forged to a "case" study with stubbornly "preconceived notions." This semantic problem is of course highly artificial. Yet Poole provides a remedy by substituting for "insanity" and "madness" his own array of euphemisms: "nervous collapse," "emotional disturbance," "nervous distress," "mental collapse," "mental disease," "mental distress," "loss of mental control," and a host of others.

Lurking behind all of this word-play is the transparent maneuver of getting Leonard Woolf into a position in which Poole can strip him of grace, and then establish his second point: that Virginia Woolf herself, who has never seemed so vivid and so various as she does in this third volume of her letters.

J. O'Brien Schaefer
University of Pittsburgh


After reading a hundred or so pages of Roger Poole's The Unknown Virginia Woolf, one has the feeling of already having covered the same ground at least a dozen times. The reason for this is not difficult to find: the principal assertions of the book are repeated over and over again without ever being logically developed. And why are they not developed? Because there is no need to. According to Poole, "if you approach something with preconceived notions you will have little difficulty in satisfying yourself that you are correct" (185).

This is the final diagnosis: that Leonard Woolf's condition was never that of "insanity" or "madness" because Virginia Woolf's condition was at the beginning connected to the death of her parents, to sexual "interference" by her two Duckworth half-brothers, and—for the remainder of her life—was either caused or aggravated by her marrying a man who was intellectually, emotionally, and temperamentally her enemy. Poole plucks and strums on this single string for the remainder of the book: "In other words, from the first days of their marriage, Leonard and Virginia had taken up positions, dug their trenches, for what was to be a war which lasted a lifetime" (130)—and, one should add, a circumstance in which Leonard is made by Poole to appear the most horrible of conspiratorial monsters. Is this allegation in any way defensible? Or is it sheer nonsense? We are driven to these questions, because Dr. Poole, the need of solid documentation too often appears to be tedious and indeed unnecessary" (63).

Documentation may be "tedious," but in this book, it is indeed necessary, for too frequently the suspicion arises that all of the relevant data are either not used, or are mis-used in a dangerously self-serving way—or invented. For example, "Leonard had, then, taken elaborate measures and carried out extensive research into his wife's mental state before they were married" (125: italics mine). This falsehood is the result of pure invention. The charge that Leonard, before the marriage, consulted Sir George Savage about Virginia's bearing children (168) is another falsehood; this
one the result of “mistaken” or mis-used data. And the insinuation that Virginia, during her illness of 1913-16, was “force-fed” by four nurses is proof of ignorance of existing evidence to the contrary.

Moreover, Dr. Poole is guilty of Convenient Oversight, otherwise known as “selective amnesia.” A great deal of space is given to Virginia’s 1913-16 breakdown and its connection mainly to Leonard’s “tyrannical” behavior and Dr. Savage’s medical mismeangement. Yet nowhere does Poole mention the breakdown of 1910—a period which Quentin Bell discusses at some length and detail in his Biography (I, 162-66). It was the same Dr. Savage who ordered the treatment, and with the same success he would have in treating Virginia after this period. That Leonard should seek Savage’s assistance is thus understandable. But that Poole omits this part in his “case” study is embarrassingly apparent: it would have blown to smithereens his argument that Leonard, in relation to Virginia, was gross, insensitive, uncompreprehending, and cruel. And in nullifying that single argument, the whole book would have vaporized along with it.

Turning his attention to Bloomsbury rationalism (i.e., Leonard Woolf’s rationalism), Poole proceeds to etch Leonard’s portrait with the strongest acid he can manage. And just in case the etching does not succeed, Poole searches for disguised evidence—something written by Leonard! something fictional!—to support his unsavory portrait. This of course is where The Wise Virgins makes its appearance; and here Poole loiters for 31 strained pages making a primitive translation of fiction into so-called fact. Poole might have “clinched” his case on that novel alone, were it not for the fact that his reading of fiction is almost as under-privileged as his methods of research. This is especially true in his reading of Virginia Woolf’s novels, which, according to Poole, “describe the adoring trust and limitless admiration for the intuitive and healing talents of Julia Stephen at such length that there is no need to attempt any kind of summary. Mrs. Hilbery in Night and Day has something of Julia, and Helen of The Voyage Out, and of course Mrs. Ramsay of To the Lighthouse” (7). Can Poole be referring to the same Helen Ambrose who, in an earlier (published, 1972) section of the novel, brutally rolls Rachel in the grass, demanding: “Own ourself beaten...Beg my pardon, and say that you worship me!” Can he be thinkin of the same Mrs. Hilbery about whom Katharine “felt all the unfairness of the claim which her mother tacitly made on her time and sympathy, and what Mrs. Hilbery took, Katharine thought bitterly, she wasted”? Is this the same Mrs. Ramsay about whom Lilly Briscoe thinks: “How childlike, how absurd she was, sitting up there...talking about the skins of vegetables. There was something frightening about her...”? Further, is “Lucy [SWithin, Virginia’s Julia-figure]” (224) as Poole asserts on one page, or has Virginia become Lucy and Leonard become Bartholomew, as he asserts on another? “In the tragic conflict between old Bartholomew Oliver and Lucy Swithin, his sister, is the vary last variation on the theme that has run through every major novel since The Voyage Out. It is the theme of emotional, rational, intellectual, and human incompatibility between two human beings, Leonard and Virginia Woolf” (231).

With such critical confusion, glaring inconsistency, mishandling of evidence, distortion of fact, and shrill repetition, no level-headed reader can possibly take Dr. Poole’s book seriously. Indeed, it might very well have been ignored altogether had Poole not so severely misrepresented and senselessly maligned both Quentin Bell and the Biography, and had he not so ambitiously sullied the memory of Leonard Woolf. It is regrettable that so prestigious a publisher as Cambridge University Press elected to ratify with its imprint so crude and unbalanced a book. We need only remember that were it not for Leonard Woolf’s 30 years of care, support—and loving companionship—Virginia Woolf might not have lived long enough to leave as her legacy some of the finest literature of our century.

Mitchell A. Leaska
New York University

VISIT OF OLIVIER AND QUENTIN BELL

Olivier and Quentin Bell visited Toronto during the last week in January for a series of public lectures and informal talks sponsored by organizations at the University of Toronto and York University. The visit marked Olivier Bell’s first trip to North America and first time on a speaker’s platform; she showed herself at home in both places.

Quentin Bell’s public lecture, “Little Bloomsbury by the Sea,” was the highlight of a symposium on “The Turn to Modernism” held at University College of the University of Toronto. As one of Vanessa Bell’s “appalling boys,” he spoke of the family’s early years at Charleston. The household was hardly a traditional one. Money and comforts were scarce, Vanessa had a knack for employing the insane, and visitors were apt to sit down on a damp still life forgotten by one of the painters in the group. Instead of representing the younger generation, the term “Little Bloomsbury,” like its London counterpart, referred to a geographical district. Little Bloomsbury derived its character from the Sussex country houses which comprised it: Charleston, Asheham and later Monks House, and Tilton. In his witty remarks Bell discussed the kinds of human traffic that went on between the occupants of the three houses.

At an editing seminar Olivier Bell talked about the judgments she had to make as the editor of Virginia Woolf’s diaries. She explained the editorial methods she devised for her project, and gave us glimpses of the myriad ways there were of tracking down Woolf’s more elusive remarks. Later she joined Quentin Bell, Barbara Bauer, S. J. Colman, and Thelma McCormack in a lively panel discussion, chaired by Naomi Black, which revolved around the topic, “Virginia Woolf’s Feminism: Literary or Political?” The talk ranged over such matters as Woolf’s incorporation of her political ideas into her fiction, the context and reception of Three Guineas, and Woolf’s understanding of the term “feminist.”

After several informal events, Quentin Bell delivered his second public lecture, “Bloomsbury and the Vulgar Passions” at York University. He underscored the importance of Bloomsbury’s members as political writers and polemists from the days of the First World War until the outbreak of the Second. In a time of barbarism, when the vulgar passions of war and passionate unreason were rampant, Clive Bell, Strachey, Keynes, and Leonard and Virginia Woolf insisted publicly in their writing on the use of reason for moral purpose. One thread running through his paper and many of the week’s events, was an emphasis on Bloomsbury as primarily a group of hard-working, not self-indulgent, friends.

Barbara Bauer
University of Toronto

Painted Waves

In her essay on “The Cinema,” Virginia Woolf describes a “shadow shaped like a tadpole [that]...swelled to an immense size, quivered, bulged...[and] for a moment... seemed to embody some monstrous diseased imagination of the lunatic’s brain.” Though the shadow turned out to be a defect in the film, “for a moment it seemed as if thought could be conveyed by shape more effectively than by words... Anger... is perhaps a black line wiggling upon a white sheet.” Though Woolf often argued with Roger Fry about the value of purely formal art, these comments indicate her remarkable sensitivity to the effect of abstract pattern and color. The possibilities Woolf suggests here for the cinema represent the very direction in which abstract expressionist painting (if not the mainstream of cinema) was to move in the years ahead.

In The Waves, even more than in her other novels, Woolf creates a series of post impressionist, almost abstract, verbal paintings. In the prologues throughout the novel, objects often seem to vanish under colors rather than to be described by them: “The woods throb blue and green, and gradually the fields drink in red, gold, brown. Suddenly a river snatches a blue light.” Midway through the book, one scene receives a finishing painterly touch when “the afternoon sun...poured blue into the shadows and reddened the corn. A deep varnish was laid like a lacquer over the fields” (302).
In the final prologue "the precise brush stroke was swollen and lopsided" (340). The bold laying on of colors, the tendency to use abstract forms—stripes, circles, wedges, bars—and the references to varnish and brush encourage the reader to regard the preludes as paintings. Viewed this way, these tableaux of ocean and garden—in a different medium, so to speak—anchor the narratives they precede. They are stationary panels in the temporal flow of words. At the same time, might this assumption of the painter's art represent a desire to trespass on Vanessa's private domain?

The presence of "painterly" techniques in The Waves has inspired me to undertake a series of serigraphs based on Woolf's descriptions of the sea in the prologues. In them I have tried to capture the combination of luminescence and strength, of fluidity and repetition, that Woolf indicates by her placement of metaphorical bars in a "sparkling" sea. "The gray cloth became barred with thick strokes moving, one after another . . . . The surface of the sea slowly became transparent and lay rippling and sparkling until the dark stripes were almost rubbed out" (179). In several prints inspired by this first prologue, for example, transparent washes of sea colors are overlaid, though not obscured, by a pattern of "dark stripes." The designs are largely abstract; like Woolf's verbal descriptions, they use color and shape to suggest changing moods of sea and garden. (Interested persons may write to Dr. Wendy Faris, Comparative Literature, University of Texas at Dallas, Box 688, Richardson, Texas 75080.)

Wendy B. Faris
The University of Texas at Dallas

--- NOTES ---


FROM THE READERS

Dear VWM,

In notice of A MARRIAGE OF TRUE MINDS by George Spater and Ian Parsons, your reviewer makes the following observations:

"the traditional view of the Leonard-Virginia Woolf marriage relationship casts Leonard in the role of protector... This view of Leonard's role in the marriage emerges in A WRITER'S DIARY, Leonard's autobiography, and Quentin Bell's biography of Virginia. Some critics have pointed out, however, that this portrait may be distorted. Leonard... might have selected...Quentin Bell was asked to be Virginia's official biographer and therefore may have wished to present him in a favourable light..."

It would be easy to make something very dark and damning of such accusations. The suppression of truth by the wicked uncle and the 'cover up job' of the naughty nephew cannot look pretty even when advanced merely as interesting possibilities. Let me therefore say at once that I am sure that no such horrid ideas ever entered your reviewer's head. I am quite sure that she thinks no evil; what perplexes me more is to know whether she thinks at all. If she did might she not have paused to consider why Leonard, intent on misleading the public, placed his wife's diaries in a public library? Or whether, this being the case, those diaries might not be sent a desire to trespass on Vanessa's private domain?

Your reviewer surmises darkly that 'forthcoming volumes of the complete diary may indicate a different picture' etc., etc. But why wait? The doors of the Berg Collection are open to scholars; she and 'some critics' have for years been perfectly at liberty to discover for themselves whether Leonard was or was not guilty of 'distortion'. Catherine Morland herself never built a finer or more horrid edifice upon more rickety foundations. Like poor Catherine, your reviewer makes an entertaining spectacle; but seriously, ought we not to expect a little scholarship, a slight sense of responsibility, and a little intelligence from contributors to what, after all, ought to be a serious journal.

Quentin Bell
Cobbe Place, Beddingham, Lewes, Sussex

--- by Wendy B. Faris ---

Dear VWM,

Readers of Woolf who have always thought her work central to the modern tradition, and crucial to an understanding of contemporary ideas, will be interested in a recent expression of this view to be found in The Civilizing Process by Norbert Elias, published by Urizen Books, 1978. This remarkable study of the transformation of-psychic and social structures in personality and society since the Middle Ages is the first part of a major work by a distinguished sociologist.

The passage in which Woolf is offered as an exemplary figure occurs in a discussion of the development of the modern self over against modern society, on page 233:

But one would gain only a very inadequate idea of the nature of this self-perception and this image of man if they are understood merely as ideas set forth in scholarly writings. The windowlessness of the monads, the problems surrounding homo clausus, which a man like Leibniz tries to make at least more bearable by a speculative solution showing the possibility of relationships between monads, is today accepted as self-evident not only by scholars. Expressions of this self-perception are found in a less reflected form in imaginative literature—for example, in Virginia Woolf's lament over the incommunicability of experience as the cause of human solitude. Its expression is found in the concept of "alienation," used more and more frequently within and outside literature in the most diverse variations in recent decades.

Although there is no extended treatment of Woolf's work, I think it is worth noting that she was singled out as the distinctive voice and representative of a certain aspect of modern sensibility.

Sonya Rudikoff
200 Hun Road, Princeton, N.J. 08540
Revisions and Revisionism: [A Reply to Louise DeSalvo on Katherine Mansfield and the Revisions for THE VOYAGE OUT]

Dear VWM:

Doubtless Virginia Woolf wanted to be thought brave and adventurous, and Mansfield's two comparisons, to the 'safety' of a Jane Austen novel and a ship in the harbour, disappointed her. For Night and Day was not only a brave effort, but perhaps a foolhardy one - if even a fellow feminist could not see that its very structure was an attack on the classical novel and patriarchal society. Woolf was a revisionist in more ways than one. If she were going to be compared to Jane Austen she would invent an Austen in her own image. Woolf's essays compare Jane Austen to the Greeks and describe her art as so "dangerous" that "one slip" means death. "A divine justice is meted out," she wrote and "Sometimes it seems as if her creatures were born merely to give Jane Austen the supreme delight of slicing their heads off," and she guesses that Austen died just as she was ready as a writer to begin "a little voyage of discovery."

After Mansfield's death Woolf's revisionist imagination was hard at work. Note in Diary II that the Katherine condemned for cheap sexuality and brittle prose is instantly transformed by death into a virgin in a white wreath and Virginia's only prose rival. Even more interesting is her claim then and later that Katherine had compared her to a ship far out at sea, a metaphor more in keeping with her self-image. While the revisions of Voyage may well have been a response to Katherine's critical preferences, the revisions of Night and Day as her finest novel. The Magic Flute is certainly patriarchal society's most sublime expression of itself as civilization. When Woolf made Mrs. Hilbery into the King of the Night, she shook the foundations of the archetypes.

That even Katherine Mansfield couldn't see this, starstruck as she was by reading the novel as a celebration of Virginia's mar-

riage to Leonard, must have upset Woolf deeply. She must have wished that Katherine was as learned as she was liberated. One can manage tragedy in a cultural vacuum, but not comedy, especially not feminist comedy, as Meredith, her mentor, had pointed out. As Brecht said "One may say that tragedy deals with the sufferings of mankind in a less serious way than comedy."

[These arguments are presented in more detail in "Enchanted Organs; Magic Bells: Night and Day as a Comic Opera" forthcoming in Ralph Freedman's collection, Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity: A Chorus of Voices (Berkeley, 1979)]

Jane Marcus
Evanston, Illinois

CORRECTION

Professor James M. Haule writes VWM that he inadvertently reversed Bernard and Neville's names in the example used in "This is the Drop Forming": Concurring The Waves (VWM, No. 11, Fall 1978). He wishes to assure us that the error is not repeated in any of the concordances: "machines triumph at least this once."

REVIEW, ANYONE?

Have any of our readers seen a production of Orlando/Olindo by the Illusion Theatre from Minnesota? We hear it is a marvel and would love to have it reviewed in a future VWM.

DONATIONS, ANYONE?

VWM wishes to thank all of you, here and abroad, who have sent donations to our printing costs and, of course, to remind those of you who have long been contemplating doing so, that VWM exists only because of such private and informal funding. We do get intermittent institutional support, but cannot count on it to keep us afloat. We do now request donations from libraries and also from individuals asking for back issues, by the way. At the suggestion of the past president of the Virginia Woolf Society, VWM now sends an official "tax-deductible acknowledgement of any donations over $10, so . . . .

Dream of Monks House:
As viewed from a slide show in California

Transparent as a word, the light in spring
Came green through cloudy windows to this room
You said was underwater, where the air
Dissolved your fans of roses, and of time
Whose leaden circles melt in silence there.

Transparent as a word, I'm seized, I flee
The silence of the underwater room.
Camellias crushed on flagstones, red and white,
Still mark the greenhouse path where you have made
Another world of roses, glass and light.

Eroded statues lean above green ponds;
Two heads of stone gaze from the garden wall
Through elms, to the river shining in the distance,
Washing another woman at her easel:
Last daughter in your dynasty of moments.

The sounding waves that broke along your shore
Still glitter in the Lighthouse stroke at night;
The ear-shaped leaves that shook, alive with birds,
Are silver round the windows of your room,
As silent and transparent as a word.

Judi Friedlander
Stanford University