To the Readers:

The first biofiction boom happened in the 1930s. Well-known authors like Robert Graves, Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger, Arna Bontemps, and Zora Neale Hurston are just a few who published noteworthy biographical novels during the decade. But the surge waned, in part because the Marxist literary critic Georg Lukács condemned the aesthetic form as an irredeemable mistake in his landmark study The Historical Novel (1937). This decline led many, especially academics, to dismiss the biographical novel as a frivolous and/or inferior “literary” form. As the critic Carl Bode says in a 1955 essay: “the biographical novel deserves more to be pitied than censored” (269). Irving Stone was extremely sensitive to this criticism, which only stands to reason, as he published many popular biographical novels from the 1930s through the 1980s. Note Stone’s frustrated tone in his 1957 lecture “The Biographical Novel”: “I would like at this moment to interject, with less bitterness than puzzlement, I hope, the question of why the historical novel, with its accurate background but fictional characters, should have been more acceptable to the academicians than the biographical novel, which is accurate not only in background but in the people involved?” (129).

Having died in 1989, Stone did not witness the biofiction boom of the 1990s, which featured works from luminaries like Joanna Scott, J.M. Coetzee, Margaret Atwood, Charles Johnson, Russell Banks, and Joyce Carol Oates, just to mention a notable few. But it was Michael Cunningham’s 1998 biographical novel about Virginia Woolf that marks a major turning point. Cunningham won the Pulitzer Prize in fiction and the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, and The Hours was made into an Oscar-winning film in 2002. Since then, biofiction has become a dominant literary form. Therefore, when discussing the rise and legitimization of biofiction, Woolf is a figure of central importance, and this is the case for many reasons.

Gillian Freeman, Susan Sellers, Priya Parmar, Norah Vincent, and Maggie Gee have published biographical novels about Woolf. But Woolf’s presence is not restricted to works with her as the protagonist. In 1997, Anita Diamant published The Red Tent, a novel about the figure of Dinah from the Old Testament. In an interview, Diamant explains how her novel was the logical product of Woolf’s work: “My book tries to answer the questions Virginia Woolf posed in A Room of One’s Own. What was life like for her [Dinah]? How many children? Did she have a room of her own, which is to say, time and space to reflect?” (110).
is a metabioficial moment that, in blurring any presumed boundary between writer and subject, also reveals Inskap-Fox’s incisive awareness of how biofiction serves the writer’s, and not the subject’s, personal vision.

Michael Schrimper takes up this same theme, but from a different angle. He wonders how Woolf would have responded to her presence in contemporary biofiction. The tendency for scholars of biofiction could be to focus on the celebrated author. But taking his cue from Woolf, Schrimper argues that the primary subject of biofiction about Woolf should not be the character but the author’s work, because, for Woolf, what really matters in literature is not the personality or mystique or celebrity or even the identity of the writer. Rather, it is the “work work,” as Woolf says. Schrimper reminds us of biofiction’s prerogative to express the vision of its author, but he asks readers to heed Woolf’s tacit, anticipatory advice to readers of biofiction, and to focus our attention not on the subject, even when the subject is Woolf, but on contemporary authors’ use of and engagement with the subject’s “work work.”

Biofiction appropriates a subject’s life and works by way of revealing a personal vision, regardless of the factual accuracy of the portrayal. But is such appropriation morally acceptable? On the other hand, is the question of morality even the right question to ask, if the very act of speaking or writing about, or performing, the subject belies even the possibility of perfect factual accuracy? Is it fair to accuse a writer of factual infidelity if the expressive act always inevitably transforms the historical subject, making each new representation of Virginia Woolf what Bethany Layne calls “a Woolf of the author’s own”? Layne’s essay shows how the “life blood” of biofiction “is subversion as much as homage, confrontation as much as celebration.” Like Schrimper, Layne takes her cue from Woolf, who found in such paratexts as biographies’ prefaces and novels’ forewords, “proof ready to hand” of an unbridgeable divide between biography and fiction. Layne’s argument shows how, in their acknowledgements and author’s notes, Cunningham, Sellers, Parmar, Vincent, Gee, and Sigrid Nunez “tread a line between the [... ] biographer’s admission of indebtedness, and the novelist’s assertion of liberation.”

In her contribution, Monica Latham turns to a different genre, drama, to reveal how “the process of fabrication” used by Eileen Atkins and Edna O’Brien in their respective bioplays, Vita and Virginia and Virginia: A Play, represent successful efforts “to create truthful portraits of [Woolf]” and “an authentic character.” The playwrights craft what Latham calls “first-degree biofictions,” in which the dramatic text comprises “big chunks of autobiography,” and, in the latter, “second-degree biofiction,” in which the script combines fragments of Woolf’s autobiographical writings with passages from her works. Latham’s contention, influenced by Lackey’s idea of “truthful fictions,” is that such truth and authenticity emerge in both plays by virtue of their creative pastiches of words from Woolf’s own writings. This happens, Latham argues, precisely because of Atkins’s and O’Brien’s “creative and therapeutic” manipulations of text and context. Both playwrights, “obsessed with and possessed by Woolf,” “stage the character of Woolf [...] as a necessary act to exorcise the authorial ghost that has been haunting them.” They create, in the process, a Woolf that “look[s] familiar and sound[s] authentic.”

Fabrication liberates, as does—or can—the “trans” narrative. Pamela L. Caughie, in her contribution, continues to develop the argument she made in a 2013 Modern Fiction Studies essay that, as she writes here, “Woolf’s fictional work [Orlando] about a sex transformation is more true to the experience of transsexualism—or in today’s terms, transgender—than the documentary narrative about an actual sex change” (20). Caughie trains her attention both on Orlando and on Man into Woman, the “life narrative” or “curriculum vitae” of the Danish artist who surgically transformed from Einar Wegener into Lili Elvenes/Lili Elbe, in 1930. These two important works in “transgenre” literature, Caughie shows, reveal “transsexual life writing as a nascent form of biofiction” (23). Like other contributors to this special issue, Caughie assumes that vital “truth” resides not only in a life, but in the writing of that life: “we read biofiction,” she writes, at the conclusion of this inventive take on both “trans” and “bio,” “not as fiction about a life lived but as part of the writing of that life.” Both Orlando and Man into Woman confirm that “life writing is not about—or not primarily about—the ‘factually correct’ but about the imaginatively and emotionally true.”

If biofiction captures truths unavailable to documentary evidence or to scientific methods of historiography, it also engages in a retroactive shaping of the past. Using Anne Freadman’s work on “uptake,” which is a process of appropriating and thereby inflecting an originary author and text, Olivia Wood clarifies not how Woolf and her novel Mrs. Dalloway determine the shape and form of Cunningham’s The Hours, but how The Hours impacts and refuges Woolf and Mrs. Dalloway. Wood’s argument recalls T. S. Eliot’s claim about the relationship of past and present in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” where he observes that with genuinely new work “the past [is] altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (50). Wood illustrates how this genre theory can open up new ways of thinking about the role biofiction plays in engaging and even reshaping both precursor authors and texts.

Many biofictions about Woolf have been authored since 1998. But the scholarship is only now starting to register what writers have done with Woolf’s life and to clarify how Woolf and her contemporaries contributed to the making and subsequent valorization of biofiction. The contributions to this special issue about Woolf and biofiction are merely the beginning of what promises to be a lively and rich field of study.

Michael Lackey
University of Minnesota, Morris
Todd Avery
University of Massachusetts, Lowell

Works Cited


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

Be sure to follow Paula Maggio’s Blogging Woolf for up-to-date information about all things Woolfian including information about upcoming Woolf conferences and recent publications from Cecil Woolf Publishers. bloggingwoolf.wordpress.com
MLA 2019
Chicago
January 3-6, 2019

Guaranteed IVWS Panel
*Night and Day at 100*
Saturday, January 5
1:45pm
San Francisco Room, Hyatt Regency.

Organizer and Chair: Mary Wilson, U of Mass Dartmouth
Mary Jean Corbett, Miami U of Ohio:
“Feminist Generations in Night and Day”

John Young, Marshall U:
“‘that vagulous phospheresence’: Mrs Hilbery in *Mrs. Dalloway*”

Moyang Li, Rutgers U:
“Katherine as Mathematician in Night and Day”

Mary Wilson, U of Mass Dartmouth:
“The Place of Night and Day”

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**INTERNATIONAL VIRGINIA WOOLF SOCIETY PANEL**

**LOUISVILLE CONFERENCE ON LITERATURE AND CULTURE SINCE 1900**
21-23 FEBRUARY 2019

1. Patricia Morgne Cramer, University of Connecticut at Stamford
   “Hidden Treasures: Rhoda as Socrates’s Lesbian Sister”
2. Zoë Rodine, University of Minnesota
   “‘I am the Foam’: Woolf’s Waves and Modernist Embodiment
3. Emma Burris-Janssen, University of Connecticut
   “‘suspended, without being, in limbo’: Temporality and Abortion in Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts*”
4. Maria Aparecida de Oliveira, Federal University of Acre
   “Virginia Woolf and the common Reader in Brazil”

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**LOUISVILLE CONFERENCE 2020—CALL FOR PAPERS**

The International Virginia Woolf Society is pleased to host its twentieth consecutive panel at the University of Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900 in February 2020. We invite proposals for critical papers on any topic concerning Woolf Studies. A particular panel theme may be chosen depending on the proposals received.

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Please submit by email a cover page with your name, email address, mailing address, phone number, professional affiliation (if any), and the title of your paper, and a second anonymous page containing a 250-word paper proposal to Kristin Czarnecki, kristin_czarnecki@georgetowncollege.edu, by Monday, August 26, 2019

**PANEL SELECTION COMMITTEE:**
Beth Rigel Daugherty
Jeanne Dubino
Mark Hussey
Jane Lilienfeld
Vara Neverow

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**Call for Papers**

**The 29th Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf**

The 29th Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf, hosted by Mount St. Joseph University, will be held in Cincinnati, Ohio from June 6-9, 2019, with the theme of ‘Virginia Woolf and Social Justice.’

As a writer deeply concerned with the distribution of power, wealth, education, privileges, and opportunities, Virginia Woolf remains a relevant and sustaining voice on issues of social justice, politics, equality, pacifism, and the dangers of fascism, totalitarianism, and all types of inequality. Whether advocating for the education of women or breaking new ground with her experimental prose or challenging the patriarchal basis of war and violence, Woolf continues—perhaps now more than ever, in our globally turbulent political moment—to speak clearly and strongly for a more just world.

We look for proposals for papers, panels, roundtables, and workshops from scholars of all stripes (literary and interdisciplinary), creative writers, performing artists, common readers, teachers, and students from all levels (high school, undergraduate, graduate). We ask that submissions relate to the theme of Virginia Woolf (and, by extension, the Bloomsbury Group) and Social Justice and that they seek to illuminate her life and work through that lens.

Possible themes and topics include, but are not limited to:

- The education of women
- Activism and ambivalence
- Prejudice, bias, and injustice
- The rise of fascism and totalitarianism
- Suffragism and the women’s movement
- Domesticity and the role of servants
- Holocaust and the role of servants
- Disability/impairment
- Technology/media
- Assembly/solidarity/alliances
- War and the role of women
- Woolf’s depiction of history and historical movements
- The dignity of human beings
- Issues of inclusivity
- The politics of sexuality
- Age and efficacy
- The consequences of colonialism
- The dignity of work and the rights of workers
- The politics of sexuality
- Issues of race
- Issues of class
- The consequences of colonialism
- The politics of sexuality
- The consequences of colonialism
- The politics of sexuality
- The consequences of colonialism
- The politics of sexuality
- The consequences of colonialism

In addition, we also welcome papers on the Bloomsbury Group (especially, but not limited to, the political writing and fiction of Leonard Woolf, the economic theories of John Maynard Keynes, Clive Bell’s writings on art, Duncan Grant’s attention to Eastern art and religion, etc.) and other associates of Virginia Woolf.

Please send abstracts with names removed as attached Word documents to your e-mail. For individual papers, please send a 250-word proposal. For panels of three or more participants, please send a panel title and a 250-word proposal for each of the papers. For workshops and roundtables, please send a 250- to 500-word proposal with biographies of each participant. We are also looking for volunteers to chair individual panels.

There will be individual panels and seminars for high school students and undergraduates; graduate students may submit proposals through the normal submission process outlined above.

Please e-mail proposals to Drew Shannon at VWoollf2019@msj.edu by January 31, 2019.

Visit www.msj.edu/VWoolf2019 for more information.
How to Join
The International Virginia Woolf Society
http://sites.utoronto.ca/IVWS/

To join, update membership or donate to the International Virginia Woolf Society, you can use the PayPal feature available online at the IVWS website at http://sites.utoronto.ca/IVWS/how-to-join/donate.html (you can also download the membership form from the IVWS website and mail to the surface address provided).

**Regular 12-month membership:**
$35

**Student or part-time employed 12-month membership:**
$15

**Regular five year membership:**
$130

**Retiree five year membership:**
$60

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

The IVWS is now registered as a U.S. non-profit organization. U.S. members’ dues and donations are tax-deductible.

Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain Membership
http://www.virginiawoolfsociety.org.uk/membership

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

- Birthday Lecture*—AGM (free) with Conference*—Study Days and Weekends*
- Reading Group meetings

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

Subscriptions for the year ending 31 December 2018 are £18 UK, £23 Europe and £26 outside of Europe; five-year memberships (five years for the price of four) beginning in 2018 are £72 UK, £92 Europe and £104 outside Europe.

The Society is always delighted to welcome new members. If you wish to join the VWSGB, please email Stuart N. Clarke at stuart.n.clarke@btinternet.com for a membership form and information about how to pay, or write to:

**Membership Secretary**
Fairhaven, Charnleys Lane
Banks
SOUTHPORT PR9 8HJ
UK

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 PDF format at: 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

If you need access to a specific article that is not available online at this point, please contact Vara Neverow at neverowv1@southernct.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 through ProQuest Literature Online (LION) and Gale Group/Cengage.

THE IVWS & VWS ARCHIVE INFORMATION

http://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/special/F51ivwoof/societyfonds.htm
http://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/collections/special_collections/f51_intl_v_woolf_society/

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

Below is the finding aid for the IVWS archival materials:
http://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/special/F51ivwoof/societyfilelist.htm

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

With regard to such items as correspondence, memorabilia and photographs, contact the current Archival Liaison, Karen Levenback, either at kilevenback@att.net or by surface mail:
Karen Levenback, Archival Liaison/IVWS Archive, 304 Philadelphia Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912.
Société d’Études Woolfiennes

The Société d’Études Woolfiennes (SEW) is a French society which promotes the study of Virginia Woolf, the Bloomsbury 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 proceedings in peer-reviewed journals, as well as organising more informal annual gatherings and workshops.

Since the foundation of the SEW in 1996, international conferences have focused on:

- “Métamorphose et récit dans l’œuvre de Woolf” (1997)
- “Metamorphosis and narrative in Woolf’s works”
- “Things in Woolf’s works” (1999)
- “Le pur et l’impur” (2001)
- “The pure and the impure”
- “Conversation in Woolf’s works” (2003)
- “Woolf lectrice / Woolf critique” (2006 / 2008)
- “Woolf as a reader / Woolf as a critic”
- “Contemporary Woolf” (2010)
- “Woolf among the Philosophers” (2012)
- “Outlanding Woolf” (2013)
- “Translating Woolf” (2015)
- Virginia Woolf, Still Life and Transformation (2018)

Information concerning past and forthcoming conferences and publications is available on our website: http://etudes-woolfiennes.org.

We would be very pleased to welcome new members. If you wish to join the SEW, please fill in the membership form available on our website (“adhérer”) and send an email to claire.davison@univ-paris3.fr or marie.laniel@gmail.com, indicating your profession, address and research interests.

The annual subscription is 25€ (15€ for students).

Cheques made out to SEW should be sent to:
Nicolas Boileau
12 Traverse du Ricem
13100 Aix-en-Provence
FRANCE

If you wish to join the SEW’s mailing list, please send an email to marie.laniel@gmail.com.

Virginia Woolf Miscellany

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS AND EDITORIAL POLICIES

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

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

CFPs

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

Miscellaneous Submissions

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

Guidelines for Submissions

Submissions should be no longer than 2500 words at maximum and shorter articles are strongly preferred. Articles should be submitted electronically, in .doc or .docx MS Word format and in compliance with the style of the 6th edition of the MLA Handbook (neither the 7th edition published in 2009 or the 8th edition published in 2016). For a copy of the current Miscellany style guide, please contact Vara Neverow at neverowl@southernct.edu.

Editing Policies

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

Permissions

Contributors are responsible for obtaining permissions related to copyrights and reproductions of materials. Contributors must provide the Editorial Board with original written documentation authorizing the publication of the materials.

Reimbursement for Permissions

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

Publication Policies

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

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

Rights of Publication

The Miscellany retains all rights for future uses of work published herein. The contributor may, with the express permission of the Miscellany, use the work in other contexts. The contributor may not, however, sell the subsidiary rights of any work she or he has published in the Miscellany. If the contributor is granted permission and does use the material elsewhere, the contributor must acknowledge prior publication in the 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 https://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 neverowvl@southernct.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://sites.utoronto.ca/IVWS/ is hosted by the University of Toronto. The website was founded by Melba Cuddy-Keane, Past President of the International Virginia Woolf Society, who continues to oversee the site.

The VWoolf Listserv is hosted by the University of Ohio. The current list administrator is Elisa Kay Sparks. Anne Fernald oversaw the list for many years. The founder of the list is Morris Beja. To join the list, you need to send a message to the following address: listproc@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu. 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/VWS archive at the E. J. Pratt Library, Victoria University, University of Toronto even though they are entities separate from the Society itself. Individuals who have materials that may be of archival significance should consult Karen Levenback at kllevenback@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 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 2001-2013 (excluding 2004) were published by Clemson University Press (formerly Clemson University Digital Press) under the auspices of Wayne Chapman. Liverpool University Press now oversees the publication of the essays from the conference that are selected. The editors of the volumes vary from year to year. The electronic version of the Selected Works published by Clemson are available for download at pdf format online at http://tigerprints.clemson.edu/cudp_woolf and Selected Works from the 2002 and 2004 Woolf conferences are available to view at the Woolf Center at Southern Connecticut State University: http://woolf-center.southernct.edu.

The Selected Papers from the Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf 1991-2000, launched by Mark Hussey in conjunction with the conference, were published by Pace University Press under his auspices. While early volumes of the papers are out of print, a number of the more recent ones are still available from the press at http://www.pace.edu/press.

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Woollian Resources Online

**Virginia Woolf Miscellany:**
Issues of the *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* from Spring 2003 (issue 63) to the present are available in a PDF format at: https://virginiawoolfmiscellany.wordpress.com. The website 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 neverowvl@southernct.edu. (These issues are available to view through EBSCOhost as well.)

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

**Facebook:**
The International Virginia Woolf Society is on Facebook! You can become a fan—and you can friend other Woolfians at https://www.facebook.com/International-Virginia-Woolf-Society-224151705144/. The Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain also now has a Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/VWSGB/.

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

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

Anne Fernald says she is “writing from a kitchen table of my own on the Jersey side of the Hudson.” Contact information: fernham [at] gmail [dot] com. The blog is located at https://anne-fernald.squarespace.com/home/.

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

**E-books:**
The majority of Virginia Woolf’s novels as well as many of her short stories and the complete texts of *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas* can be read online at http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/.

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

**VWListserv:**
The VWListserv is open to one and all. To join the VWListserv, please go to the IVWS home page a http://sites.utoronto.ca/IVWS/ and click on the VWListserv link in the left column. Then, follow the instructions.
The Annual
Angelica Garnett
Undergraduate Essay Prize

by
Isabel Perry

ENG 368 Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature: Virginia Woolf & Bloomsbury
taught by Dr. Christine Froula
Northwestern University

The Combatant in the Mirror:
Chekhov and Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts*

“Art is violent. To be decisive is violent. Only when something has been
decided can the work really begin.”

—Anne Bogart, “Violence”

“As we read these little stories about nothing at all, the horizon widens;
the soul gains an astonishing sense of freedom”

—Virginia Woolf, “The Russian Point of View”

In 1925, Virginia Woolf wrote her essay, “The Russian Point of View” in *The Common Reader*, analyzing Russian literature in hopes of grasping Chekhov’s ability to write politically without satirizing and give meaning to the inconsequential. While critics have compared her works *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* to Chekhov’s plays, very few have mentioned connections to *Between the Acts*, Woolf’s own attempt at a play within a novel. Chekhov’s work influenced her late writing, cited as political in content, daring in form, and living in questions of the everyday and the soul. After her essay-novels *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*, Woolf returned to embrace the theatricality hinted at in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* to respond to the political atmosphere in Europe.

With war looming and threats of violence in the air, Woolf leaned into exploring the Chekhovian inconsequential, the nothing; she takes notice of the small and seemingly insignificant. Written in a world defined by “acts” and eras, straddling two world wars, *Between the Acts* draws upon Chekhovian tropes and gives voice to the spectators: those who experience reality, those who embrace the in between, those who keep the story going after it ends.

While passionate about Russian literature as a whole, Virginia Woolf singled out Anton Chekhov’s work for aligning more with English art. She found it more accessible and tangible, preoccupied with the everyday. By 1925, when Woolf reviews Chekhov in “The Russian Point of View,” Adolf Hitler had already attempted to seize power, Benito Mussolini seized power in Italy, and the “New Roman Empire” was already a threat. While the war hadn’t officially begun, violence was on the horizon, and Virginia Woolf watched with pen in hand. Also, in 1925, Woolf’s friend Charles P. Sanger wrote to her and requested “a little of Chekhov” in Woolf’s next book (Turner). Chekhov was a respite from the cruelties of World War II, and Woolf carried this inspiration through when World War II officially began in 1939, setting out to write her wartime novel in a rather Chekhovian manner. A novel, Woolf wrote, is “an impression not an argument” (Froula 291). It is an image, not a direction. As with the impressionist art movement, an impression strives to capture motion, passage of time, often outdoors. The inconsequential is often skipped over, with light brush strokes replacing specific details; therefore, the spectators together create the smaller particulars. In *The Seagull*, Konstantin declares, “The point [of theatre] is not to show life as it is, or how it should be, but as we dream it to be!” (Chekhov 44). “We,” the dreamers, own the power of creating with the artist. La Trobe’s Pageant represents this dream as members of the community of all classes, ages, and backgrounds join their realities together in order to perform a fictional dream. *Between the Acts*, through incorporating
this pageant, paints an impression, and presents a call to action to the community—both the spectators and the artist—to “create, talk, judge, and differ” (Froula 319). Woolf calls upon this community, this “we,” “composed of many different things...we all life, all art, all waifs & strays—a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole” (Diary [D] 5 135). Theatre is the ultimate communal act; although La Trobe is the one at the helm of the operation, her experimental production casts both performer and audience in her play.

Virginia Woolf’s desperation for experimenting with new form in the era of wartime echoes the very sentiments of Chekhov’s most famous playwright character, Konstantin Gavrilovich in The Seagull. In setting out to write Between the Acts, Virginia Woolf declared, “to flout all preconceived theories—For more [and] more I doubt if enough is known to sketch even probable lines, all too emphatic [and] conventional” (D5 214). Woolf defended her need for a new form through uncertainty in reality. As Hitler rose to power, World War II simultaneously became more real and more absurd. Virginia Woolf witnessed Maynard Keynes’ prediction come to fruition with air raid warnings, explosions heard over telephones, and the rise of fascism. However, although these horrors were somewhat predicted, as the reality of war closed in, the unimaginable grew. Woolf could not imagine death by a bomb explosion or that Virginia and Leonard’s names would appear on the Nazi’s secret arrest list. She called herself a “gnat on a blade of grass” (D5 162), an insignificant spectator under the fascist regime, and vowed to write. When reality became too horrible, Woolf called for throwing out convention, finding a new form. Similarly, in The Seagull, Konstantin denounces realist theatre practices:

Every evening, when the curtain goes up, and there under the bright lights, in a room with three walls, those celebrated artists, those high priests of our sacred art, when they play it all out before us, how we mortals eat, and drink, and love, and go around wearing our clothes and leading our lives; when out of this vulgar scenario we are served up some kind of message or moral, however meager, ready for our daily domestic consumption; when after its one thousandth incarnation all these plays seem to me to be the same, time after time after time the same, then I flee—I flee like Maupassant fled the Eiffel Tower, because it outraged him how enormously trite it was. We need new forms. (Chekhov 42)

Just as La Trobe investigates a new form of the Pageant with an entire community, Konstantin calls for “new forms” as a plural from the “we.” He does not ask for others to adhere to his own new form, but rather, calls upon the larger artistic community to create and experiment with multiple forms. He also acknowledges the silliness in separating spectators from performers when the stage is a “room with three walls.” This type of performance imitates the day-to-day in order to provide a message, or an argument, rather than an impression.

However, Woolf embraces the idea of performance as a holy act with spectators as mortals and artists as priests. Just as Konstantin chooses the lake at sundown for his production, La Trobe throws out conventions of a stage with bright lights and sets her Pageant outside on the terrace, a “church without a roof, an open-air cathedral, a place where swallows darting seemed, by the regularity of the trees, to make a pattern, dancing, like the Russians” (Between the Acts [BA] 65). La Trobe’s stage is quasi-religious; the space has meaning because of the value the spectators’ give to the setting. Woolf proves that theatre is based solely in the community’s imagination, the spectator’s dream. It is religious and god-like to play another character, to live another life for a moment, to alter reality. After the performance, as the audience leaves, someone says, “We’re the oracles, if I’m not being irreverent, a foretaste of our own religion?” to which another replies, “But I was saying: can the Christian faith adapt itself? In times like these…” (BA 198). In the last hundred pages, the spectators watched Christian faith mutate, as a theatre became a church with those in the pews projected onto the stage, where the leader of the church would preach. Spectators are not only encouraged but required to participate, to see themselves as the future of history during a fascist, wartime present. Instead of encouraging a dependence on the church during trauma, La Trobe forces the audience to look at themselves. The spectators reflect, “That’s cruel. To snap us as we are, before we’ve had time to assume...And only, too, in parts...That’s what’s so disturbing and upsetting and utterly unfair” (BA 184). This new form merges reality with imagination; La Trobe snaps spectators before they’ve had time to assume a character, a holier role. They’re also only exhibited in parts, only making a whole unit as a community, a “we.”

As with Genesis, both Chekhov and Woolf set their pre-shows in nothingness; however, we separate from the biblical tale when it is the spectators, the audience—rather than one singular voice, the director—who create the world with their freedom to observe. When Konstantin introduces his play, he begins with a call for audience participation, “Let us dream what life will be in two hundred thousand years!”, and when his uncle chimes in, “In two hundred thousand years there will be nothing,” Konstantin excitedly replies, “Good, let them show us that nothing.” (Chekhov 46). “Let us dream” implies that the spectators have the power to conjure the play; they are as much a part of the journey as the actors. Similarly, “Let them show us” introduces the relationship between actor and audience; priest and mortal immediately. Nina, Konstantin’s star, sets the scene with nothingness, “…All life has died away….Cold, cold, cold. Empty, empty, empty. Terrible, terrible, terrible” (Chekhov 47). Immediately, the world springs to life via the spectators with comments such as “Something from the decadent school” and “It smells like sulphur. Is this really necessary? Ah, yes, special effects!” (Chekhov 48). Woolf follows the same repetition as Candish, the gardener, sets the house before the play has begun in a room that is “Empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent” (Chekhov 36). The play is then also brought to life with the cacophony of comments from spectators: “She’s England...It’s begun...The prologue...Hear heart!” and it goes on (BA 77). This opening to La Trobe’s Pageant is pure Chekhovian humor as the playwright attempts to hold their vision together while the spectators occupy the attention of the broader spectators, the reader of Between the Acts or the audience of The Seagull. Woolf brings the inconsequential—a towns-person’s confusion, a friend’s tardiness, and a little girl as big England—to the forefront. This scene occupies the liminal comic mode, comedy through the chorus, the reversed roles of who occupies the audience’s attention. Woolf’s comedy “undermines all definitions of a group as a centered, unified identity and rewrites the concept of community as a fragmented, questioning, contradictory, but fully collective voice” (Cuddy-Keane 280). The spectators own the freedom of individual thought with a unified soul; symbolized by their parts of a whole refracted in the mirrors at the end of the play.

The spectators fill in what is “between the acts” because the everyday and the inconsequential are theatrical; theatre reflects life. While the pageant traditionally reflects the happier, larger events of English history, La Trobe’s production marks an adoption of Woolf’s belief: “Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small” (Rubenstein 201). If the acts are World War I and World War II, or the acts are the death of loved ones, there is importance in the small, the inconsequence. With fascism threatening those everydays, the simple freedom of spectatorship becomes the large, the everything. Woolf recognizes this through La Trobe, evidenced in the transformation from spectator to main act. The whispers from the crowd become the lines in the play, and the end of the novel, Giles and Isa talking, prompts another play beginning, a curtain rising. Again echoing the Chekhovian connection of souls, Between the Acts’ forward motion exists in the chorus of voices. It is truly a symphony, freedom of speech as the refrain. While it seems as though the story ends where it takes off, “They were talking” to “They spoke” with nothing but talking all through the performance. Woolf’s explanation of Chekhovian endings illuminate the meaning. She reflects, “Where the tune is unfamiliar and the end a note of interrogation or
merely the information that they went on talking, as it is in Chekhov, we need a very daring and alert sense of literature to make us hear the tune, and in particular those last notes which complete the harmony” (CR). Woolf not only echoes but takes directly from this sentiment in her ending of Between the Acts: Giles and Isa go on talking, as it is in Chekhov. To go on talking, to be able to go on, to engage with another soul is to be free.

Under the impending threat of fascism, where freedom of speech is not an everyday, a given, or a guaranteed right, merely talking, thinking with one another, is fighting, is the future, is pushing forward. It is not the content, but the act of talking that is worth watching; the parallel of an intimate moment in a bedroom and a moment onstage encourages speech. Within both Chekhov and Woolf, the words are often incidental, but the life is imperative. When thinking is fighting, the act of staging a play for an audience is also fighting. Theatre is identifying with another, empathizing, physically stepping into a different body, and requires an attention of the small things that make up a life. Inside these nothing stories, the horizon widens as the spectator realizes her inconsequence, as the spectator realizes she is only one part of a reflection: a nose, a skirt, trousers. There is nothing trivial in what exists in the between; in the between exists humanity: freedom, hope, and life.

Isabel Perry
Northwestern University

Works Cited

Call for Editors
for the Virginia Woolf Miscellany

The Editorial Board of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany will be seeking new Assistant and Associate Editors for the publication. Specifically, we are seeking applicants who are intellectually invested in Woolf studies and have strengths in one or more of the areas listed below:

~ expertise in copy-editing and proofreading
~ proficiency with layout in InDesign
~ skills in website editing and digital publishing
~ competence in database management and mailings

If you have questions, please contact Vara Neverow at neverowv1@southernct.edu
CALL FOR PAPERS
VIRGINIA WOOLF MISCELLANY
ISSUES 95, 96 AND 97

CFP: Virginia Woolf Miscellany
Issue #95 Spring 2019
SubmitTions DuE: 31 October 2018

Special Topic:
Collecting Virginia Woolf

GUEST EDItOR: CaTherIne hollIs
Who collects Virginia Woolf and Hogarth Press books? When did the demand for and economic value of Woolf’s and the Hogarth Press’s books begin in the antiquarian book trade? Are Woolf and Hogarth Press books more or less desirable than other modernist first editions? What are the emotional, haptic, and educational values of early Woolf and Hogarth Press editions for scholars, students, and common readers? What do the book collections of Virginia and Leonard Woolf tell us about their lives as readers and writers?

In addition to more formal academic essays, this issue of the Miscellany (in collaboration with Blogging Woolf) will also feature a special section called “Our Bookshelves, Ourselves.” Our book collections tell stories about our reading lives and also about our lives in the larger community of Woolf’s readers and scholars. In fact, a history of our bookshelves might begin to tell a history of the IVWS itself. If you are a “common book collector,” and your books tell a story about your immersion in Woolf or Hogarth Press studies, tell us about it. If you have interesting strategies or stories about acquiring collectible editions of Woolf and Hogarth Press books on a budget, let us know!

Send submissions of 2000 words for longer essays and 500 words for “Our Bookshelves” by October 31, 2018 to Catherine Hollis via hollisc@berkeley.edu

CFP: Virginia Woolf Miscellany
Issue #96, Fall 2019
SubmitTions DuE: 1 May 2019

Special Topic:
Reading, Fast and Slow:
Centennial Musings on the Early Novels

GUEST EDItOR: ReBeCCa dunCan
Centennial years for Woolf’s novels began in 2015 with The Voyage Out and continue in 2019 with Night and Day. To consider the critical legacy and continued relevance of these early works, we can make an analogy of economist and Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman’s notion of fast vs. slow thinking (see Thinking, Fast and Slow. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011). Fast thinking is intuitive, impressionistic, and dependent upon associative memory. Slow thinking is deliberate, precise, detailed, and logical.

Likewise, reading can be fast or slow. Fast reading of the early novels seems to hurry along to Woolf’s more celebrated works, treating the former as prelude or practice in narrative art. Impressions, including early reviews and Woolf’s own reflections on her process or state of mind, may be limiting, or they may take us right to the heart of the work. Slow reading, in contrast, settles in and pursues a new approach, context, or dialogue and seeks to answer the question, “What have we missed?”

For its fall 2019 issue, the Miscellany invites fresh (fast or slow) readings of The Voyage Out and Night and Day, as well as Leonard Woolf’s The Wise Virgins and The Village in the Jungle. Possibilities include perspectives of postmodern readers; dialogues with contemporary fiction; attention to happiness, pain, intimacy, disruption; narrative forms, historicist/contextual/generic dialogues—any approach that will encourage a contemplative re-reading.

Submissions should be no longer than 2500 words; shorter articles are strongly preferred. Articles should be submitted electronically, in .doc or .docx MS Word format and in compliance with the style of the 8th edition of the MLA Handbook. For additional guidelines, please consult the Submissions policy published in any issue of the Miscellany.

Please send questions or submissions to Rebecca Duncan, guest editor and professor, English, Meredith College, Raleigh, NC: duncanr@meredith.edu. Deadline: 1 May 2019.

CFP: Virginia Woolf Miscellany
Issue #97 Spring 2020
SubmitTions DuE: 29 September 2019

Special Topic:
Virginia Woolf: Mobilizing Emotion, Feeling, and Affect

GUEST EDItOR: Celiese Lypka
This issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany seeks essays on Woolf’s exploration of emotions and feelings in her work and life, asking further how these states are mobilized into affective reactions and/or actions. In the introduction to The Affect Theory Reader, Melissa Gregg and Greg Seigworth outline affect as the “vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement … that can likewise suspend us … or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the [world].” With this in mind, the following questions might be considered: How does Woolf explore the politics and aesthetics of feelings? In her writings, how do feeling and emotions become affect; in what ways are bodies made to be orientated or disorientated; is there a relation to gender and how is affect embodied in different bodies? What might be Woolf’s theory of affect, and how might it be productive or potentially problematic? How does this theory of affect evolve over Woolf’s writings? Topics related to feminist and queer readings, illness and depression, as well as desire and orientations are encouraged—other approaches are also welcomed.

Submissions should be no longer than 2500 words. Please send inquiries or submissions to Celiese Lypka: celiese.lypka@ucalgary.ca

If you are interested in proposing a special topic for a future issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany, please contact Vara Neverow at neverowv1@southernct.edu
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## List of the IVWS Officers and Members-at-Large
Oscar Wilde was the first to offer a theoretical reflection about the biographical novel. In 1889, he has the character Vivian from “The Decay of Lying” say: “if a novelist is base enough to go to life for his personages he should at least pretend that they are creations, and not boast of them as copies. The justification of a character in a novel is not that other persons are what they are, but that the author is what he is. Otherwise the novel is not a work of art” (925-6). For the author of biofiction, of utmost importance is the artist and his or her creative vision, and not the historical past or the biographical subject, because, as Wilde’s Vivian says: “Literature always anticipates life. It does not copy it, but moulds it to its purpose” (934). According to this logic, those who write history or biography are not and cannot be artists, because they merely represent (copy) what is or was. For Wilde, art is located in the act of creation, even if that means recreating an actual biographical figure.

Wilde’s reflections have significant implications now that so many authors have made Virginia Woolf the protagonist of their biographical novels. For those scholars who treat the biographical novel as a form of biography, as Georg Lukács, Paul Murray Kendall, and Ina Schabert have done, Michael Cunningham’s The Hours, Susan Sellers’s Vanessa and Virginia, and Priya Parmar’s Vanessa and Her Sister could only be described as failures, because a primary criteria of the biographical novel would be the degree to which it accurately represents the life of the actual historical figure. But for those scholars who, like Wilde, consider the biographical novel primarily a form of fiction, then those same novels would be assessed on the basis of different criteria. To quote Wilde’s Vivian yet again: “The only portraits in which one believes are portraits where there is very little of the sitter, and a very great deal of the artist” (940). What makes a biographical novel an outstanding work is not the authors’ ability to accurately portray the historical personage, but rather, their ability to use the biographical subject in order to project into being their own aesthetic vision. To be more specific, the novels of Cunningham, Sellers, and Parmar are excellent only insofar as they give us a clear and compelling picture, not of Woolf, but of their authorial vision.

Let me supply just a few examples to illustrate how biofiction works. In The Brook Kerith (1916), instead of accurately representing the actual life of Christ or his time, George Moore pictures a Jesus who did not rise from the dead and who renounced many of his teachings as dangerous and fanatical. In short, Moore uses Christ and his story to create a more contemporary and humanist worldview. In Moses, Man of the Mountain (1939), Zora Neale Hurston portrays the great liberator not as a natural-born Hebrew, as is recorded in Exodus, but as an Egyptian, and making use of her anthropological work about race as a cultural construction, she brilliantly pictures Moses de-ethnicizing himself as an Egyptian. In The Confessions of Nat Turner (1967), William Styron has his protagonist have a homosexual experience, even though there is no evidence that this ever occurred. These novels do not give readers an accurate biographical portrait of Christ, Moses, or Turner. They give readers a vivid picture of the worldview of Moore, Hurston, and Styron.

Biographical novelists as varied as Joyce Carol Oates, Julia Alvarez, Colum McCann, Sabina Murray, Russell Banks, Bruce Duffy, Iliya Troyanov, and Emma Donoghue, to mention only a notable few, insist that their novels are not biographies and should not be treated as biographies. Two prominent biographical novelists, in particular, best express why readers should not see their novels as a form of biography. Gore Vidal has written some outstanding biographical novels, and in a 1974 interview with Gerald Clarke, he said the following about the subject of his biographical novel Burr: “My Burr is not the real Burr” (54). Joanna Scott has written two brilliant biographical novels, and in an essay about biofiction, she says the following about Egon Schiele, who is the protagonist of her biographical novel Arrogance: “I was not trying to pretend that my Schiele was the real Schiele. I just wanted him to be real” (32).

With regard to the legitimization and popularity of contemporary biofiction, Woolf is a strangely important figure. Her literary innovations, as seen most clearly in her novels Orlando: A Biography and Flush: A Biography, have contributed to the rise of biofiction, and some of the best and most influential biographical novels have made her the protagonist. And yet, Woolf could not imagine her way to biofiction. As she claims in her 1939 essay “The Art of Biography,” writers have to make a choice between biography and fiction, because the two “differ in the very stuff of which they are made” (120). The biographer is tied to the epistemic law of accurately representing established facts, while the novelist is committed to the aesthetic law of projecting “the truth of his [or her] own vision” (124). Given these competing and even antagonistic objectives, mixing the two can only lead to mutual destruction, thus ruling out the possibility of the biographical novel.

But can we specify why Woolf could not imagine her way to biofiction? What is it about biofiction that Woolf could not entertain as a possibility? The answer, I contend, is that Woolf failed to understand that biographical novelists use rather than represent their subjects. To clarify what I mean, let me return to Styron’s novel. There is absolutely no evidence that the actual Turner had a homosexual experience. So why would Styron create such a scene? When working on the novel, James Baldwin was living with Styron, and the two frequently drank and conversed after their long days of writing. This friendship significantly impacted Styron’s novel. Styron credits Baldwin with helping him imagine his way into Turner, and Baldwin confessed that he sees much of himself in Styron’s protagonist. If we know that Baldwin was gay and that he authored a gay novel just four years before moving in with Styron, then we could hypothesize that Styron sought to identify in his novel parallel forms of oppression. In essence, Styron’s biographical novel about Turner is not

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1 This paper was presented at the 26th Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf in Leeds, England, June 2016. For insightful feedback on this presentation and essay, I would like to thank Mark Hussey, Gill Lowe, Monica Latham, Bethany Layne, and Todd Avery.

2 For discussions of Woolf’s role in the rise and legitimization of biofiction, see the introduction to my book The American Biographical Novel and my essay “The Futures of Biofiction Studies.”
really about Turner. Rather, it is about the psycho-epistemological structures that were used to justify the subjugation and violation of blacks like Turner in 1831 as well as blacks and gays in the 1960s. Styrion discovered in Turner’s story a psycho-epistemological structure, and he then appropriated Turner in order to illustrate how that same structure operates in the 1960s against other marginalized communities.

Put more specifically, what readers get in The Confessions of Nat Turner is not an accurate picture of the nineteenth-century slave rebel. They get a figure that Styrion converted into a metaphor in order to represent his own vision of life. Styrion is absolutely clear about this. In response to the critiques of his book, he says that a novel has “its own metaphysics, its own reason for being as an aesthetic object.” With regard to The Confessions, he claims that, while it “deals with history,” it “can at the same time be a metaphorical plan, a metaphorical diagram for a writer’s attitude toward human existence.” This is the case because, as “a work of literature,” the biographical novel has “its own reality, its own power, its own appeal, which derive from factors that don’t really relate to history” (Styrion qtd. in Woodward 143). Styrion is not really that interested in history, which is why The Confessions of Nat Turner cannot be considered a historical novel. The biographical novelist appropriates the life story of a person from history and then converts that story into a metaphor. As such, Styrion does not give readers history or even biography. What he does is to appropriate the biographical figure in order to create a “metaphorical diagram” that readers could then use to illuminate something from both the past and the present. The accent here is on the metaphorical diagram, not the historical past or the biographical subject. Within this aesthetic framework, if altering biographical facts enables a novelist to better picture the metaphorical diagram, then that is what the writer will and must do.

David Ebershoff’s 2000 novel The Danish Girl will help clarify one of the standard practices of the biographical novelist. Based on the life of Einar Wegener/Lili Elbe, the first person to undergo sex confirmation surgery, Ebershoff states explicitly that the “reader should not look to this novel for very many biographical details of Einar Wegener’s life” (Author’s Note). Ebershoff found “some important facts about Einar’s actual transformation” (Author’s Note), and he then used those details in order to craft a narrative that would underscore the degree to which “there is universality to Einar’s question of identity” (“Conversation” 8). In short, Ebershoff converted Einar/Lili into a symbol. Thus, Ebershoff used Einar/Lili, not to picture the actual life of a real historical figure, but to express his own views about the link between a constructed identity and human agency. Consistent with the aesthetic practice of her day, Woolf did exactly the same thing when she named her character Orlando rather than Vita Sackville-West (the actual person on whom the novel is based), thus giving her the freedom to convert her protagonist into a symbol that represents the fragmented or multiple self, the construction of gender and sex identity, pernicious forms of heteronormative coercion, and so much more.

But had Woolf, like contemporary biographical novelists, named her protagonist after the actual person (Vita), she would not have felt that she could have taken such liberties. We see this most clearly through her biography about Roger Fry. In an oft-quoted passage from a letter to Sackville-West, Woolf wonders how one goes about writing a biography. What troubles her is the overwhelming amount of information about Fry, which leads her to ask: “How can one deal with facts—so many, and so many and so many?” (3 May 1938 Letters 226). At this point, Woolf considers abandoning the biography project and writing something “purely fictitious” instead. Based on this passage, it seems like Woolf believes that there are only two options: either she must write a biography that is doggedly faithful to the mountain of facts or she must write something “purely fictitious,” something like Orlando, which would allow her to dispense with the facts altogether. The biofictional option of writing about an actual person but subordinating biographical facts to her creative vision is not a possibility.

To bring into sharp focus what prevented Woolf from imagining her way to biofiction, let me briefly contrast Woolf’s remarks about her Fry biography and Sellers’ comments about her novel Vanessa & Virginia. Like most biographical novelists, what fired Sellers’ imagination was less the actual biographical subjects than a particular structure of being. As Sellers says about the genesis of her novel, it was a sibling rivalry story that caught her attention—a two-year old wanted to throw her new-born sister into the garbage. Sellers used this event as the basis for drafting a short story about two imaginary sisters, but at the same time she was doing research about Woolf and her family. It was this combination that led her to examine more closely the relationship between Vanessa and Virginia and led her to start writing about the sisters. But once she got from her research what she needed, she put the primary sources aside. She did this because she wanted her “characters to come alive on the page” (83). This resulted, Sellers acknowledges, in some deviations from fact and embellishments of the truth, and what allowed her to justify this is her primary commitment to the inner logic of her characters and story. Given her allegiance to her own fictional vision over the lives of her subjects, what readers get in Vanessa and Virginia is more literature than biography, more “metaphor” than “fact” (83). Bell and Woolf are the basis for the story, but the novel ultimately contains Seller’s aesthetic vision rather than an accurate picture of Vanessa and Virginia.

Sellers is not alone in subordinating the biographical to the fictional, in placing the integrity of her authorial vision above the established facts of her protagonists’ actual lives. In 2012, Monica Latham published a ground-breaking essay on biofiction about Woolf, and in that work, she notes that some scholars criticized Cunningham’s deviation from fact in his biographical novel The Hours. But as Latham rightly notes, “Cunningham is not a biographer, but a fiction writer whose method consists in fictionalizing biographical events. He breaks free from biography, distorts it, and fabricates new events that seem authentic as they encroach on real, biographical material” (415). What Latham says about Cunningham holds true for authors of biofiction more generally. Take, for instance, Malcolm Bradbury’s remarks from the preface of his biographical novel about Denis Diderot. Bradbury acknowledges that he has drawn “a great deal on history,” but he confesses that when history seems “dull or inaccurate,” he has improved on it by quietly correcting “errors in the calendar,” adjusting “flaws in world geography,” occasionally budging “the border of a country,” or changing “the constitution of a nation” (55). In biofiction, biography and history take their cue from the vision of the creative writer rather than the reality of the world of established fact. This was an aesthetic move that Woolf could not make.

Now, of course, someone could easily retort: but Woolf does name characters after actual historical figures and she does alter facts about them, as we see with her Queen Elizabeth in Orlando and Elizabeth Barrett Browning in Flush. But here we need to make a clear distinction between the biographical novel and the historical novel. As Lukács claims in 1937, the protagonist of a historical novel is an invented figure that represents a historical-social type. In this genre, actual historical figures can and frequently do appear in a work, but they exist on the periphery, function to enhance the symbolic significance of the fictional protagonist, and locate the narrative within a specific temporal context. Thus, in the historical novel, authors feel free to alter facts about peripheral and secondary figures, but only so long as those changes function to illuminate the socio-historical reality of the fictional protagonist. To put the matter quite simply, Orlando and Flush are historical novels, not biographical novels.

3 For an extensive analysis of Styrion’s novel as a form of biofiction, see my essay “Separatists, Integrationists, and William Styrion’s The Confessions of Nat Turner.”

4 For an astute theoretical formulation of the way biofiction authors engage primary source material but then put it away to create an original and unique work of art, see Latham’s discussion of Cunningham’s The Hours in her book Poetics of Postmodernism and Neomodernism (62-76). Both Sellers and Cunningham use the same strategy.
To conclude, let me briefly note the way the aesthetic discourse about biofiction differs from the kind of language Woolf used. In the Author’s Note of Vanessa and Her Sister, Parmar specifies that her objective is “to fictionalize the Bloomsbury Group” (344). Using fiction to access and represent a reality, such as a person’s interiority or the essence of a group, is much different from fictionalizing a person or a group. In the former, fiction is at the service of accurate representation and must therefore respect the facts, while in the latter, the fiction writer uses history, people, and/or facts as the basis for constructing a vision about life and the world. Now it might seem that Parmar is closer to being a fictional biographer than a biographical novelist because she claims that, given the excessively documented lives of Bloomsbury Group members, it is difficult to find “enough room for invention in the negative spaces they left behind” (344). Logically filling in gaps within a biographical record in order to illuminate the life of a particular figure is typical among fictional biographers, so in this instance, it would seem that Parmar is more biographer than novelist. But she goes on to say that her characters “are very much fictional creations,” and she then states that she made strategic “adjustments and alterations” to the biographical and historical record. In short, Parmar fictionalizes rather than represents Vanessa and Virginia in her novel. Therefore, when assessing the work, instead of measuring its quality on the basis of its representational accuracy, we should assess it on the basis of Parmar’s vision of life and the world. Biofiction can and certainly does give readers new and productive ways of thinking about figures from the past. But since authors of biofiction convert their protagonists into metaphors and symbols, they also give us insightful ways of understanding the present, how the past contributed to its making, and what motivates our contemporary forms of living. We are only now beginning to realize the uncanny power of this respectfully iconoclastic art form.

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Lytton Strachey and the Biographical Roots of Biofiction

In “The Futures of Biofiction” (2017), Michael Lackey asks vital questions regarding the whence and what of biofiction and the what and whither of biofiction studies. These questions emerge from the widely shared understanding of the genre’s modernist roots. Among modernists, core members of the Bloomsbury Group exerted a preponderant theoretical and practical influence on the development of biofiction. Echoing Bethany Layne’s location of biofiction’s “antecedents” in “Modernist developments in life writing by [Virginia] Woolf, Harold Nicolson, and Lytton Strachey” (31), Lackey pays particular attention to the originary influence of the two bona fide Bloomsburyans in Layne’s tria: “Lytton Strachey and the new biographers revolutionized the biography by making liberal use of the creative imagination and fictional techniques in picturing a person’s life, while Virginia Woolf made biography and the biographer a central feature of her novels Orlando and Flush. In essence, Strachey and Woolf nuded the two separate and distinct genres closer to one another” (343). Does such generic nudging imply, Lackey asks, “that Strachey and Woolf paved the way for the current postmodernist literary genre of biofiction, even if neither wrote nor even could imagine their way to a biographical novel?” If it does, then “how did Strachey’s experimental biographies and Woolf’s experimental novels-as-biography set the stage for the rise of biofiction?” And “To what degree did stream of consciousness and the rise of psychology make possible and even necessary the biographical novel?” (343). I want to take up the question of Lytton Strachey’s place in the history of biofiction by briefly describing the stages of his influential reconceptualization of biography as an art form. Virginia Woolf is proving an immensely popular subject for writers of biofiction, and she took steps along a path from fiction in the direction of biofiction; but among the Bloomsburyans it was Strachey who, as a historian, critic, and biographer, more fully theorized and more eagerly practiced a type of life writing that contains biofiction’s DNA.

Strachey was an inheritor of the aestheticist mantle carefully sewn by Walter Pater and flamboyantly worn by Oscar Wilde, and he would later make his reputation equally as a biographer and as a stylist in life. But to fully appreciate his reshaping of biography and his influence as a progenitor of biofiction, he must be seen not only as an aesthete and a biographer, but also as a historian. As a young man, long before publishing the innovative biographies of eminent Victorians and Elizabethans by which he secured his place in the biographical avant-garde, Strachey trained as a historian at Cambridge University. At the same time when he was beginning to cultivate the persona that marked him as a latter-day aesthete, Strachey sharpened his bio-theoretical teeth. He did this indirectly, as a history student energized by the late-Victorian and Edwardian historiographical debate that centered on the question, Is history a science or an art? This debate would profoundly shape Strachey’s idea of biography, and lead him to a theory of life writing from which it is a short step to biofiction.

Strachey, as Dennis Petrie put it long ago, “manipulates literal truth to construct brilliantly formalized, compact portraits” (qtd. in Middeke 21 n6). Strachey learned such manipulation among historians. At the turn into the twentieth century, leading historians and historiographical theorists like G. M. Trevelyan and J. B. Bury argued over whether history was a science of the past, grounded in the pursuit of objective
fact, or an artistic endeavor to shape past events and that might be permitted some factual latitude. Bury, in a January 1903 lecture titled “The Science of History,” argued, under the influence of nineteenth-century positivism, that history had “begun to enter into closer relations with the sciences which deal objectively with the facts of the universe” (10-11). Trevelyan, for his part, sided with artist-historians, in insisting on the imaginative and literary character of history. From the moment when Strachey entered the fray, in an essay titled “The Historian of the Future” late in 1903, he sided with Trevelyan. He argues, apropos of history’s interest in individual minds—a budding psychological interest whose rapid and imminent growth Strachey anticipated—that:

the truth of propositions with regard to individual minds cannot be inferred by the scientific method, but only by an artistic method, and as the narration of these truths can only be effected by means of art, history is, so far as it deals with individual minds, artistic. (20-21)

Strachey would continue to assert history’s fundamentally artistic character for the rest of his life. The attitude toward history that he began articulating at Cambridge and that would eventually so influence the course of biofiction would express itself not only as regular pronouncements on historiography in various essays and reviews, but also as a theoretical principle of biography and, tacitly, of autobiography. For Strachey, as for the Oscar Wilde of “The Decay of Lying” (1889) and “The Critic as Artist” (1890)—and for many other aesthetes and decadents, such as J. A. M. Whistler (“Ten O’Clock”) and Max Beerbohm (“A Defense of Cosmetics”)—it is art that justifies historical and biographical fact—and indeed nature itself—and not the other way around. Lackey argues that Wilde’s distinction between creation and representation in “The Decay of Lying” constitutes “the first […] theoretical reflection about the biographical novel” (“Usages” 12). In. “mould[ing] life” to its purpose,” Wilde writes, “Literature always anticipates life. It does not copy it, but moulds it to its purpose” (“Decay” 983). Lackey glosses this passage as an ur-theorization of biofiction: “According to [Wilde’s] logic, those who write history or biography are not and cannot be artists, because they merely represent (copy) what is or was. […] art is located in the act of creation, even if that means recreating an actual biographical figure” (“Usages” 12). Accordingly, “What makes a biographical novel an outstanding work is not the author’s ability to accurately portray the historical personage, but rather, their ability to use the biographical subject in order to project into being their own aesthetic vision” (“Usages” 12). For this reason, biofictional novels “do not give readers an accurate biographical portrait[…] […] They give readers a vivid picture of the worldview” of the author (“Usages” 12). Biofiction then functions analogously to the Wildean mode of criticism, which “treats the work of art simply as a starting-point for a new creation” (Wilde, “Critic” 1029). In biofiction, as Lackey puts it, “biographical novelists use rather than represent their subjects” (“Usages” 12).

Just as Wilde subordinates the mundane world of fact to the act of imaginative creation and critical re-creation, so too Strachey, from his earliest theorizations of history as art, subordinates the “science” of factual collection to the artistic vision of the historian. Virginia Woolf, whomed by facts while writing her biography of Roger Fry, found it impossible to reconcile fidelity to fact with the creative writer’s urge to invention. In contrast, Strachey’s axiomatic allegiance to art enables him, when he turns to biography in the mid-1910s, to blithely sidestep the mountains of facts about the Victorian Age that threatened to overwhelm the “scientific” historian, in order to affirm the creative autonomy of the new biographer. In the “Preface” to Eminent Victorians (1918), his brief, campy, ironic, and hugely influential biographical credo, Strachey begins as a historian and redefines himself as a biographer. He opens with an ironic comment on history: “The history of the Victorian Age will never be written: we know too much about it”—and shifts to “the medium of biography,” a genre which, he writes, will enable him “to present some Victorian visions to the modern eye” (9). In other words, the genre of biography will allow him to present his own vision of the Victorian Age to his modern readers. Thus, in the process of defining his role as a biographer, Strachey subordinates history as recorder of fact to biography, or the history of the individual, as an art form that celebrates not objective truth but the writer’s “freedom of spirit” (10).

Where the nineteenth-century historian had set out in pursuit of facts, Strachey, in a proto-postmodern embrace of partial and fragmented knowledge, placidly accepts “ignorance” as “the first requisite of the historian” (9). Given the impossibility of total knowledge, Strachey instead selects “characteristic specimens” of the age and presents characteristic facts about those specimens that conform to “simple motives of […] art” (9). He is not interested in Truth, but in “fragments of truth”—and, what is more, “fragments of truth” that, as he says, simply “took my fancy and lay to my hand” (9). He is proceeding here along methodological lines that he’d laid out in his 1909 review of “A New History of Rome”; there, as in the “Preface” to Eminent Victorians, he begins with a paradox designed to elevate the artistic impulse that drives the aesthetic historian over that which motivates the scientific historian like J. B. Bury:

When Livy said that he would have made Pompey win the battle of Pharsalia if the turn of the sentence had required it, he was not talking utter nonsense, but simply expressing an important truth in a highly paradoxical way—that the first duty of a great historian is to be an artist. […] Uninterpreted truth is as useless as buried gold; and art is the great interpreter. […] More than that, it can throw over the historian’s materials the glamour of a personal revelation, and display before the reader great issues and catastrophes as they appear […] to the penetrating vision of the most soaring of human spirits. (“A New” 13)

For Strachey, art is both craft and self-expression. In this review, he defines the historian as an imaginative and indeed an inspired, a visionary craftsman. To a certain extent, the historian pays obeisance to facts. However, in that seemingly innocuous invocation of “personal revelation,” Strachey begins to shift gears, and to see his way to the methodological position that would come to fruition in the “Preface” to Eminent Victorians, where he redefines the biographer as an expressive artist.

This redefinition happens explicitly in Strachey’s discussion of “the art of biography” as practiced so gloriously in France and so deplorably in England (10). It happens implicitly in the fabricated quotation with which he concludes his “Preface,” by way of clarifying his purpose in writing the “lives” of Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Thomas Arnold, and General Gordon. For in the final sentence of this manifesto he relinquishes, with a mischievous subtlety and a thorough disinenueness, all pretense to factual “truth”—which anyway cannot be known—in the name of a higher, artistic, truth. Immediately after declaring the two duties of the biographer—“To preserve . . . a becoming brevity” and “no less surely . . . to maintain his own freedom of spirit”—he further clarifies the biographer’s business: “to lay bare the facts of the case, as he understands them” (10). In that appeal to the necessarily limited understanding of the biographer interested only in “fragments of the truth” which conveniently and accidentally lay about, Strachey weights his method finally in favor of art over science, imaginative truth over verifiable fact. He concludes: “That is what I have aimed at in this book—to lay bare the facts of some cases, as I understand them, dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior intentions. To quote the words of a Master—’Je n’impose rien; je ne propose rien; j’expose’” (10). The quotation is a fabrication; he’s writing fiction.

This tacit figuring of the biographer as writer of fiction marks an interesting moment in the development of the theoretical conditions that would make biofiction possible. Strachey’s playful fabrication of a quotation from an equally fictional “Master” sounds un cri de joie
of a free spirit, who feels himself unbound by obligation to objective truth and free to pursue imaginative truth, using facts that lie to hand and with the determination to shape them according to the dictates of art. *Eminent Victorians*, like the 1903 essay “The Historian of the Future” and the 1909 review “A New History of Rome,” marks a stage in Strachey’s intellectual journey toward biofiction. The biographical attitude he defines in the “Preface” enables him to expand biography in his next major work, and indeed in his first (and arguably last) full-length biography, *Queen Victoria* (1921), into a hybrid genre. *Queen Victoria* is both biography and novel. In it, Strachey continued his work as an ironist and further blurred boundaries between what Woolf calls “the granite and the rainbow” by writing the life of the Queen in the form of a melodramatic and “романтический роман” (Holroyd, “On” 35).

Unlike Virginia Woolf, who was unable to reconcile the sharp opposition between factual fidelity, on the one hand, and fictional imagination, on the other, Strachey delightedly theorized the subordination of fact to fiction in biography. He would come closest to carrying out this subordination in his last major work, an ostensibly biography, or dual biography, that announces itself sub-titularly as a work of imaginative fiction: *Elizabeth and Essex: A Tragic History* (1928).

Strachey deliberately approached Elizabeth in a biofictional spirit. Like the later writers of biofiction who subordinate biographical fact to creative vision—who, that is, use their subject as a creative opportunity—Strachey intentionally manipulated and invented historical facts in the service of an intensely personal vision. In February 1927, Strachey, then the most famous biographer in England, wrote a letter to his lover Roger Senhouse in which he articulates a statement of method that carries profound implications for all life-writing, including what would come to be called biofiction. “I can only write nonsense today,” he tells Senhouse. “I wish I could write Elizabeth as well. If only she could be reduced to nonsense—that would be perfect. The whole of Art lies there. To pulverize the material and remould it in the shape of one’s own particular absurdity” (qtd. in Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey* 568). For Strachey, to “write Elizabeth” is not to represent the Queen’s life with factual fidelity; it is, rather, and by definition, to demolish the known facts in order to re-shape her—to impose a vision of Elizabeth, of her relationship with Essex, and of some of the Elizabethan Age’s most fascinating figures that is grounded in and a reflection of Strachey’s “own particular absurdity.” This absurdity resides, in part, in an increasingly active fascination with sado-masochism, one of the book’s topoi. But the specific content of Strachey’s “own particular absurdity” is not important here; what is important is that Strachey theorizes and strives to practice, in the late 1920s, a mode of biographical writing that fuses with fictional techniques in such a way as to facilitate the writer’s creative autonomy. Here is biofiction in *ovo*. It may convey factual information about its nominal subject; but its “attaching” purpose is “to express the personality of the writer” (Strachey, “Walpole’s Letters” 197).

Virginia Woolf thought rather lowly of *Elizabeth and Essex*, which was published in the same year as *Orlando*. In her 1939 essay “The Art of Biography,” she argues that Strachey’s book was an example of “what biography cannot do” (189). She was more right than she realized. For Woolf, who is not being ironic, the blame was generic: “it was not Lytton Strachey who failed; it was the art of biography” (190). She thought *Queen Victoria* a success because in it Strachey “treated biography as a craft; he submitted to its limitations” (191). *Elizabeth*, on the other hand, was a “compulsive failure” because in it Strachey “treated biography as an art; he flouted its limitations” (191). In *Elizabeth*, Woolf continues, “fact and fiction refused to mix” (192). But is *Elizabeth and Essex* essentially a failure? Might it not be considered afresh in light of recent scholarship in biofiction—scholarship that helps us to read the trajectory of Strachey’s career with fresh eyes? Woolf is no doubt right if we assume a biographical purpose on Strachey’s part. But he called his book “A Tragic History,” not “A Biography;” moreover, he constructed it as a five-act tragedy modeled on *Antony and Cleopatra* (Holroyd, “On” 38). Strachey’s letter to Roger Senhouse, when located in the narrative of Strachey’s development from historian to biographer and, eventually, proto-biofiction writer, enables us to see *Elizabeth and Essex* in a more positive light. It was not a lamentable failure of biography, but an example of precisely “what biography cannot do.” It was a vigorous effort, by a latter-day aesthete, to practice the art of biofiction.

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Angels Musing at My Expense

“Vain trifles as they seem, clothes…change our view of the world and the world’s view of us.”
Virginia Woolf, Orlando

“comfortable always, like an old shoe”
Doris Moore Swallow, “Mom”

On and on it goes, this conversation
Between my mother and Virginia.
Once again,
These two angel muses sit enjoying another comfortable chat at my expense.

Over tea they disagree,
Virginia seeing the need for the new fashions to come
Abhorring what hung in her closet and never one
To step ahead, to stand out, to set a trend,
And Mom, reminding her just how easy it could feel
To slip back into what one has known
Though in her green flapper fringe Mom could, would,
Shimmy with the best of them.

Which of them demands that I sleep even now with my eyes open?
Which says wear what you want
Just don’t be conspicuous? Which one wags a finger, shakes a fist,
Says wear your purple, take a stand. They argue over me
As if they both had birthed me and had that right.
You make the bed you lie in, even sleeping naked is no one else’s affair.

I cringe, but then agree:
They are both part and a part of me, our own rooms
Being what they are: tightly drawn up around us, girdles of Expectations and girdles long out of style,
(Didn’t Mom tell me letting herself out was a feeling
Better than sex, and Virginia, laughing, agreed)
And me now, alert always to the textures and colors
Of my darkest dreams, the peripeteia of conversations with Mrs. Dalloway

When she finds me lacking,
Never forgiving like my mother’s old & comfortable loafers
Begging the binding question of style itself;
Nor rather long and yellowed like Mabel’s new dress
Something special always hidden under the skirt,
Kept secret, lest the fitting in be close
But lacking.

What Would Woolf Think About Her Presence in Biofiction?

Despite all of her writing—personal, polemical, creative and otherwise—it might be difficult to determine just how Virginia Woolf would have felt about her place in biofiction. Since the genre did not exist, at least with that identifier, in her time, she certainly never gave her opinions on the matter, directly. Yet one does know she wished to survive beyond her death. Is having a presence in biofiction a way of surviving beyond death? ‘Yeats’ anthology out. Am I jealous? No: but depressed to feel I’m not a poet. Next time I shall be one. And I’ve touched ground. Whatever happens I don’t think I can now be destroyed,” Woolf says in her diary in November 1936 (D5 35). Having published Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, and The Waves, among other books, Woolf believed herself to have “touched ground” in her writing—her “work work,” as she refers to it (“Only work work is essential” [D5 35]). Accordingly, one sees that the immortality that mattered to Woolf—the avoidance of being “destroyed”—was one based on the quality of her literary output, not, for instance, the mystique she cultivated as an individual, a figure, a celebrity. What Woolf would seem to admire most in regard to writers writing about her in the twenty-first century is that writers are writing about her work; her continual appearance in biofiction likely would impress her less than the active legion of scholars studying her novels, short stories, essays and the like. Compared to critical scholarship and the anthologizing of her “work work,” imaginative reconstructions of her life—“visions” of Virginia Woolf on part of Susan Sellers, Norah Vincent, Michael Cunningham (Lackey 7)—would likely be comparatively unimportant to her.

At the same time, it’s worth considering how biofiction keeps Woolf’s “work work” from being destroyed while imagining how this genre’s connection to “work work” might have tempered Woolf’s feelings about it. Take, for instance, Susan Sellers’s Vanessa and Virginia. In this work of biofiction, published in 2008 and focused on the relationship between the Stephen sisters, Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf, Sellers uses the first-person to inhabit the mind of Virginia Woolf when she writes: “My memories are as tangled as the reels of thread and fragments of cloth in Mother’s sewing basket, which I loved to tip out and sort on the nursery floor: colored ribbons, stray buttons, a triangle of purple lace” (Sellers 2). In this passage, “Mother” is Woolf’s mother, Julia Prinsep Jackson Duckworth Stephen. But for a reader familiar with To the Lighthouse, she ("Mother") is also Mrs. Ramsay, a fictionalized version of Woolf’s own mother. For the reader familiar with To the Lighthouse and Woolfian history, allusions to Woolf’s famous novel accumulate around the Mother figure.

With Mother’s sewing basket, Sellers refashions imagery from To the Lighthouse. For instance, Woolf writes, “Nothing could be cooler and quieter. Taking out a pen-knife, Mr. Bankes tapped the canvas with the bone handle. What did she wish to indicate by the triangular purple shape, ‘just there?’” (TTL 58) In this scene, as Lily Briscoe, a visitor...
to the Ramsay's summer house, paints beside the sea, fellow guest Mr. Bankes approaches her and scrutinizes her work, questioning the significance of particular elements of the painting. In Mr. Bankes's eyes, Lily has painted Mrs. Ramsay as a "triangular purple shape." And we see that Sellers has written something of an homage to Lily's painting by mentioning that a "triangle" of "purple" lace is in Mother's sewing basket. Lily painted Mrs. Ramsay as a purple triangle, and now Sellers transforms Mrs. Ramsay from purple paint into purple lace, retaining both her color and shape.

In *To the Lighthouse* Mrs. Ramsay famously spends a good portion of the novel's first section, "The Window," knitting a stocking for a lighthouse keeper's little boy:

"But it may be fine—I expect it will be fine," said Mrs. Ramsay, making some little twist of the reddish brown stocking she was knitting, impatiently. If she finished it tonight, if they did go to the Lighthouse after all, it was to be given to the Lighthouse keeper for his little boy. (5)

While Mother's sewing basket lacks knitting needles (Sellers replaces these objects with threads and colored ribbons and buttons), Sellers connects Mother to objects associated with the fiber arts and invokes Mrs. Ramsay's knitting in *To the Lighthouse*. Sellers even incorporates some of Mrs. Ramsay's interaction with her son, James, in one of *To the Lighthouse*'s early passages:

Finally, Mother seats herself in the chair by the fire and calls us to her. Always, Thoby goes first. I watch him pulled into the curve of Mother's arm, closing my eyes to imagine the silky feel of her dress, her smell of lavender and eau de nil. When I open my eyes her fingers are stroking his hair. (Sellers 3)

This passage recalls the moment in *To the Lighthouse* when Mrs. Ramsay holds James, attempting to comfort him after they discover that the stocking she has been knitting is "ever so much too short" (31) for the lighthouse keeper's boy. "Mrs. Ramsay smoothed out what had been harsh in her manner a moment before, raised his head, and kissed her little boy on the forehead" (TTL 33). In Sellers, Thoby is "pulled into the curve of Mother's arm," and the reader familiar with Woolf's novel glimpses Mrs. Ramsay's extended and loving embrace of James in "The Window."

*To the Lighthouse* connections continue as Sellers's "Mother" "enters the nursery like a queen" (2). The Woolf-versed reader recalls two instances in Woolf's novel: the moment in which Mrs. Ramsay "looks down" and "descends among" her "people" "like some queen" (TTL 91) on her way to a dinner the Ramsays are hosting in their home that evening, and when, after dinner, Mrs. Ramsay retreats to the house's nursery, where she speaks of fairies, goats and antelopes in a "rhythmnical" voice until her daughter, Cam, falls asleep (TTL 127). Sellers sustains Mrs. Ramsay's regal bearing and her proximity/connection to her children's bedroom, arguably the site most demonstrative of her maternal care and her being pressured, by her husband, to fill her home "with life" (TTL 41).

In these passages of biofiction, elements of Woolf's "work work" are forwarded, continued, upheld. Indeed, knowing that Mrs. Ramsay is based on Julia Stephen creates a multilayered experience in reading Sellers's "Mother": at once the reader sees Julia, Mrs. Ramsay, and Mother; they cannot help conflating the three, allowing the presence of each to pass from one to the other with a rich fluidity. For the Woolf-versed reader, to read Sellers's "Mother" is to extend the fictionalized life of Mrs. Ramsay. No longer is she dead. From the passage of time she has been plucked, from the "poppies" among the "dahlias" (TTL 155) she has been reborn, refashioned and reconfigured; now she is the "Mother" who, inhabiting the biofictional page, bears literary significance.

So, while it is "work work" that matters (is "essential") to Woolf, and scholarship of such work that carries weight for her, critics can begin to imagine that a particular brand of biofiction might not be entirely separate from Woolf's "work work." Biofiction that pays homage to literary output might earn Woolf's respect for its prolonging the life of creative work. Fairly subtle references to *To the Lighthouse in Vanessa and Virginia* extend a novel central to Woolf's creative production, and so prevent her "work work" from being "destroyed" (D5 35).

Not all works of biofiction necessarily pay homage to the literary figure whose life they are recreating, it should be noted, and there of course exist works of biofiction that have nothing to do with literary artists whatsoever, but, rather, queens, conquerors, heads of state. Since this brief paper is concerned only with Woolf's place in biofiction, these other biofiction projects are out of my scope. But it would seem that so long as a work of biofiction contains elements of Woolf's "work work," it is furthering the "ground" she was aware she touched with her oeuvre. The reader who picks up a novel featuring Woolf-centric biofiction without having read any of Woolf's "work work" misses the connections to Woolf's output, obviously, and it seems plausible the reader would earn Woolf's loathing for the dismissal of what she considered the crucial component of her legacy. When it comes to answering the question, "what would Woolf think about her presence in biofiction?," the answer really depends on *what kind of reader* is reading the work of biofiction. Woolf would seem to favor the biofiction reader catching the homage and references keeping her art alive.

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Biofiction and the Paratext: Troubling Claims to “Truth”

In "The Art of Biography" (1939), Virginia Woolf found "proof ready to hand" for her assertion that "biography is the most restricted of all the arts." This evidence was the "preface" in which "Smith, who has written the life of Jones, takes this opportunity of thanking old friends who have lent letters, and ‘last but not least’ Mrs. Jones, the widow, for that help ‘without which,’ as he puts it, ‘this biography could not have been written.‘" Woolf contrasted these acknowledgements with the novelist's "foreword," a simple statement to the effect that "every character in this book is fictitious," concluding that whereas "the novelist is free, the biographer is tied" (120). Sixty-five years later, David Lodge would introduce his biographical novel about Woolf’s godfather, Henry James, by qualifying his claim to freedom: "sometimes it seems advisable to preface a novel with a note saying that the story and the characters are entirely fictitious, or words to that effect. On this occasion a different authorial statement seems called for" (Author, Author n. pag).
This essay examines those “different authorial statements”: the appendices to biographical novels about Woolf. Variously referred to as “acknowledgements,” “author’s note(s),” or “note(s) on sources,” these statements tread a line between the “tied” biographer’s admission of indebtedness, and the novelist’s assertion of liberation. I inspect statements by Michael Cunningham, Maggie Gee, Sigrid Nunez, Priya Parmar, Susan Sellers and Norah Vincent, in light of a shared series of questions. How is the statement positioned and named? Do authors name their sources, or gloss over them? Do they acknowledge the tension between fact and fiction, or is fact subordinated to their fictional vision? Are specific instances of borrowing or invention indicated? And what relation is established with the subject herself? Answering these questions will illuminate my central hypothesis: that these scholarly gestures conceal a subversive function. Such subversive strategies are evident when, to cite just one instance, the identification of a specific invention risks misrepresenting the surrounding prose as wholly empirical. As a gateway to biographical fiction, the paratext functions, then, to shape and define the perceived validity of the accompanying discourse, and to clarify the nature of the relationship between the author and the subject.

It is fitting to pause at this juncture to introduce the works of biofiction under consideration. The best-known of the novels sampled, Cunningham’s The Hours (1998), details the day on 23rd on which Woolf began Mrs. Dalloway. These chapters are interspersed with ones from the perspective of Laura Brown, who is reading Mrs. Dalloway in 1949, and Clarissa Vaughan, who is living a version of her namesake’s life at “the end of the twentieth century” (9). They are preceded by a prologue narrating Woolf’s death in 1941. Gee’s Virginia Woolf in Manhattan (2014) resurrects Woolf in twenty-first-century New York, where she appears to a novelist preparing to deliver the keynote address at an international Woolf conference. Nunez’s novella Mitz: The Marmoset of Bloomsbury (1998) follows the Woolfs’ careers from 1934-38, during which years Leonard Woolf kept the eponymous pet monkey, while Parmar’s Vanessa and Her Sister (2014) focuses on the period 1905-1912. It is written from Vanessa Bell’s first-person perspective, like Sellers’s Vanessa and Virginia (2008), which encompasses the full chronicle sweep of Woolf’s life. Lastly, Norah Vincent’s Adeline (2015) covers the years 1925-41, and imagines that Woolf’s adolescent self continued to exist as a separate entity. The paratextual materials provided by all six authors, then, a broad base of evidence for a survey of this kind.

Gerard Genette’s Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation (1997) offers a theoretical framework for the study of these borderline texts. Genette defines the paratext as “those liminal devices and conventions, both within the book (peritext) and outside it (epitext), that mediate the book to the reader: titles and subtitles, pseudonyms, forewords, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, inter titles, notes, epilogues, and afterwords” (XI). The paratext, he insists, is “a threshold” “more than a border or a sealed border;” it is “an ‘undefined zone’ between the inside and the outside” (2). As part of the paratext, the acknowledgements section is not, therefore, simply an appendage or afterthought, but one of the devices that “control . . . one’s whole reading of the text” (2). Woolf made use of these devices to mediate the reading of her two historical novels, Orlando (1928), and Flush (1933). In the Preface to Orlando, she enumerates her sources, “those dead and so illustrious that I scarcely dare name them,” before proceeding to a litany of friends (7). She then inserts in-jokes for the appreciation of her “old and valued collaborator,” Quentin Bell (who as a child enlisted his aunt as co-editor for an issue of The Charleston Bulletin), and “my niece, Miss Angelica Bell,” citing “a service which none but she could have rendered” (presumably posing for “The Russian Princess as a Child”) (8). In Flush, Woolf lists her “sources for the foregoing biography,” for the benefit of “the reader who would like to check the facts or pursue the subject further” (155). Such statements anticipate biofiction’s paratextual invocation of authority, its assumptions about audience (coterie or generalist?), and its playful attentiveness to the fact-fiction borderline, three issues to which I shall return.

The appendices to Orlando and Flush are named “Preface” and “Authorities,” and are positioned at the beginning and the end of their respective texts. Flush’s “authorities” section falls into category of “postface,” criticized by Genette for being restricted to “a curative, or corrective, function.” Genette favors the “preface,” which, despite its “difficulties and awkwardness,” “has the virtue of at least being monitory and preventive.” Despite Genette’s confident assertion that “most authors” opt for the preface over the postface on these grounds, only one of Woolf’s biomythographers concurs (239). This might be attributed to an impulse to symbolically prioritize the creative representation over its factual sources, the “fiction” over the “bio.” In other words, it encourages readers’ full immersion in the ontological world of the novel before they proceed to the epistemological checks and balances. The exception, Susan Sellers, begins her prefatory “Acknowledgements” with the following statement: “Although this is a work of fiction, it is indebted to the research of numerous critics and scholars, and in particular to four extraordinary biographies.” While Sellers bucked the trend by placing her acknowledgements at the beginning, it is notable that, on the level of the sentence, “fiction” trumps “critic[ism],” “scholar[ship],” and “biographies,” however “extraordinary.”

Genette notes that wherever the “authorial annotation” is positioned, it “unavoidably marks a break in the enunciative regime and is ‘used most often with texts whose fictionality is very ‘impure.’” While Genette, writing in 1997, did not have the vocabulary to describe biofiction, he does refer to a text “conspicuous for its historical references,” whose notes “bear precisely on the nonfictional aspect of the narrative” (332). Turning now to nomenclature, we might expect “acknowledgements” (Nunez, Sellers, Gee) to denote a simple enumeration of these nonfictional aspects, “author’s note” (Vincent, Parmar) to suggest something more personal, and “a note on sources” (Cunningham) to fall between the two stalls. To acknowledge is connotative of indebtedness, whereas an “Author’s Note” or a “Note on Sources” emphasizes the novelist’s agency in synthesising diverse materials. In reality, the terms appear to be used interchangeably, with Gee’s acknowledgements providing a personal narrative of the origins of her novel, and Vincent’s Author’s Note being little more than an annotated bibliography.

As an addendum to biofiction, the chief virtue of the bibliography is its status as a source of “facts than can be verified by other people besides the artist” (AOB 123). Of the biofiction writers considered here, Nunez, Cunningham, Sellers, and Vincent provide a conventional bibliography, naming specific authors and texts. All four refer to Hermione’s Lee Virginia Woolf, and all but Sellers refer to Leonard Woolf’s autobiography and Woolf’s letters and diaries. As a Woolf scholar as well as a novelist, with a chapter on “Woolf’s Diaries and Letters” in the Cambridge Companion, perhaps Sellers’ immersion in her subject’s autobiographical writings is such as to render direct citation redundant. Vincent’s reference to her own “copious use of the letters, journals, and autobiographical works of Virginia and Leonard Woolf” is intriguingly unspecific, particularly when compared to her stipulation of the precise nature and location of material borrowed from Michael Holroyd’s Lytton Strachey: A Biography. There is the emerging sense that silent quotation of autobiographical material is acceptable, whereas similar borrowings from scholarly works might be considered plagiaristic. The passage of time since the publication of the and diaries compounds the sense of their being “fair game,” as do our varying feelings of entitlement where first and second-order discourses are concerned. For all four writers, the provision of a bibliography is suggestive of a pedagogical impulse, an attentive concern to orient the novice reader around the scholarly points of reference.

In the field of adaptation studies, Sarah Cardwell has criticized this idea of “send[ing] viewers back to the book” as suggestive of our valuation of
“the original organism” over the new insights offered by the adaptation (13). Under such logic, “the book[s]” would comprise both Woolf’s own writing and secondary criticism on her life and work, towards which biofiction would redirect its readers rather than itself comprising a legitimate focus. Whether or not we give credence to this charge – is the provision of references not simply good practice? – it is one that both Parmar and Gee sidestep by glossing over their sources. Parmar refers to “a wealth of existing primary and secondary material,” and Gee to “[Woolf’s] writings or . . . the biographies.” In contrast to the other writers considered for the general reader, Gee in particular conjures an audience of Woolfians with a shared frame of reference. This raises the question of who, exactly, biofiction is for, a question that became increasingly pressing with the release of the TV biopic Life in Squares. Too fast-moving for the novice, the piece’s reductively oppositional portrayals of Woolf and Bell seemed calculated to infuriate the specialist, leaving it “betwixt and between” (AOB 125/6).

Where Gee does provide specific references, she emphasizes authors over their books. Her focus is less on “the ground-breaking Virginia Woolf: A Writer’s Life” than on its author, “Dr Lyndall Gordon,” who “encouraged this project at a very early stage.” Similarly, “the beautiful short biography Virginia Woolf” is secondary to author “Alexandra Harris,” who “very kindly read and advised on parts of the book.” Despite Gee’s acknowledgement that “all mistakes are, of course, my own,” the invocation of established scholars lends her novel implicit authority. Parmar’s thanks to “Virginia Nicholson . . . for taking me to Charleston and sharing her Bloomsbury memories” lends Vanessa and Her Sister authority of a different kind, situating it as the product of privileged knowledge. Compounded by the associations of Virginia Nicholson’s name, Parmar invokes a direct connection with her subjects through the conduit of Nicolson’s “Bloomsbury memories.” Nicolson colludes in this in a statement at the novel’s close, in which she equates “This book . . . Priya Parmar’s ‘Bloomsbury’ with “my own Bloomsbury”: Charleston farmhouse, ending with a plea for donations to the Charleston Centenary Project. This situates Parmar’s biofiction as an act of symbolic curatorship, a legitimate means of preserving the past.

Another common characteristic in the majority of the texts is a statement of some kind about the author’s perception of the marriage of fiction and fact. For Woolf, this was a marriage guaranteed to fail; in “The Biography,” she concluded that the two partners were “antagonistic; let them meet and they destroy each other” (154-55), while in “The Art of Biography” she reiterated that “no-one [....] can make the best of both worlds; you must choose, and you must abide by your choice” (124). Genette regards the subtitle as an ideal vehicle for stating this choice, citing “genre indication” as its principle purpose (56). The (sub) title allows the author to convey “an intention (‘I look on this work as a novel’) or a decision (‘I decide to assign the status of novel to this work’)” (95). Thus Norah Vincent’s subtitle, “a novel of Virginia Woolf,” emphasizes that Adeline is not a biography, while the word “of” does double-duty, implying that Woolf is not only the subject, but also, on a symbolic level, the ghost-writer. Nunez, conversely, conveys a genre indication in her acknowledgements, calling Mitz “an unauthorized biography” which, while “imagined” for the most part, is based on “published fact.” Nunez’s preference for “biography” over “novel” accounts for her laying-bare of the suture-wounds where fact meets fiction; she alone uses quotation marks when citing Woolf’s own works.

The choice of genre indication was one that Woolf herself grappled with; having decided not to call Orlando a novel, she was dismayed to find that

No-one wants biography. But it is a novel, says Miss Ritchie. But it is called biography on the title page, they say. It will have to go the Biography shelf. I doubt therefore that we shall do more than cover expenses – a high price to pay for the fun of calling it a biography.

(AWD 133)

Nevertheless, Woolf went on to subtitle Flush “a biography,” implying that, on balance, she considered her “fun” worth the “price.” Whereas Vincent and Nunez obeyed Woolf’s instruction to “choose, and . . . abide by your choice,” Cunningham, Parmar, and Gee assert their right to “make the best of both worlds.” Cunningham notes that the Woolfs, Bell, and Nelly Boxall “appear in this book as fictional characters” in a world depicted “as accurately as possible” (229), while Gee follows the aforementioned reference to “[Woolf’s] writings or . . . the biographies” with the statement that “her thoughts and feelings are mostly my imaginings.” Her modest suggestion that “this Virginia is a phantasm, one of Thackeray’s fictional ‘puppets’” segues into a triumphant assertion of possession: “always and only my own.”

Parmar, similarly, states that “the characters in the book are very much fictional creations,” but juxtaposes this with the insistence that “the broad external chronologies and events are as accurate as possible, with a few adjustments and alternations I made to better tell the story.” These include the confabulation of Quentin Bell’s three provisional names into one, the inclusion of fictionalized artworks, and the invention of “internal landscapes” for the characters, documented in a diary that “Vanessa Bell never kept.” In a loose paraphrase of the “truth is stranger than fiction” idiom, Parmar asserts that “many of the unlikelier details in the novel are rooted in fact,” and goes on to enumerate these: Woolf’s request of Violet Dickinson’s writing table; her pretense that Thoby remained alive after November 1906; her participation in the Dreadnought hoax, and Bell’s loss of her wedding ring immediately before embarking upon an affair with Fry. She also maps out “the complicated romantic lives of the characters,” and asserts that “they all remained close friends.”

The purpose of all this detail is to legitimize Parmar’s “one important detour from recorded history”: “the argument between Vanessa and Virginia over the affair with Clive,” “never referred to” in Bell’s letters and quite possibly “[n]ever mentioned between them.” Contrary to Woolf’s assertion that when fiction and fact are intermingled “the one of Thackeray’s fictional ‘puppets’” segues into a triumphant assertion of fact and exposing the “truth is stranger than fiction”

Gee’s reference to Woolf’s (auto)biographical writings immediately prior to the enumeration of her inventions has a similar effect. The inventions include “the passage on pages 436-437” (an unsatisfactory honeymoon liaison between Virginia and Leonard), “Woolf’s love for her sister” (“In the long view, was she such a good sister?”), and “her thoughts before she died” (“Of course I didn’t want to die. It was just the illness, the cloud of darkness, something outside me, tracking me”) (322). As Lodge explains, “by guaranteeing the authenticity of the written documents,” a novelist gives readers “a kind of ‘reality check’ on the events described: they could be certain that everything referred to in such sources was ‘true’” (Year 62). By thus specifying her inventions, Gee implies that any detail not listed is grounded in the extant documents and is thus veracious. Furthermore, Gee’s understated mode of reference belies the controversial nature of her inventions, particularly her imagining of Woolf’s sex life and her troubling of the sisters’ “very close conspiracy.”

This enacts, in microcosm, my overall argument: that acknowledgement sections do far more than simply allow the author to pay her debts. Conversely, they are sophisticated rhetorical devices that govern, in important ways, the way readers encounter the text. They are particularly influential over the text’s pedagogical function, its reception as fact and/or fiction, and its perceived relationship to the published record. The diverse potentiality of acknowledgements is encapsulated by two contrasting statements regarding the author’s relation to the subject herself. For Sellers, her novel “owes everything to those two remarkable sisters, Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf, whose lives and works continue to intrigue, inspire and delight.” This simultaneous admission of indebtedness and affection contrasts with Gee’s perception of her work: not simply “a love letter” but also “an act of cheek, an attempt not to be afraid of Virginia Woolf.” Thus concealed within Gee’s acknowledgements is the beating heart of the biofictional project, whose
life blood is subversion as much as homage, confrontation as much as celebration, and which insists that each text is, in many ways, a Woolf of the author’s own.

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“I have been dead and yet am now alive again”:
Virginia Woolf on the Contemporary Stage

Virginia Woolf “has been dead” for 77 years and “yet [is] now alive again,”1 haunting her literary heirs, many of whom have contributed to her rebirth as a character in their fictional writings. I would like to focus on two such legatees who have drawn on Woolf’s auto/biographical material and her fictional oeuvre to create truthful portraits of the author in two comparable bioplays. Eileen Atkins, the British stage actress, playwright and screenwriter, has had a longstanding artistic relationship in two comparable bioplays. Eileen Atkins, the British stage actress, playwright and screenwriter, has had a longstanding artistic relationship in two comparable bioplays. Eileen Atkins, the British stage actress, playwright and screenwriter, has had a longstanding artistic relationship in two comparable bioplays. Eileen Atkins, the British stage actress, playwright and screenwriter, has had a longstanding artistic relationship

1 This quote refers to Septimus Smith’s hallucinations in Mrs. Dalloway (58).

2 Atkins played Virginia Woolf in Patrick Garland’s 1989 adaptation of A Room of One’s Own, a one-woman show, and adapted Mrs. Dalloway into a screenplay for the 1997 film with the same name directed by Marleen Gorris.

3 “I went around for months possessed by this woman, wondering how she herself would dramatize her own life. Then one day I decided that I would have to be

haunting literary figure who inspired her and had a formative influence on her. I will closely examine the process of fabrication of the two bioplays and the authors’ strategies of resurrecting Woolf on stage and of creating an authentic character who speaks with Woolf’s own words.


Compared to Edna O’Brien’s adaptation of Woolf’s life and work, Eileen Atkins’s play constitutes what I would call “first-degree biofiction”: big chunks of autobiography (letter and diary fragments) are selected and displayed as such in the play, with minimal intervention from the playwright. Thus, this bioplay relies exclusively on autobiographical documents, as the playwright straight-forwardly and systematically copies the primary sources, pastes them in her play, and presents it as dialogue. As a matter of fact, Atkins herself has precisely referred to her play as “[her] little cut-and-paste job” in an interview (see Nathan).

I perceive the process of biofictionalization as ripples that become larger and larger, moving further and further away from the auto/biographical impact, expanding and absorbing more and more fabricated material. I would therefore consider O’Brien’s bioplay as “second-degree biofiction,” further removed from the raw, primary autobiographical source, which is more processed and interwoven with fragments of fiction from Woolf’s own work. Indeed, O’Brien’s creative ripple circles further away from the autobiographical core by incorporating a dose of fiction—even if, in this specific case, it is Woolf’s own fiction.

Generally, in all biofictional products, the dosage or proportion of biography and fiction, the way biography is injected and folded into fiction, and the final homogenous mixture of the ingredients are essential in the production of “truthful fictions.”2 And yet, in their respective bioplays, Atkins and O’Brien do not contribute any fictional components and do not alter existing historical fact, biographical record, autobiographical material, or Woolf’s fictional oeuvre. However, Woolf’s biographical representations remain subordinate to the playwrights’ creative imagination, as they artfully and playfully (re)assemble and dramatize the Woolfian primary sources.

Although done in a minimal, light, imperceptible way, the full content of the letter exchanges between Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West as well as Woolf’s diary entries selected by Atkins are manipulated and edited. The playwright has arranged the true material so as to suit the dramatic requirements of her play. Consequently, the autobiographic material does not appear as it was originally conceived and delivered: it is decontextualized and recontextualized, that is to say it is first uprooted from its original epistolary or diaristic context, then it is truncated and reshaped, and finally it is presented anew in the form of a long conversation between Vita and Virginia.

Atkins’s “little cut-and-paste job” is more intricate than it sounds and concretely consists in carefully choosing and strategically cutting portions (a few words, a few short sentences) or taking whole letters from Woolf’s and Sackville-West’s real correspondence to fabricate dialogues out of them; at other times the playwright juxtaposes fragments from several letters written days, months or years apart and glues them together in one long exchange; conversely, she sometimes splits one letter into several quick exchanges between Vita and Virginia. The two characters’ conversations range from light gossip to emotional love declarations and more serious confessions and interrogations about their literary arts. As the end of the play gets nearer, Atkins selects and accumulates thoughts, discussions and symbolic images related to death.

daring and that I would simply have to do my vision of her, subjective as that may be” (Interview).

4 While composing her biographical fantasy Orlando, Woolf herself considered the relationship between (biographical and historical) fact and fiction and stated that “the balance between truth & fantasy must be careful” (Diary 3: 162).

5 I am here borrowing Michael Lackey’s term. See Truthful Fictions.
The writing and publication of Orlando marks a turning point in the characters' personal relationship. The project seems to stem from Virginia’s jealousy of being replaced in Vita’s affections. This spurs a renewed creative energy and a desire to capture, take control of, and possess Vita in the pages of her “biography.” The mock biography that immortalizes Vita as Orlando is dedicated to Vita as a symbolic farewell love letter to their bygone passionate relationship. When four years after Virginia’s death Vita Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicolson compiled an anthology of poetry, Vita included a passage from Orlando to pay homage to her friend and split it up into lines, so that it looked and sounded like a poem. This very poem constitutes the final lines of Atkins’s play, and is voiced by the character of Vita, then by Vita and Virginia in unison, and finally by Virginia alone. The prose poem conveys the idea of resurrection and life after death with the character of Virginia reciting the end of her own poem, despite her physical death that occurred a few lines previously in the play. Virginia “died and yet she is alive again,” just as in O’Brien’s end of Virginia. Both bioplaies clearly suggest that Woolf’s poetic heritage survives and her voice as a writer continues to be heard after and beyond her death. The last words of Vita and Virginia are both an indication of Virginia’s resurrection on the stage and the heartfelt expression of her love for Vita (“life” in Latin): “What’s life we ask; / Life Life Life! cries the bird / As if he had heard” (42). Mitchell Leaska commented on this allusion in relation to Between the Acts (45-46), Woolf’s final novel that was published posthumously, singling out a very specific line where “birds are” syllabing discordantly life, life, life.” Thus, Atkins’s “curtain” at the end of her bioplay is just a temporary interruption that promises new “acts,” new beginnings, new lives for Virginia.

Virginia is resuscitated and lives on in “Another World than This” (the very suitable title of Vita and Harold’s poetry anthology), which provides a perfect analogy with the current prolific literary trend of resurrecting authors in biofictions, that is to say reimagining their lives and permanently adding new acts to them, in other worlds than the ones these literary figures inhabited: fictional worlds in which they are well and truly alive. O’Brien and Atkins have proven that these new worlds can be successfully constructed with Woolf’s old words. In their respective bioplaies, the two playwrights have staged original performances and representations of Virginia’s life and career in order to commemorate her literary legacy and immortalize her “life life life.”


This particular line from Shakespeare’s Hamlet’s monologue, “The play’s the thing” (Hamlet I.2.530), quoted by O’Brien in an interview in which she discusses Virginia, specifically suggests that her play invites us to consider its very strings and mechanisms of production. Just as in Atkins’s bioplay, O’Brien’s fragmentary and impressionistic portrait of her subject is entirely drawn from Woolf’s heritage, that is to say Woolf’s own words are “copied” from her life records and work and “pasted” in a play with its own generic rules. However, in this quite similar creative exercise, O’Brien proves to be a more daring and resourceful “bricoleuse” than Atkins, as she uses more “means at hand” and a more diverse range of Woolfian auto/biographical and intertextual materials and assembles them so as to produce a seamless portrait of her Virginia. O’Brien’s craftsmanship consists firstly in drawing a portrait

6 I am referring here to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s concept which was subsequently developed by Jacques Derrida. “The bricoleur, says Levi-Strauss, is someone who uses ‘the means at hand,’ that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous—and so forth” (Derrida 285).

7 O’Brien uses portions from many of Woolf’s fictional works: Mrs. Dalloway, The Voyage Out, The Waves, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, Between the Acts, A Room of One’s Own, “A Haunted House,” Kew Gardens,” “Lappin and Lapinova,” “A Mark on the Wall,” “A Summing Up,” “Mrs. Dalloway’s Party,” that does not show its numerous joints and articulations. She creates a smooth, convincing “reality” with scraps and fragments of Woolf’s own auto/biographical facts and bits and pieces of her fiction, which, in turn, are often based on memorable events in the author’s life. Secondly, while these intricate ontological levels are skillfully brought together in O’Brien’s bioplaie, the pastiche of collected materials (Woolf’s “true facts” and “true fiction”) is reworked to sound dialogic, which is, of course, in keeping with the generic requirements of drama.

O’Brien’s practice is similar to Raymond Federman’s concept of plagiarism, that is to say a playful re-appropriation, re-use and remixing of existing material and sources. As a playgiarizer, the playwright plays with imbricating pieces of borrowed material from Woolf’s oeuvre as well as with her modernist technique. O’Brien helps herself from Woolf’s reservoir of sources, operates selections, appropriates fragments and assembles them in order to offer the spectator her mosaic version of Woolf; in the process, the playwright draws attention to her ingenious craft and revives her predecessor’s literary legacy. Her second-degree imaginative biofiction involves minimal processing or transformation of the raw Woolfian material, which is not so much fused but stitched together.

If the bioplay’s material is so heavily and exclusively borrowed from Woolf herself, one may legitimately ask what part O’Brien’s creative skill and imagination play. The playwright devises different mechanisms of imbricating bits of truth and fiction and creating transitions and articulations between them. Whether we choose to call this creative exercise an art or a craft, O’Brien’s compositional technique is remarkably simple and complex at the same time: it consists in the selection, combination, re-arranging and welding together of auto/bio-fictional material.

O’Brien is a creative “conservationist,” as she devises a series of ingenious operations and strategies to preserve this raw, authentic material. It is a sort of lego-like building enterprise of imbricating ready-made elements and creating a unifying whole. Her objective is not so much a matter of creating a brand-new edifice from scratch, that to say a fictional universe in which a character named Virginia Woolf evolves, but to make the ready-made, prefabricated blocks she selects fit perfectly together in order to produce a coherent discourse on its own. O’Brien’s stitching and sticking techniques, and her strategies of adjustment are multiple. A case in point is Virginia’s first and last monologue:

I dreamt that I leant over the edge of the boat and fell down. I went under the sea; I have been dead and yet am now alive again—it was awful, awful, and as before waking, the voices of the birds and the sound of wheels chime and chatter in a queer harmony, grow louder and louder and the sleeper feels himself drawing towards the shores of life, the sun growing hotter, cries sounding louder, something tremendous about to happen. (Virginia 3; Virginia 73, emphasis mine)

This specific nightmare originally belongs to Woolf’s character Septimus Smith. O’Brien rearranges the original quote, changes the focus and point of view, re-appropriates Septimus’s traumatic experience and gives it to her own character, Virginia, who thus speaks with Septimus’s voice and enacts his hallucinations. Septimus’s thoughts become verbalised discourse; the stream of his inner consciousness becomes Virginia’s

8 “You’re born a playgiarizer or you are not. It’s as simple as that. The laws of playgiarism are unwritten, it’s a taboo, like incest, it cannot be legalized. […] Inferior writers deny that they playgiarize because they confuse plagiarism with playgiarism. These are not the same. The difference is enormous, but no one has ever been able to tell what it is. It cannot be measured in weight or size. Plagiarism is sad. It cries, it whines. It always apologizes. Playgiarism on the other hand laughs all the time. It makes fun of what it does while doing it.” See Federman’s interview, “The Word-Being Talks: An Interview with Ray Federman,” at http://www.altx.com/interviews/ray.federman.html
stream of verbal monologue. It is interesting to point out that O’Brien’s Virginia resembles Woolf’s shell-shocked character, Septimus, who, in turn, was partially born from her author’s own experience. People and characters from different ontological worlds mirror each other, and their words create complex echoes in O’Brien’s bioplay.

As Virginia Woolf may be one of the most thoroughly documented literary figures of the twentieth century, the major challenge for biofiction writers who appropriate her life is certainly to give full rein to their creativity within the boundaries of documented auto/biographical material, and consequently render them malleable and porous to include and absorb imaginative events. O’Brien’s and Atkins’s personal responses to this challenge were to adhere very closely to Woolf’s auto/biographical and fictional truth, to give birth to two versions of Virginia that come straight from Woolf’s own oeuvre, and to endow their characters with a voice that speaks with Woolf’s very words. Both Virginias, who come alive on the stage, thus look familiar and sound authentic.

For both Atkins and O’Brien, who have confessed in numerous interviews to being obsessed with and possessed by Woolf, their respective plays that stage the character of Virginia may be viewed as a necessary act to exercise the authorial ghost that has been haunting them, in the very same way Woolf herself “ceased to be obsessed”10 with her mother and reconciled herself to her sudden, tragic death, after capturing her and completing her artistic vision in To the Lighthouse. Thus, giving life to the character of Virginia amounts, for Atkins and O’Brien, to both a creative and therapeutic exercise, which has allowed them to finally let their foremother rest in peace.

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9 Dawn Duncan referred to Virginia as a “stream of consciousness play” (103).
10 “[...] when [To the Lighthouse] was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her. I suppose I did for myself what psycho-analysts do for their patients” (“A Sketch of the Past” 81).

Curriculum vitae:
Transsexual Life Writing and the Biofictional Novel

The complex relation between bio and fiction, life and writing, is central to the project I am currently working on, a comparative scholarly edition of Man into Woman: An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex (1933), the life narrative of Lili Elbe, formerly Einar Wegener, the Danish artist who became Lili Elvenes (her legal name) through a series of surgeries in 1930. In chapter six, Andreas Sparre (the fictional name used for Wegener in the narrative) offers to tell his life story to his friends, Niels and Inger, on the night before his first surgery, his last night as Andreas. Niels responds, “I should like to suggest, if I am not hurting your feelings, that you let me take down in shorthand the curriculum vitae which you are about to relate” (57). Curriculum vitae means, in the original Latin, “the course of one’s life.” That curriculum vitae can stand in for “life story” is especially apropos for academics. Perpetually being asked for our CVs, as if to justify our existence, our lives as academics are literally in our writing. I can trace the history of my life’s writing through what I have written on that classic modernist life writing narrative, Virginia Woolf’s Orlando. From my first publication when I was a graduate student in the 1980s to my 2013 essay in Modern Fiction Studies, I have been writing on Orlando my entire academic life. Yet, far from having nothing left to say, I am proposing to add yet another essay on Orlando to my academic life story. Prompted by the opportunity this special issue affords, I would like to reprise my latest publication on this perennially popular modernist narrative, in which I read Orlando in relation to Man into Woman. What might these works, both iconic narratives of the trans movement, tell us about the genre of biofiction?

In that 2013 essay, I argue that Woolf’s fictional work about a sex transformation is more true to the experience of transsexualism—or in today’s terms, transgender—than the documentary narrative about an actual sex change. “Insofar as it reconceives the very concept and form of life writing,” I claim, “Orlando radically reforges the narrative of transsexualism presented in Lili Elbe’s more conventional tale” (503). Life writing encompasses various genres—autobiography, biography, memoir, diaries, letters, personal essays, case histories—that record someone’s experiences, memories, and reflections. While Orlando does not give us the life of an actual transsexual, it does give us a different way of narrating a life, one that is more life-sustaining, I argue, than the “wrong body” narratives of so many transsexuals’ life stories, including Elbe’s (518). The emphasis on writing as part and parcel of Orlando’s life presents life writing “not as an account of a life lived, but as the deliberate shaping of a narrative of a life that might be lived, and livable” (517). Speculative, not definitive. I still stand by that argument. Working closely with Elbe’s narrative over the past few years, however, I have come to read her story more generously, as a modernist work more like Orlando than a traditional memoir or biography, as it is often read. Reading Man into Woman as like Orlando encourages us to read transsexual life writing as a nascent form of biofiction, and by extension, biofiction as a form of life writing.
Technically, neither Orlando nor Man into Woman is a work of biofiction, a term more fitting for novels such as Norah Vincent’s Adeline (2014), subtitled “A Novel of Virginia Woolf,” and David Ebershoff’s The Danish Girl (2000), based on Elbe’s life. Unlike Adeline or The Danish Girl, neither work uses the real names for their historical characters, a key criteria of the genre. And yet… Orlando: A Biography is dedicated to Vita Sackville-West, contains several photographs of Vita as Orlando, and draws on facts of Vita’s life and on Vita’s writing. Man into Woman contains a foreword by the editor that names Einar Wegener as the subject of the story; contains numerous photographs of Einar and Lili, and Einar as Lili, with captions naming them; and draws on facts of Einar’s and Lili’s lives and on their writings. Orlando presents itself as a biography, written from the biographer’s point of view, though it is clearly fiction. Subtitled in the Danish edition, Lili Elbes Bekendelser (“Lili Elbe’s Confessions”) and in the American and British editions, An Authentic Record of a Sex Change, Man into Woman presents itself as a memoir or case history, though it too is fiction, mostly narrated from a third person perspective with thoughts, dialogue, letters, and diary entries attributed to Andreas and Lili. Orlando has an authenticating preface written by Virginia Woolf that lends credence to the research that has gone into this “biology,” giving her pages. Woolf writes, “whatever degree of accuracy they may attain” (n. p.). Elbe’s narrative has an authenticating foreword written by the editor, Niels Hoyer (a pseudonym), who assures us that the narrative, based on “papers she left behind in the form of this book,” is being published “in accordance with Lili Elbe’s last wishes” (xiii). As archival evidence shows, the editor and publisher took great pains to shape Elbe’s narrative in ways that would not offend the public, as did a scandalous article on Elbe that appeared in the Danish press. Woolf, too, wrote her novel of a famous Sapphist in such a way as to avoid the censorship that plagued Radclyffe Hall’s Sapphic novel of the same year, or circumvent a public scandal over Vita’s sexual life. And both works, published only a few years apart, recall sexologists’ case histories of sexual inversion from the early twentieth century. Certainly fiction, there is enough “bio”—biography, memoir, personal writings, case histories—for each to lay claim to kinship with the genre of biofiction.

Just as Woolf’s biographer puzzles over how to write about Orlando’s unconventional life, Elbe and her editor had no adequate models for writing the life of a person who changes sex, for though others had undergone surgery before Lili, few had published a personal account of a surgical change in sex. The editor, then, had to invent a form. In doing so, he produces a narrative that deliberately departs from the model he would have had at the time: the sexologist’s case study.

Although Andreas’s curriculum vitae, as his friend Niels records it, does contain information common to case histories—family background and education; childhood signs of cross-gender identification, such as physical traits, dress, and preferred activities; first sexual experience; attitude toward the “opposite” sex—Andreas explicitly rejects identification with those lives. After years of cross-dressing as Lili, Andreas begins to suffer more and more from mysterious bleeding, intense pain, and severe depression, and he comes to suspect a connection between his “double life” and his physical sufferings. He tells Niels and Inger:

And then, like so many sick persons who do not know what is really the matter with them, I began to procure all kinds of scientific books dealing with sexual problems. Within a short time I acquired an expert knowledge in this department, and knew many things of which the layman hardly dreams. But gradually it became clear to me that nothing which related to normal men and women could throw any light on my mysterious case.

Havelock Ellis’s Sexual Inversion (originally published in German in 1897) and Magnus Hirschfeld’s Die Transvestiten (1910), works Andreas (and Einar) might have read, did include case histories of subjects who would later be termed “transsexuals,” for both inversion and transvestism were seen to be forms of cross-gender identification. Presumably such writings would have allowed Andreas some recognition of his condition. And unlike Ellis’s work where homosexuality was seen to follow from inversion, Hirschfeld held that transvestism or transsexualism did not have any correlation to sexual orientation: “Almost all of these persons put the thought of homosexuality out of their minds, many clearly stating an instinctive loathing” (130), as does Andreas. So why might Andreas find no case like his own in this literature?

One explanation is provided by Hirschfeld himself. His theory of sexual intermediaries undid the binary opposition of man and woman, positing an endless range of variants between these extremes. Sexual identification becomes an ongoing task in which categorical distinctions are only provisional, an insight Orlando offers as well. Indeed, Hirschfeld’s epigraph, “There are more emotions and phenomena than words,” echoes a line in the final pages of Woolf’s manuscript: “words have yet to be coined for the selves have never been numbered” (280). According to Hirschfeld, “the constantly present merging of both [sexes] into one, the unending condition of mixing variables” (18) allowed for some 43 million combinations of sexual criteria, far outnumbering Orlando’s estimate of 2,052 selves in one body (308). Given the seemingly infinite number of possible variations, Andreas may well not have found himself, or rather herself, in any of the case histories he read. The subject of the case study, like that of Woolf’s novel, may be an “exceptional case,” but it is also sui generis.

“Sui generis” precisely describes Woolf’s and Elbe’s narratives insofar as these works defy conventional generic distinctions and cross genres: biography, confession, fiction, fantasy, case history. I have offered “transgenre” as a term to capture how narratives of and by “transsexuals” necessarily reconfigure the conventions of life writing itself (503), making it more like biofiction than biography. “The transgenre as represented by Orlando,” I suggest, “is not about being true to life […] but about the consequences for living of telling a different kind of story” (517). Both Orlando and Man into Woman, in different ways, make life writing available to trans persons, as Paul Peppis says Ellis’s Sexual Inversion sought “to make Bildung […] available to homosexuals” (104). But they do more. In reconfiguring the conventions of life writing, they open that genre to the biofictional novel itself.

Novels, though, are typically single-authored, as are most forms of life writing, with the exception of the case history. Man into Woman has a composite author, compiled by the editor from various sources. It is not authored by Lili Elvenes, though the German edition puts “Lili Elbe” in the place where the author’s name would normally appear on the title page. Nor is it authored by Einar Wegener, though the Danish first edition housed in the Royal Library catalogues the work under his name and puts “E. Wegener” on the spine. Importantly, the narrative directly confronts this authorial conundrum. Lili writes to her friend, the editor:

1 Life writings that Elbe and her editor might have used as models had they known them were Aus eines Mannes Mädchenjahren (“Memoirs of a man’s maiden years”) (1907), published under the pseudonym N. O. Body, with an epilogue by Magnus Hirschfeld, and Earl Lind’s Autobiography of an Androgyne, published in The Medico-Legal Journal in 1918.
2 In the Danish first edition, literally “books on sexology” (58).
3 Einar Wegener consulted with Hirschfeld at his Institute for Sexual Science before the first surgery. Professor Hardenfeld in the narrative is modeled on Hirschfeld.
4 43,046,721 to be exact (227).
5 Jan Morris’s Conundrum, for example, cites both works.
6 The original title for my MFS essay—"Time’s Queer Force: Modernist Life Writing in the Era of Transsexuality”—sought to elide this difficulty. When the editor wanted the titles of both works in my title, we decided to attribute authorship for Man into Woman according to the Danish first edition, a decision I now regret. Not only is it a misattribution but the Danish edition differs significantly from the English-language editions.
Should I write a preface to the book, to explain why, when speaking of Andreas, I always use the third person, as in a novel? But, my dear friend, what other form of narrative could I have chosen? I could not relate the story of Andreas’ life in the first person. Nor could I employ the third person when speaking of my own life and experiences, after Andreas had vanished. (283)

Andreas’s *curriculum vitae* is part of Lili’s life story yet separate from her “own life and experiences.” What kind of narrative form could capture that pronounal and temporal complexity? “That is the key question for transexual memoirs,” I note. “How can an autodiegetic ‘I’ refer to two differently sexed beings?” (509). Lili’s solution, to write of Andreas in the third person “as in a novel,” identifies this work as an important historical precedent for biofiction. She avails herself of novelistic techniques as the only way to write the life of an historical person who no longer exists and to create a credible narrative for her own life. As Michael Levenson says of Freud’s case studies of neurosis, we might say of the sexologists’ case studies of “transgender”: each is itself “a pathology of narrative, an incapacity to give a coherent account of one’s life” (82) in terms of conventional scripts. In their pronominal promiscuity and chronological chaos (Orlando lives 350 years but ages only 20; Lili insists she was born in the surgeon’s clinic and cannot be said to share Andreas’s age), *Orlando* and *Man into Woman* give us a new temporality and a new character, one that is “an overlay of past and present” (Levenson 83). Thus, they expose not just “the recursive nature of time in the process of gender formation” (510), as I have argued, but the recursive temporality of any life writing.

This insight can be illustrated by Ebershoff’s biofictional novel. Ebershoff brings contemporary understandings of transgender to Elbe’s story. In *The Danish Girl*, as in Tom Hooper’s 2015 film version, Einar frequents a peep show, watching the erotic performance to learn how to move as a woman, “to study the curve and heft of their breasts, to watch the thighs, […] to see how their bodies attached limb to trunk and produced a female” (105), something that is not narrated in case histories meant to prove sexual identity is congenital, but something that trans individuals often do. Although Ebershoff gives us a scene that does not align with Elbe’s narrative, Lili does acknowledge her performance of femininity—“I had to demonstrate every day that I was a different creature from [Andreas], that I was a woman” (235)—even as she insists her performance was not “merely farcical acting” (235). Ebershoff’s imagined experience corroborates that truth.

Similarly, Ebershoff seeks to correct Lili’s misconception of herself as a totally separate being from Einar/Andreas, reading her story through nonbinary theories of sexual identity that, as we have seen, were contemporary with her life but not yet widely known or accepted. Ebershoff’s novel reveals truths that Lili and her editor could not yet express—namely, that the subject of a sex change doesn’t land in another sex as if crossing a bridge, as the title *Man into Woman* suggests.8 Reading back from Ebershoff’s novel, though, we see what it actually does is to affirm what Lili begins to perceive in the last chapter when, having taken on an art pupil at the urging of her German friend (the editor), she accepts Andreas’s artistic legacy that she had previously spurned:

And through this she [Lili] herself had learned and experienced that she too would be able to paint again, that she had to paint …… that she was now strong enough to carry on the inheritance, 7 Deirdre McCloskey once told me that she called people “dear” and touched their arm lightly when speaking to them as a way of feminizing herself. Numerous transgender narratives include passages where the subjects adopt specific gestures, voices, or movements in an effort to convey to others their felt sense of identity. But such practices are not unique to transpersons, and as Susan Stryker reminds us, “all human bodies are modified bodies; all are shaped according to cultural practices” (10).

8 Actually, Elvenes objected to that title, preferring “How Lili Became a Real Girl,” the title used by my co-editor, Sabine Meyer, for her book on Lili Elbe, the immortal inheritance, the artistic faculty, that Andreas had bequeathed her.9

A narrative of absolute difference is being reconsidered even before the narrative is complete. This dawning insight, moreover, is connected to “the artistic faculty.” Before the first operation a nurse recognizes the significance of Andreas’s avocation: “Your case,” she said, “is something quite new to us, and what makes it particularly interesting to science is that you are an artist and thus in a position to analyse your emotional life” (121). In a recent article, Nicholas Chare offers a compelling reading of Wegener’s paintings in terms of a “trans* aesthetic,” noting evidence of Wegener’s “transsexualism” well before he transitioned in his paintings of bridges sans opposite shore (see Fig. 1 below) and a rare interior of a boudoir sans femme. More to the point, Chare’s art criticism and Ebershoff’s biofictional novel are versions of Elbe’s life story, giving us access to truths implicit in the language and imagery of the artwork, if not in the historical facts of the life.

Fig. 1: Einar Wegener. “Au Bord de la Seine,” 1922. 18x 22 in. Oil paint on canvas. Private Collection

What I am suggesting is that we read biofiction not as fiction about a life lived but as part of the writing of that life, itself a recording of memories, feelings, thoughts, and experiences, the author’s own as well as another’s, that come from reading works by and about an historical figure. I don’t believe most Woolf scholars expect fiction about Virginia Woolf to sanction biography. What we expect instead is some fidelity to the truth of Woolf’s life as presented in her writings, personal and fictional. Where we go wrong, I believe, is in forgetting that that truth is in the writing, ours on Woolf’s as well as Woolf’s own. It is not that Woolf’s life was once lived and now we write about it; in writing about Woolf we shape the life we have come to value. No one’s life story is entirely self-authored. However outré it may be, *Orlando* is a biography of Vita—a *curriculum vitae*, as it were. Even Vita recognized herself in its pages, writing to Woolf: “you have invented a new form of Narcissism—I confess,—I am in love with Orlando” (Woolf, *Letters* 3 574). As Orlando illustrates, life writing is not about—or not primarily about—the “factually correct” but about the imaginatively and emotionally true, as is Ebershoff’s biofictional novel. “The figure of the transsexual allows for a truer depiction of the genre called life writing,” I contend, “which by definition is about the multitude of ways of inhabiting time and space, than does the conventional single-sexed subject. The transsexual’s life narrative essentially changes the definition of life writing itself” (519). And in doing so, *Orlando* gives rise to a form of life writing that anticipates the emergence of biofiction, or, put differently, prepares us to read biofiction as a form of life writing. Life writing, like transgender, is not an umbrella term for various genres; it is 9 This wording is from Marianne O³lholm’s translation of the Danish first edition for our digital edition. The American edition reads “she was now strong enough to claim that immortal heritage which Andreas had bequeathed to her” (271). The quotation appears on p. 177 of the Danish edition, *Fra Mand til V kvinde: Lili Elbes Bekendelser* (1931).
itself a transgenre. That is, the genre itself is trans, not just the subject. The biofictional novel is, historically, part of this crisscrossing of genres, the very stuff of a life story.

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Time, Place, and “Mrs. D”:
Uptake from Mrs. Dalloway to The Hours

One of the many delights for readers who enjoy Michael Cunningham’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel The Hours is noticing the subtle parallels between the novel and its mother text, Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway. The Hours seems to take pleasure in this also, and on several occasions, the book discusses itself in a meta-commentary disguised as the characters commenting on something else. In The Hours, Richard Brown reflects on Clarissa Vaughan, whom he affectionately calls Mrs. Dalloway, and the biofiction he tried to write about her: “Of course, there’s time. And place. And there’s you, Mrs. D. I wanted to tell part of the story of part of you. Oh, I’d love to have done that” (Cunningham 66). This quote doubles as Cunningham’s statement of purpose for his own novel about Mrs. Dalloway. While Cunningham uses Mrs. Dalloway to write The Hours, The Hours also re-visions Mrs. Dalloway, telling part—and only part—of its story. The Hours emphasizes the homoerotic and suicidal themes of Mrs. Dalloway above other themes like class and the impact of war on society, impacting how readers view or remember the earlier novel. My hope is that through this discussion of The Hours and its uptakes of Mrs. Dalloway, I will draw the fields of rhetoric and literature closer together and demonstrate how terminology from rhetorical genre studies can productively be applied to literature. Literary texts are also rhetorical, and they serve persuasive functions in the world too. Biofiction, here exemplified by The Hours, is a tripartite uptake of two genres and a real-life story, and “does” things in the world perhaps more than other literary genres, since it uses and reflects back upon not only other works of literature, but the very lives of its real-world subjects.

The guiding principle for my analysis will be Anne Freadman’s concept of “uptake.” Although scholars in the field of literary studies do discuss the influences of some texts on others, most have not adopted Freadman’s term, a cornerstone of modern rhetorical genre theory. “Uptake” refers to the process by which a reader of a text internalizes and reappropriates the text toward the creation of their own text. For example, if a teacher crafts a writing prompt and gives it to her students, the students have a number of possible uptakes available to them, including “paper,” “question asked in class,” “email to the teacher,” or, to the teacher’s eternal frustration, “paper doing something the prompt didn’t ask for.” Even though the original text paves the way for particular responses, students still have the agency to choose the form of their response and its content. The genres in my example fall into the category of “rhetorical” genres, a term which refers to the commonplace genres that people employ in the course of their daily lives. The business memo, the Facebook post, and the grocery list are all examples of rhetorical genres.

Discussions of uptake are common in articles studying rhetorical genres, but only rarely when studying literary ones. One instance is Monica Latham’s “Serving Under Two Masters” in which she situates Woolf’s genre as an uptake of both biography and the novel. Undertaking a study of the genre of biofiction, and focusing specifically on Woolfian biofiction, Latham effectually characterizes biofiction as an uptake of Woolf’s own work, describing it as “new genre that shows that imagination can successfully serve these two masters [biography and fiction] simultaneously” (355). “Uptake” allows us to view the biofictional text as the agent of change, whereas the term literary “influence” places the earlier text or genre (in this case, biography and the novel) first in the process, and the later text or genre second. The earlier text is the cause, and the later text is the effect. By theorizing Woolfian biofiction as an uptake of Woolf’s own genre-blending, Latham’s work enables us to analyze how biofiction affects readers’ understanding of Woolf as well as how Woolf’s work and life influence biofictions about her. Biofiction may or may not impact readers’ understanding of Woolf in a historically accurate way, but it does affect how Woolf and her work are viewed in the reader’s eye. Postmodern novels like The Hours, which often feature a non-linear, non-subjective depiction of time, provide useful illustrations of this bidirectionality.

1 Latham does not explicitly name Woolf’s genre in “Serving Under Two Masters.” However, she characterizes it as Woolf’s answer to the problem of serving both fact and fiction in biographical writing. She may be referring to the genre of Orlando, which the Triangle Classics edition describes as both “fantasy” and “mock biography” (back cover), but which is understood to be based on Vita Sackville-West.

2 Latham discusses The Hours further in her book A Poetics of Postmodernism and Neomodernism. Her work is very comprehensive regarding how Cunningham uses Mrs. Dalloway. My intention is not to offer an alternative to her readings of The Hours but to examine how The Hours impacts future readings of Mrs. Dalloway.
For example, with uptake, *The Hours* actually does something with and to *Mrs. Dalloway*, whereas in the conventional literary influence model, *Mrs. Dalloway* gives rise to *The Hours* and then continues to exist unchanged. Literary influence moves in only one direction, but uptake is bidirectional, including but also adding to the relationship of literary influence. Early approaches that predate Freadman’s terminology but are relevant to her approach include Jorge Borges and Harold Bloom. Borges explored the relationship between texts and their precursors in the 1960s, and Bloom extended Borges’s ideas in *The Anxiety of Influence* in 1973. Sarah Hardy writes that, “since as Borges says every writer creates his own precursors, such works also recast their predecessors, so that for contemporary readers, Shakespeare may be flavored with Stoppard, Homer with Joyce” (401). Bloom discusses a concept closely related to uptake without using the term by demonstrating how a truly exceptional poet can make “particular passages in [a previous] work seem to be not presages of one’s own advent, but rather to be indebted to one’s own achievement” (141). Since Borges and Bloom both predate Freadman, neither could use her words, but current and future scholarship across literary and rhetorical studies can be united under this term. Without shared terminology, literary scholarship is unlikely to be found by many rhetorical theorists through a database or keyword search, and vice versa. Shared terms help to resolve this algorithmic problem, bringing rhetoric and literature closer together in a way that will allow the fields to learn from each other as they continue to grow.

**Bidirectionality and The Hours**

*The Hours* is structured by three interwoven timelines taking place in the 1923, 1949, and an unspecified year in the late 1990s, preceded by a Prologue depicting Woolf’s 1941 suicide. Within the chronological structure of *The Hours*, *Mrs. Dalloway* is written both before and after Woolf’s suicide. Readers subjectively experience Woolf’s suicide as the first event in the book, even though it empirically takes place after she wrote *Mrs. Dalloway*. The timeline of the novel and the timeline depicted by the novel are different in this case, because readers experience pieces of the story in a different order than they take place in history. In the non-linear, non-subjective structure of *The Hours*, each time period exists both simultaneously and chronologically. The following exchange between Clarissa Vaughan and Richard Brown illustrates this relationship:

> “You kissed me beside a pond.”
> “Ten thousand years ago.”
> “It’s still happening.”
> “In a sense, yes.”
> “In reality. It’s happening in that present. This is happening in this present.” *(Cunningham 66)*

*The Hours* suggests through its structure of interwoven timelines and Richard Brown’s reflections that all time is happening simultaneously; every moment of someone’s life exists at every other moment. This conception of time is similar to how readers experience the novel’s timelines while reading. In *The Hours*, Richard’s past really is simultaneously happening along with his present because the “Richie” of the Mrs. Brown chapters (1949) is revealed to be the Richard of the Mrs. Dalloway chapters (1999). The reader experiences Richie’s childhood at the same time that he or she experiences Richard’s last few days. Through the structure of alternating chapters, each timeline develops and progresses alongside the other as if the two parts of Richard’s life are happening simultaneously, because Cunningham develops each timeline simultaneously. *The Hours* reinforces Richard’s view of time for the reader through its own structure of intertwining timelines and through the nature of reading itself as a flippable, stoppable, and re-startable experience.

This non-linear structure gives the reader multiple points of view from which to understand *Mrs. Dalloway*. The trio of perspectives offered by *The Hours* either thicken the reader’s own understanding of *Mrs. Dalloway*, or, for readers who have not read *Mrs. Dalloway* themselves, create the reader’s idea of *Mrs. Dalloway* more directly. For the reader, *Mrs. Dalloway* is a published book on their shelf or in their local library, but through the imaginative access portal of *The Hours*, *Mrs. Dalloway* is also still being written, and also being read in 1949 by Mrs. Brown, and also being discussed by Richard Brown and Clarissa Vaughan in 1990s New York City. Such a temporal relationship with *Mrs. Dalloway*, though imaginary, facilitates the bidirectional function of uptake. Although *Mrs. Dalloway* is not materially changed by *The Hours*, and the real-life circumstances of its production remain the same, *The Hours* reshapes the reader’s view of both. All instances of uptake cast the text or genre that is “taken up” in a new light, but *The Hours* provides a concrete example in that it explicitly depicts the production of its predecessor text.

Borges argues that “every writer creates his own precursors” and “His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future” (201). How then does *The Hours* modify *Mrs. Dalloway*? Additionally, since our understanding of history is a factually-based yet nonetheless human-made story, how does the section of *The Hours* devoted to Virginia Woolf modify (our story of) Woolf’s own life? Further, *The Hours*’ multitemporal perspective allows the reader to view *Mrs. Dalloway* not as an eternal and unchanging text but as a text with a history and a text embedded within history. By creating these new “readings” of *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Hours* effectually adds to its predecessor text and re-focuses how readers perceive it.

The characters’ names and actions are the most obvious examples of how *Mrs. Dalloway* informs *The Hours*, but themes most clearly show how *The Hours* shapes *Mrs. Dalloway* in reverse, demonstrating the bidirectional nature of uptake. *The Hours* is, in many ways, a novel about suicide. It begins with Mrs. Woolf’s suicide and ends with Richard Brown’s, and Laura contemplates suicide frequently in between. Although Cunningham makes extensive use of *Mrs. Dalloway* as source material for adaptation and as a framing device for his characters, the focus of his own text is on his characters’ inner lives and struggles, not on Woolf’s novel. Much as Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* uses preparation for a party as a frame to talk about isolation, memory, and social norms, Cunningham’s *The Hours* uses *Mrs. Dalloway* as a frame to talk about mental anguish, embodied in the act of suicide, and *The Hours* prioritizes Woolf’s suicide as a more significant event than the creation of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Additionally, because of the way Cunningham portrays Woolf’s decisions about *Mrs. Dalloway* as direct reactions to events in her own life, *The Hours* encourages an autobiographical reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Although Cunningham does clearly establish in the first paragraph or two of each narrative the year in which the narrative timelines takes place, he never mentions them again, making it easy for readers to lose track of specific dates. For Mrs. Woolf, readers not already that familiar with Woolf’s life can easily forget that almost 20 years passed between the day Woolf began writing *Mrs. Dalloway* and the day she killed herself. The suicide chapter (1941) and the opening Woolf chapter (1923) take place very close together within *The Hours*, but more importantly, the novel builds to a climax—Richard’s death—that echoes Woolf’s suicide, suggesting that Woolf’s suicide and the writing of *Mrs. Dalloway* are closely related. Although Richard is the only character who actually dies in the main arc of the novel, his mother, Laura, strongly considers killing herself in her L.A. hotel room, and readers already know from the Prologue that Woolf does so.

Although the book does not end with a repetition of the Prologue, the final words from Mrs. Woolf are as follows: “Clarissa, sane Clarissa—exultant, ordinary Clarissa—will go on, loving London, loving her life...”
of ordinary pleasures, and someone else, a deranged poet, a visionary, will be the one to die” (Cunningham 211). Within the context of Mrs. Dalloway, this quote refers to Septimus; within The Hours, it refers to Richard Brown. However, given the Prologue, as well as Mrs. Woolf’s contemplations over the dead bird, and her anguish throughout her chapters, the phrase “a deranged poet, a visionary, will be the one to die” can also be read as a description of Virginia Woolf. Mrs. Woolf decides that the best thing for her novel is for Clarissa to live, and for someone else to die. Insofar as the sentence above can be taken to represent Woolf herself as well as her character Septimus Smith and Cunningham’s character Richard Brown, the implication is that Woolf must ultimately die in order for Clarissa to live, for the novel to be balanced, and for Mrs. Dalloway to be complete, even though Woolf’s suicide occurs years later. Mrs. Woolf takes the needs of the text and uptakes them into a suicide. Therefore, although Cunningham explicitly mentions the time gap between the two events at the beginning of the novel, the progression of the rest of the text implies that the events are much more closely connected both chronologically and causally than they were in real life.

Earl Ingersoll writes at length in Screening Woolf about the implications of this false understanding of Woolf’s suicide generated by The Hours. He argues it obscures the sociopolitical context of 1941, a time during which Leonard and Virginia already had extensive suicide plans in place in case Nazis invaded England (119; see also Orr). Woolf also wrote several drafts of her suicide note, which demonstrates that her suicide was not a spontaneous, impulsive act, but a very deliberate one affected by the global situation she lived in (Ingersoll 127). "Accordingly,” Ingersoll says, “the all-too-real story of Virginia’s suicide had to be fictionalized, or sanitized, to align its narrative with the ‘ordinary people’ in the ‘Mrs. Brown’ and ‘Mrs. Dalloway’ narratives” (Ingersoll 119). The true context of Woolf’s suicide was a lifetime of mental health struggles and a very real threat across the English Channel, but the romanticized, literary version depicted in The Hours obscures these issues.

The main impact The Hours will have on a reading of Mrs. Dalloway is that The Hours provides a narrative of Mrs. Dalloway’s creation. Although the reader may technically know something is fictional, a compelling narrative can easily supplant facts. Those who read The Hours before Mrs. Dalloway are likely to feel like they have an understanding of the circumstances of the novel’s creation. Correct or not, a belief about the author’s intentions for a novel focuses one’s attention on the related aspects of the novel. In this case, readers might focus more on Clarissa’s relationships with her servants, the “poetic” aspects of Septimus’s character and the circumstances of his suicide, and other aspects of the novel that Cunningham’s Mrs. Woolf contemplates. Readers will also be predisposed to pay more attention to the aspects of Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway that Laura Brown and Clarissa Vaughan parallel in their own arcs at the expense of other avenues of interpretation and meaning. In my view, the most positive result of this retroactive framing of Mrs. Dalloway is that The Hours so explicitly focuses on same-sex desire and issues that readers are more likely to pay attention to these themes in Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway as well.

As discussed previously literary uptake is bidirectional, unlike the model of literary influence. The earlier texts impact the later texts, but the earlier texts are in turn affected by the form and content of the later texts. The Hours predisposes readers to focus on the homoerotic and suicidal elements of Mrs. Dalloway and obscures the geopolitical factors in Woolf’s own suicide discussed by Ingersoll (see also Orr). The Hours also romanticizes and emphasizes Wool’s illness and suicide above her achievements as a writer, even though the book pays extensive homage to Woolf’s novel, Mrs. Dalloway.

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Works Cited

Here Ends the Special Topic on Virginia Woolf and Biofiction

If you are interested in proposing a special topic for an upcoming issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany, please contact Vara Neverow at neverowl@southernct.edu.

Also, please contact Vara Neverow at neverowl@southernct.edu if you have any questions about accessing an issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany at https://virginiawoolfmiscellany.wordpress.com/
JANE MARCUS FEMINIST UNIVERSITY:
THE DOCUMENTARY RECORD
September 9, 2016
J. Ashley Foster, Cori L. Gabbard and Conor Tomás Reed,
Conference Organizers
Cori L. Gabbard and J. Ashley Foster,
Documentary Record Editors

Introduction
Cori L. Gabbard, Lyon College

In Part One of Three Guineas, Woolf’s speaker imagines her response to an appeal from the “honorary treasurer” (31) of one of the women’s colleges at Oxbridge for donations to “the college rebuilding fund” (31). She, the speaker, would contribute “a guinea […] if [the honorary treasurer] can satisfy [her]” that the money “will [be used] to produce the kind of society, the kind of people that will help to prevent war” (42). That is, the money should be used to establish a college that teaches “[n]ot the arts of dominating other people; not the arts of ruling, of killing, of acquiring land and capital” but:

the arts of human intercourse; the art of understanding other people’s lives and minds, and the little arts of talk, of dress, of cookery that are allied with them. The aim of the new college […] should be not to segregate and specialize, but to combine. It should […] discover what new combinations make good wholes in human life. The teachers should be drawn from the good livers as well as from the good thinkers. […] People who love learning for itself would gladly come there […] where all the different degrees and kinds of mind, body and soul merit co-operated. (Three Guineas [TG] 43-44)

Jane, of course, was both a “good liver” and a “good thinker”; and it was to pay tribute to her as such as Jane Marcus Feminist University (JMFU), an all-day conference organized to commemorate her life and intellectual work, took place on the ninth of September 2016 at the CUNY Graduate Center where she was Distinguished Professor of English. The documentary record of this conference, which I introduce here, is the written testament to that event. But the joy in the everyday, intellectual curiosity, egalitarian ethos, collectivity and collaboration that distinguish Woolf’s ideal college for women—and that were intrinsic to Jane’s own values as a feminist intellectual, mentor and teacher—also informed the spirit, the genesis and the structure of JMFU. To begin with, JMFU included what perhaps, for a one-day conference, was an unusual amount of food: mini bagels, muffins and Danish, fruit salad, yogurt, granola, health bars, orange juice, coffee and tea at breakfast; pita, olives, dolma and feta with Baba ganoush, hummus and tapbouleleh; grilled vegetables with balsamic vinaigrette, lentil salad, green salad, chicken Française, eggplant Florentine, fusilli with asparagus, tomatoes and parmesan, orecchiette, and bottled water for lunch; carrot cake, chocolate cake, trail mix, granola bars, protein bars, fresh berries, bananas, coffee, tea and bottled water for teatime; and wine, brownies, blondies, guoda, goat cheese, cheddar, soppressata, olives, pepadew peppers, strawberries, rosemary crackers, table water crackers, and crudité with dip for the conference reception.

Jane loved food; she delighted in learning about it, as reflected in her enthusiasm when she asked me one night over dinner if I’d known that there is more than one kind of carrot; and she was a fabulous cook, as more than a few of the contributions to this documentary record make clear. Jane even grew her own tomatoes and herbs on the back deck of the house she shared with her husband, Michael Marcus, in East Hampton, which was indicative of her respect for the processes of creating meals that traditionally have been the focus of daily life for much of human history. But the pleasure that Jane found in sharing a good meal with family, friends, colleagues and students also speaks to her emphasis upon food as a feminist foundation for the intellectual development and health of women scholars. Noting the comparative meagerness of the meals served in the “dining-hall[s]” (A Room of One’s Own 17) of the women’s colleges at Oxbridge relative to those served in the same spaces of their male counterparts—a disparity rooted in the economic oppression of women that she critiques in Three Guineas—Woolf observes in A Room of One’s Own that “a good dinner is of great importance to good talk. One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well. The lamp in the spine does not light on beef and prunes” (18).

Beyond food, JMFU featured a playlist, which is part of this documentary record; and a slideshow of images featuring Linda Stein’s Virginia Woolf 370, Vanessa Bell’s covers for her sister’s books, other works of art that hang in Jane’s East Hampton home, flowers from her garden and Jane herself. The playlist and the slideshow emphasize the extent to which Jane was “a liver” and “a thinker”: both music and art were among her personal passions, while the interdisciplinarity that Woolf perceives as integral to the curriculum of the ideal college for women distinguishes Jane’s scholarship.

Implicit in Woolf’s rejection of “the arts of dominating other people, […] the arts of ruling […] [and] of acquiring land and capital” is a devaluation of hierarchy, subjugation and ownership, and the conception and structure of JMFU reflect a commitment not only to egalitarianism, intellectual autonomy, collectivity and collaboration, but also, in their unconventionality, to “[discovering] what new combinations make good wholes in human life” (TG 43). The event’s Call For Papers, which invited submissions for a roundtable on Jane’s feminist pedagogy, a plenary discussion on the legacy of her scholarship, readings of works by or inspired by Jane, and breakout sessions on topics such as the Spanish Civil War and fashion, reflected the creativity and input of more than a dozen of Jane’s students, colleagues and friends who brainstormed and shared ideas over several conference calls. In this way, “different degrees and kinds of mind, body and soul merit co-operated.” But if it is not uncommon within the academy to acknowledge the passing of its most influential scholars with a conference in their memory, it is distinctly unconventional to organize any conference, let alone a commemorative one, constituted wholly by sessions and other elements that lack hierarchical design as reflected, say, by the inclusion of a keynote speaker. The breakout sessions elided distinctions between official conference participants and the members of their audience, for example, while the very idea of a roundtable, which by its nature as a circle with no beginning or end eradicates any distinction in rank on the part of those sitting around it, speaks to notions of equality.

As a conference, JMFU was, of course, a celebration of Jane as a scholar, mentor and individual. As a gathering that brought together Jane’s students, friends, family, colleagues, collaborators, unaffiliated readers and other like-minded feminists and activists through their presence, whether physical or virtual, at the event itself, or through the diversity of their contributions, whether intellectual, financial or pragmatic, JMFU was also a testimony to the bonds of community that she created throughout her life, ties that, like her scholarship and pedagogy, constitute her legacy.

This documentary record commemorates that moment and, like the Center for the Humanities’ video of the conference that captured all but one of the conference participants and the members of their audience, for example, the plenary discussion on the legacy of her scholarship, readings of works by influential scholars with a conference in their memory, it is distinctly unusual to organize any conference, let alone a commemorative one, constituted wholly by sessions and other elements that lack hierarchical design as reflected, say, by the inclusion of a keynote speaker. The breakout sessions elided distinctions between official conference participants and the members of their audience, for example, while the very idea of a roundtable, which by its nature as a circle with no beginning or end eradicates any distinction in rank on the part of those sitting around it, speaks to notions of equality.

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Because it has no end, a circle also symbolizes infinity. The concept of an infinite roundtable not only speaks to the idea of Jane Marcus Feminist University as an ongoing conversation that future generations of “good livers” and “good thinkers” both within and outside of the academy will continue but also positions the 2016 conference as a perpetual catalyst and perpetual call for feminist activism. Attendees of Jane Marcus Feminist University might extend Jane’s legacy through their own approaches to scholarship, collaborative projects, pedagogy and relationships both professional and personal. We also encourage people to “occupy” JMFU by putting together JMFU panels at the annual Woolf, Space Between or Modernist Studies Association conferences,
for example, by holding JMFU events or by teaching JMFU classes on May Day at the free universities or in other radical spaces.

Last, but not least, and in a way that brings us full circle to the beginning of this introduction, JMFU testifies to the achievement, on a small scale, of Woolf’s goal “not to segregate and specialize, but to combine.” Just as the “honorary treasurer” cannot resurrect her college without the financial support of Woolf’s speaker, so does it go without saying that JMFU would not have been possible without the support and generosity, financial and otherwise, of many, many people. Although constraints of space prevent me from going into meticulous detail with respect to the particulars of everyone’s contributions, I wish to express my intense gratitude on behalf of myself and my co-organizers to the following groups and individuals, beginning with our sponsors. At the Graduate Center, CUNY: Lost & Found: The CUNY Poetics Document Initiative of the Center for the Humanities, the Ph.D. Program in English, the Doctoral Students Council, the Feminist Press, Women’s Studies Quarterly, the Women’s Studies Certificate Program, the Twentieth Century Area Studies Group and the Feminist Studies Group. Beyond the Graduate Center: The International Rebecca West Society, and Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature. Individuals: Michael Marcus, Sandi Cooper, Linda Camarasana and Ron Nerio.

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Copious thanks in this regard go especially to Michael Marcus, for his generosity and hospitality when I went out to East Hampton to photograph Jane’s art, for providing all of the garden shots and for his advice with respect to the Wagner selections for the playlist.

I would like to say how deeply appreciative I am for my co-organizers, Conor Tomás Reed and J. Ashley Foster, for their creativity, for the depth of their collaborative spirits, for their guidance and moral support and, most of all, for their friendship.

In anticipation of what is to come in the following pages, we wish to thank all of our presenters and attendees for their contributions.

Finally, I wish, on behalf of Ashley and myself, to thank Vara Neverow, who in publishing this documentary record in the Virginia Woolf Miscellany allows Jane Marcus Feminist University to exist beyond its actual moment and to perpetuate Jane’s legacy as a feminist, activist scholar and mentor through its potential to inspire readers everywhere to establish the kinds of connections that she herself created in a collective effort to “produce the kind of society, the kind of people that will help to prevent war.”

—Cori L. Gabbard, lead editor of the documentary record for Jane Marcus Feminist University

A Mother to Think Back Through: Jane Marcus, 1938-2015

We open our record here with Lisa Marcus’ 2015 eulogy for Jane. Read at her service in 2015, it vividly evokes the indomitable zeal with which Jane approached life. Although Lisa was unable to be in New York for JMFU, she joined us virtually by watching the conference proceedings as they were live-streamed over the internet and has given us the honor of printing the words she delivered at her mother’s memorial here.

Eulogy for Jane Marcus

Lisa Marcus, Pacific Lutheran University

June 2015

Virginia Woolf wrote that “we think back through our mothers if we are women” (A Room of One’s Own 76). Woolf, of course, means both metaphorical and literal mothers, intellectual precursors and physical, emotional, flesh-and-blood mothers—mothers of the mind and of the body.

Jane Marcus was my mother, and what a mother to think back through. Intellectually, my mother shaped me profoundly, but when I think of her, I think of many things, such as birthday cakes. My mother loved celebrations, and when my brothers and I were young she made from scratch every cake for each of our birthdays: German chocolate for Ben, Devil’s Food for Jason, and for me—a special confection. One year she charged out into the garden after making my cake and returned with a handful of lilacs of the valley, which she promptly planted in the middle of her creation—and from then on, lilies of the valley sprouted in messy profusion from my birthday cakes. She continued the tradition with my daughters, as Hannah’s birthday was often celebrated during our annual August visit to Sag Harbor. Every year, my mom would insist on making Hannah’s birthday cake. She would pull out recipe books, plan elaborately, and yet the resulting cakes were two thirds my mom’s inventions, and maybe one third connected to the printed instructions. The results were often sublime, sometimes not, though they fed the imagination and heart.

My mother worked hard to feed my imagination, too, when I was a child, and with more substantial fare. She gave me Wuthering Heights and Silas Marner, and had to tolerate instead my reading only Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret over and over as I lived out a clichéd 1970s adolescence. Her influence seeped through nonetheless, and at age 15 I presented her with my feminist credentials after I attended—on my own—a huge Chicago rally for the ever-doomed Equal Rights Amendment, where I heard rousing speeches by Jessie Jackson and Marlo Thomas, among others. My mother, in her feminist consciousness raising group, Portia, had of course long been an activist for such causes, and I was now fully on board.

When my dream of earning a medical degree and founding a women’s health clinic bumped up against the reality of my failure to progress beyond rudimentary calculus or memorize the Krebs Cycle, I found myself, perhaps inevitably, following my mother’s literary footsteps. I thrived in Women’s Studies classes and wrote my undergraduate thesis—get this—one on my own—a huge Chicago rally for the ever-doomed Equal Rights Amendment, where I heard rousing speeches by Jessie Jackson and Marlo Thomas, among others. My mother, in her feminist consciousness raising group, Portia, had of course long been an activist for such causes, and I was now fully on board.

When I earned my Ph.D. and was commissioned to write an essay from the third wave perspective for The Women’s Review of Books, I was embarrassed at the hyperbolic title the editors chose: “Feminism’s Daughter,” for surely feminism has many daughters, and sons, too. Now, though, I readily claim this honorific, for if I am feminism’s daughter, then Jane Marcus is feminism. She certainly was feminism to me. She and her compatriots had worked fervently to “storm the toolshed” of the academy, to dismantle patriarchal assumptions and power structures—in the literary canon and beyond.

1Here I refer to her essay “Storming the Toolshed,” in Art & Anger: Reading Like a Woman, Ohio State University Press, 1988, pp. 182-200.
In 1981 when she published her groundbreaking collection, *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, she showed such generous confidence in inscribing the book, “To Lisa, a daughter to think forward through.” I marvel that she could see such a future for her 16-year-old daughter, a girl of cut-off shorts and tube-tops, feather earrings, too much mascara, and too many boyfriends. What a gift to announce then that I might be a daughter she could think forward through: “feminism’s daughter.”

My mother was elegant, and she had the most daring fashion sense. A classic family photograph, taken on holiday at our friend’s cabin in Vermont in the early 70s, features my mother in an extravagant Cacharel red, white, and blue pantsuit, while we kids lounge in shorts and tube socks. Later my mother’s bold eye for color, not to mention her attraction to pantsuits, would translate into battles of the will, as I was ever plain by comparison. When I was 12 and we were living in Denmark for the year, my mother bought me a wide-wale purple corduroy pant and jacket set. With a hood of lilac flowers and wide-belled bottoms, I looked like an exploded grape—I was in the grip of puberty—and I became the easy target of that generation’s mean girls. Later my mom would acquire a cape with a lightning bolt on the back to wear to the opera—the outfit my father lovingly referred to as “Captain Marvel’s Mother.” My mother wore a bikini: she wore a bikini when she was young and lithe, slim with hipbones jutting out above the bikini ties, and she wore one when she was old and plump, her belly tanned and free. My mother was a woman of the body. She didn’t hide her nakedness, even after she had a mastectomy and a large scar across her belly. On her last visit to me in Tacoma, for her birthday we spent the day at a Korean spa notorious for its obligatory nudity, and I marveled at her love of a body that was by then a landscape of scars and craters. She experienced pain, but she sought and chose pleasure.

My mother loved my father—her Michael-bear, her “oh, Michael,” a frequent interjection during every well-cooked-by-him meal. They met when dad was a Ph.D. student at MIT and she was a working-class Irish girl from Boston with a degree from Radcliffe and on her way to a Masters at Brandeis. Following a lunch with his housemate, my mom—tipsy and with a rose between her teeth (as the story goes)—encountered my shirtless and quite buff father shaving: she was smitten. The courtship, as my dad tells me, lasted three hours. As he pressed his suit on me for marriage, she told him to read *Orlando* and insisted that she would never marry but wanted to live freely. Luckily, his arguments prevailed, and I arrived on the scene nine months and three days later. Thus began a marriage of true intellectual, political, and romantic soulmates. They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in August 2014, and they were on an adventure of a lifetime when she died. Only hours before she took ill, they were hand in hand on the deck of their cruise ship enjoying the sun and each other.

My mother was the most brilliant person I’ve ever known (and along with my father, the most educated). She filled every room of every home she lived in with books, thousands of books, and books of all kinds—books about how to keep deer out of the garden next to histories of the Spanish Civil War, recipe collections featuring flourless chocolate cake butted up against collected letters of some important writer or thinker. Poetry, history, art, high-canon, lowbrow mass-market mysteries…she loved words and what they could do. She tracked sources and lived in archives, her curiosity drove her in multiple directions all at once—her intellect fired her imagination and fueled her, and this is certainly evidenced in her many published books and still overflowing filing cabinets of manuscripts.

The summer before she died, when I was at a two-week seminar and turned on by all that I was learning, she wrote, “So, my advice is—Work hard and enjoy every minute of the inspiration and excitement of new and difficult ideas. It’s the best thing in life.” Later that day, she wrote again:

> At a certain point in life an intellectual frisson is better than an orgasm. Do not quote me. Or maybe they are the same thing.
stairs to the first-floor sitting room, but she was still seeing students. I went to her house for a short, friendly visit, with no intention of talking shop. I just wanted to see that she was OK after a long stay in the hospital and a painful illness.

No such low-key visit happened. Propped on a couch in the bedroom, hooked to her IV, Jane wanted to know all about my current writing, immediately greeting me with her energy and enthusiasm. I had started working on Vaslav Nijinsky’s ballet Rite of Spring (1913). She told me I had to “go after” the gender element of the unconventional choreography. We spent the rest of the conversation debating whether Nijinsky was feminized, was he a figure of androgyny, was he the fallen one, did the pagan dancers kill off the girl in Rite of Spring as a patriarchal scapegoat? What happens when the sacrificial victims become male soldiers in the First World War? Many years and evolutions of the argument later, she sent me an email, ending it with, “Return to Nijinsky and acting out violence in art,” pushing me to explore further the relation between culture and war. The day I visited Jane on her couch, she sent me home with two Nijinsky books, a head full of thoughts, a subject that continued to percolate for years after in my research, and the image of a mentor who despite illness and pain, was so passionate that she could inspire, influence, and also completely school a budding scholar.

Jane not only nurtured thoughts and scholarship, she nurtured relationships and connections. She always had a new picture of her grandchildren to share, or a meal created with Michael, or a story of her children’s lives and successes. Amongst her students and in her classes, she worked constantly at fostering a feminist socialist collaborative space. The presence of so many of Jane’s students and colleagues at JMFU speaks to her legacy and the way in which she developed her own impressively extensive network of feminist modernism. Students of Jane’s have become my close friends, colleagues, and co-conspirators and have pushed me to think and write better. Conor Tomás Reed has challenged both Cori and me in the organization of this conference to truly dwell on the question: but what is a feminist university?

The gift of community that Jane has given keeps giving. It was reading Margaret Carson’s remarks in this very documentary record, as Cori and I were collating the entries, that moved me to interview Michael Marcus about his time with Jane traveling to the Spanish Civil War refugee camps that housed Republican exiles at the fall of Spain in 1939 to the fascist forces of Francisco Franco. As it happened, I had a trip planned to cross the Pyrenees in June 2017 with Nick Lloyd, tour guide and author of Forgotten Places: Barcelona and the Spanish Civil War. These were the research methodologies that Jane encouraged: go to the places, explore the environment, imagine oneself in other’s lives. And because tales of Jane’s trips provided much of the impetus for my path, I knew that my imagining would be permeated not only by the lives of the refugees forgotten on the beaches and borderlands of France, but also by Jane’s own presence and personal brand of scholarship amidst these silenced histories. On the refugee trail and through the concentration camp Rivesaltes, I envisioned Jane and Michael in these same spaces. Michael’s words from a conversation we had before I left stayed with me:

We were in North France looking at Nancy’s [Cunard’s] house and we went walking through the cemeteries from the victims of World War II. We were in Belgium and we would walk through the cemeteries of the First World War. It was a way of paying one’s respects—to the folly, sadness, and the victims, and it was very moving. We felt the same way tracing the paths of the Spanish Refugees who fought fascism, following in their footsteps. Why do people go to memorials? One honors the dead by visiting places where they struggled and died. You do it for your families and you do it for the victims of history.

I found traveling the Spanish Civil War refugee trail was an homage, as Michael said, to all the persecuted civilians and anti-fascist fighters, but also to Jane, her revolutionary spirit, and her invested and involved teaching. It is testament to Michael’s comment “There was something special about Jane – she wanted to see it [history] – wanted to get her hands on it to make it real.” She made history real to her students, too, and I was one of the many beneficiaries of her insight.

When I think about Jane, and what she created in bringing us as scholars and collaborators together, it becomes clear that she helped to foster the vision of feminist collective that Virginia Woolf hoped for in Three Guineas. Through her own work and the work she instilled in us, she mapped a network of relations that we might think of in terms of a rhizomatic structure—a biological structure of connection with no definitive “center,” as Catherine Gander describes, “weeds, couchgrass, burrows, and animals that move in swarms” (181). Although this is an idea from Gilles Deluze and Felix Guattari, I came to it through Gander’s work on Muriel Rukeyser. She explains: “The rhizomatic structure, however, fosters multiplicity on an equal scale, having no centre but rather a network of branches and roots, all segments of which are fertile” (181). She continues: “the rhizome is characterized by its ability to regenerate, to ‘start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines’” (190). Like Jane’s work, a “rhizome establishes connections between ostensibly separate fields of philosophical inquiry partly through its independence from a prescribed linguistic model” (181).

So, how does this structure contribute to the idea of a Jane Marcus Feminist University and what are we creating? It helps us to think about disseminating Jane’s spirit throughout our own writings, as a guiding influence and a radical presence. It allows us to think about Jane’s writings and teachings in terms of linkages, networks and connections. It situates each of us in an elaborate web of relations that can be entered at any point and that fosters a multiplicity of perspectives and harbors a diversity of voices. It is a structure that is generative and regenerative, that grows horizontally and not vertically, that subsists without a trunk or center, and that is ever expansive through roots and branches coming in contact and extending outwards. The rhizomatic structure undoes the idea of “individual genius,” as Jane’s writings and teachings have also done. It is a model that lends itself to Jane’s feminist pedagogy, where she avers, “in our classrooms, the students do not relate individually to each other. They form a common bond with the teacher and the other students” (“Afterword: Some Notes on Radical Teaching” 190).

If we are operating in a rhizomatic structure of collectivity, collaboration, multiplicity, connections, relations, extension and expansion, then Jane’s own very rhizomatic writings provide a good map of places to start. She left us tasks, identifying the work yet to be done. She asks us to question the canon even as we insist on more works’ entry into it. We are charged with the task of continually diversifying the modernist discourse, expanding its voices: “If Cunard, the poet and activist, is dismissed as an heirress, Mulk Raj Anand is not described at all. And yet he was at the center of Bloomsbury cultural life in the thirties and forties. It is my opinion that the study of the period would be greatly enriched by wresting it from the hands of those who leave out the women and the people of color who were active in the struggle for social change in Britain” (Hearts of Darkness 180-81). We must also work for peace. For Jane: “To lobby for peace, to occupy public space for peace and freedom, and to teach for peace is our imperative […] if, as the poet says, ‘the war works hard’, we must pledge our energies to making the work peace harder” (“Afterword” 190). And we must work, as Woolf has said, at “finding new words and creating new methods” (TG 170) to better change, and even identify, new subjects. Jane writes:

What, in any case, is a socialist feminist criticism? The answer is a simple one. It wants to change the subject. The critic is committed to social change in her workplace, the university, as well as to political activism in the world. Her perspective on literature brings those concerns to scholarly practice and teaching. […] Literary criticism is inescapably political, often when it most vigorously denies its politics. A socialist feminist position openly affirms its values while keeping a weather eye out for formalism, essentialism, or any totalizing systems. (Art & Anger xvii)
Beloved Rebellion: A Tribute to Jane Marcus
Conor Tomás Reed, The Graduate Center, CUNY

I’m deeply grateful to share this day with Ashley Foster, Cori Gabbard, panelists, audience members, and Jane, whose spirit is here cheering us on. As many here know, one of our most tenaciously brilliant radical women, Jane Marcus, died on May 28, 2015 at the age of seventy-six. An archivist, author, organizer, teacher, and friend to many across the globe and at the City University of New York (CUNY), Jane transformed our landscape of cultural histories with her work on socialist feminism, Black liberation, and internationalist modernism of the twentieth century. For many decades, Jane dedicated her life to creating spaces for emancipation in the here and now. In 1964, she and her husband, Michael, taught at freedom schools in Boston’s Roxbury neighborhood before moving to Chicago, where they worked in the peace movement, establishing the Midwest branch of the Peace and Freedom Party in 1968. Jane was a co-founding member of Women’s Studies programs at the University of Illinois-Chicago and the University of Texas (where she collaborated with Gayatri Spivak), as well as a long-time advocate for Women’s Studies self-determination at CUNY. Her fierce dedication to “departments of one’s own” gained her lifetime friendships, which were based upon shared commitments to social justice, and aroused the scorn of and dismissal by many a mansplainer. As early as 1978, Jane’s essay “Art & Anger,” which takes its title from the book in which it was published, defined the stakes of her trans-generational project:

Anger is not anathema in art; it is a primary source of creative energy. Rage and savage indignation bear the hearts of female poets and female critics. [...] Out with it. No more burying our wrath, turning it against ourselves. No more ethical suicides, no more literary pacifism. [...] When the fires of our rage have burnt out, think how clear the air will be for our daughters. They will write in joy and freedom only after we have written in anger.

I first met Jane when I enrolled in her Spring 2008 seminar on the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) as an undergraduate at the City College of New York. Seventy years old and raucously vibrant, Jane animated the University of Illinois-Chicago and the University of Texas (where she collaborated with Gayatri Spivak), as well as a long-time advocate for Women’s Studies self-determination at CUNY. Her fierce dedication to “departments of one’s own” gained her lifetime friendships, which were based upon shared commitments to social justice, and aroused the scorn of and dismissal by many a mansplainer. As early as 1978, Jane’s essay “Art & Anger,” which takes its title from the book in which it was published, defined the stakes of her trans-generational project:

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An exception to much of the academic world, Jane refused to compartmentalize the labors of organizing, teaching, and writing, and understood the need to push back against any instance of university or state repression dealt to her, colleagues, and students. Some personal cases in point: After a November, 2011 incident at Baruch College—where CUNY security and New York Police Department (NYPD) officers attacked a crowd of us peacefully entering a Board of Trustees hearing on tuition increases—Jane joined a group of professors who demanded that charges be dropped against the 15 teachers and students arrested in the mêlée. In June of 2012, Ashley Foster and I were detained at the Canadian border en route to the International Virginia Woolf Society Conference to deliver papers on Three Guineas. Unresolved charges for some of my Occupy Wall Street civil disobediences raised red flags with Border Security, who rifled through our vehicle, belongings, and cellphones. Upon hearing this news, Jane instantly leaped into defense mode: she contacted the conference organizers to rally the Woolf scholars community (a mighty force to be reckoned with), all the while theorizing with us about how Woolf’s Three Guineas call to “burn the college to the ground” (42) was her own prescient “Occupy the Universities” statement.

1This tribute is a modified version of “Remembering Jane Marcus: CUNY Prof Was A Tenaciously Brilliant Scholar, Activist” which was first published at https://indydependent.org/2015/06/remembering-jane-marcus-cuny-prof-was-a-tenaciously-brilliant-scholar-activist/.
Revisiting these writings and memories, I’ve more deeply realized Jane’s ample generosity and unspiring critique as a radical feminist mentor. She knew how capital-H History erased rebellious people’s lives, and she demanded that in our own resurrective appraisals of their work, we get the record right each time. Jane would readily offer contacts for a wide network of elder and youngblood feminist scholars, point out unsung archival troves, and celebrate each small victory of scholarship and movement work, even as she frequently traveled, balanced dozens of writing and mentoring projects, and endured a range of illnesses across the several years I knew her. Jane chose not to suffer silently yet also refused to let that suffering consume her joy for life.

Jane’s transformative legacy is the kind that we need to both defend and expand. Jane Marcus Feminist University (JMFU) is one such provocation. What else can we do together? As she advised in her 1982 essay “Storming the Toolshed,” “It is far too early to tear down the barricades. Dancing shoes will not do. We still need our heavy boots and mine detectors” (623). Her generation’s gains for social change created foundations on which our own liberatory present emerges, but the ground is never settled. We can share Jane’s writings, speeches, and teaching/archiving practices inside and outside of the university. We can inaugurate her into the counter-canons of our People’s Histories of teaching/archiving practices inside and outside of the university. We can share Jane’s writings, speeches, and teaching/archiving practices inside and outside of the university.

And, I would add, sites to recruit people into militaries to inflict more bombings and shootings.

Blazing and Kindling: Moments of Being in the Life of Jane Connor Marcus
Cori L. Gabbard, Lyon College

Virginia Woolf’s 1928 story, “Moments of Being: ‘Slater’s Pins Have No Points,’” begins with an innocuous question that piano teacher Julia Craye directs towards her student, Fanny Wilmot, after the pin that secures a flower to the latter’s clothing detaches from her garb and lands on a rug: “‘Slater’s pins have no points—don’t you always find that?’” (215). Fanny’s internal response to this query is one of “extraordinary shock” (“Moments of Being” 215) out of which she formulates some questions of her own:

Did Miss Craye actually go to Slater’s and buy pins then, Fanny Wilmot asked herself, transfixed for a moment? Did she stand at the counter waiting like anybody else, and was she given a bill with coppers wrapped in it, and did she slip them into her purse and then, an hour later, stand by her dressing table and take out the pins? […] What need had she of pins—Julia Craye—who lived, it seemed, in the cool, glassy world of Bach fugues, playing to herself what she liked and only consenting to take one or two pupils at the Archer Street College of Music.[4] (Woolf, “Moments of Being” 215)

Jane, of course, was instrumental in establishing Virginia Woolf as a canonical literary figure, and therefore I need not expound upon what to many at JMFU is an obvious connection between the modernist scholar and the modernist writer. Rather, it is my intention, in considering the passage that I have just quoted, to emphasize how, by way of contrast, it illuminates Jane’s own “moments of being.” Fanny’s questions reflect her incredulity that Miss Craye might “actually go to Slater’s and buy pins,” an idea so apparently outlandish that its thinker experiences fleeting paralysis. What underlies this response, as Fanny’s subsequent image of Miss Craye “in the cool, glassy world of Bach fugues” implies, is the young woman’s conception of her instructor as an individual whose vocation isolates her from what she, Fanny, perceives as the mundane experiences of everyday life. In other words, Fanny situates her mentor, Julia Craye, in the musical equivalent of the ivory glass tower. Contrary to Miss Craye’s, Jane’s vitality as an intellectual very much informed her engagement with the world beyond what we think of as the conventional bounds of academia. In light of the fact that JMFU’s plenaries and readings focus upon Jane’s contributions as a scholar, mentor and colleague, I should like to share a few anecdotes illustrating how Jane’s approach to her research and teaching was, in fact, her approach to life. Although, technically speaking, Jane was a feminist scholar whose focus was post-1900 British literature—a description that already fails to encompass the complexity and breadth of her critical contributions—her curiosity, enthusiasm and knowledge transcended this realm, sometimes even in its very midst. In my first semester as a doctoral student at the CUNY Graduate Center, I enrolled in Jane’s course on Virginia Woolf. As was customary for Jane on the first day of any class she taught, she spent much of that first session having her students identify themselves by name and describe their particular intellectual interests. Jane was unique in her ability to respond immediately to such descriptions with detailed specifics as to how further knowledge of a given subject might be pursued, and when, therefore, I spoke with her after that first class, I expected her to reflect further upon what she had heard. Instead, as it turned out, what had impressed her most was the aesthetic sensibility of one particular student, even as she found his propensity to quote her own printed words in real time to her face somewhat unnerving, to say the least. Had I noticed this student’s “two-tone shoes?” she asked.

Notice everything and revel in it was exactly what Jane did. When some years later, Jane, her husband, Michael, and I sat watching the 2006 Torino Olympics, the woman who had played basketball at Radcliffe and had once aspired to a career at Vouge was as enraptured by the sophisticated yet seemingly effortless grace of the ice dancers as she was by the ugliness of many of their costumes. And yet this serious scholar, who on other occasions could and did point out the counter melody in a recording of a given aria even as she focused her attention on a complex work of criticism, did not fail to note what should have been central to the Sophisticated yet seemingly effortless grace of the ice dancers as she was by the ugliness of many of their costumes. And yet this serious scholar, who on other occasions could and did point out the counter melody in a recording of a given aria even as she focused her attention on a complex work of criticism, did not fail to note what should have been central to the Sophisticated yet seemingly effortless grace of the ice dancers as she was by the ugliness of many of their costumes.
JANE’S FEMINIST PEDAGOGY PLENARY ROUNDTABLE

Many of the contributions to this record speak to the fact that Jane integrated all of the parts of herself into everything she did. Her teaching was integral to her research and vice-versa. Throughout her scholarly criticism, from *Art & Anger to Hearts of Darkness* to her afterword for *Communal Modernisms*, she develops carefully and consistently a feminist pedagogy that seeks to expand the walls of the University and bring students into the center of academic discourse communities as contributing citizens to a global community at large. She invited outside guest academics into the classroom; she invited her students into her life and encouraged them to leave the classroom and dig into the archives, the materials, the art, the history. Countless trips—to Hemingway’s *The Fifth Column*, the Virginia Woolf exhibition at the Morgan, the Tannin collection and King Juan Carlos Library at New York University, the opening of the Mexican Suitcase photographs at the International Center for Photography, and Abraham Lincoln Brigade Association (ALBA) events—peppered her syllabus and broke down the boundaries between the academy and “life,” a boundary Jane was always transgressing. This roundtable panel describes how Jane’s students adopted, absorbed, and continue to carry forward her praxis as a teacher and highlights some of her great contributions to feminist pedagogies.

Jane Marcus’ Feminist Pedagogy:
A Remembrance and an Appreciation
Linda Camarasana, SUNY College at Old Westbury

I was glad to have been invited to present at Jane Marcus Feminist University, in good company among so many of Jane’s colleagues, friends and especially her former students. I took two classes with Jane as a Ph.D. student at the CUNY Graduate Center. The first was in 1994, a feminism seminar that she held at City College, and in which she hosted various guest speakers, including Carol Gilligan, Carolyn Heilbrun, Shari Benstock, and Gayatri Spivak. My second class with Jane was a seminar in 1996 called “Black and White Atlantics.” She headed my oral committee and was my dissertation advisor; following graduation, she continued to be my mentor and friend. I appreciated Jane immeasurably as a person, a scary but invigorating teacher, an extraordinarily supportive if demanding mentor, and a scholar who left a vital legacy. It is her legacy as a teacher and mentor that I want to speak to here.

I can’t say that I fully emulate Jane’s pedagogy in the classroom. I will never have her voice, her presence, or her encyclopedic mind. Her classes at times seemed like barely organized chaos, bombarded as we were by books, articles, references, titles, names, suggested museum exhibits, and ideas at a dizzying and disorienting pace. It was clear from the start of class that she would not infantilize us: we were not going to be spoon fed, and we were not there to be an audience for this brilliant, pioneering, and revolutionary scholar. One week when five books were on the schedule, a fellow student remarked, out of Jane’s earshot of course, “This lady is crazy.” For “Black and White Atlantics,” Jane placed a copy of Nancy Cunard’s massive, unabridged *Negro Anthology* on library reserve. She expected us to look it over, all 854 pages, and somehow absorb a section of it in two weeks and be ready to comment on what we had learned. Her discussions, whether in class or about my oral lists or pieces of my dissertation, often seemed to begin in *media res*, and at times struggled to figure out what I had missed. I remember thinking, she seems to think I know more than I actually do; and I feared that at some point she would realize that I was much too ignorant to be her student.

However, over the course of the semesters and in the many years since, something else happened. While I could never catch up to her, I learned so much more than I might have because she expected more from me than I might have ever thought I could accomplish. Moreover, I learned to be comfortable with the sometimes-chaotic nature of the learning process. Jane was bold and she thus gave us permission—commanded us in fact—to be bold. God forbid she would see her students sit at the back of the room if she were at a conference with us. “Sit in front,” she would instruct. “Ask a question.” By her example and her methods, she taught us that teaching isn’t just explaining and showing off what we know but empowering others to really dig in and grapple with new knowledge and new perspectives.

Jane had a way of looking at me that made me feel as though I were somehow in league with her (I am sure that Jane had this same effect on others). She could of course lecture brilliantly, hold forth for hours, it seemed, without notes and be totally entrancing. But she wanted us to feel we had permission not just to unpack materials we read and discussed, but to strip them bare, be outrageous if we had to, take leaps, and above all, be honest. In the feminist seminar, when she met with just the class and not one of the illustrious invited speakers, most of whom were her friends, Jane empowered us to say what we really thought about the presentation. She didn’t want us to cower before authority or academic celebrity. Sometimes she would shoot us a sly look that seemed to say, “I want to know what you really think,” and even, what you feel. “I want you to think openly and honestly; say it, write it, own it.” She didn’t want hagiography in our approach to literature or our scholarship. Of course, she wanted to topple the canon, but she also would openly declare, “Virginia Woolf is a snob; Virginia Woolf is a racist; Nancy Cunard is no feminist; Claude McKay’s *Banana Bottom* is clunky, don’t you think?” She wanted to get a rise out of us, to break through conventional thinking and stifling politeness. It was her way of teaching us to be truly independent thinkers and honest scholars. In her pedagogy, Jane modelled the importance of the things she valued. She taught us to bring female and historically marginalized authors and critical perspectives into the classroom. She showed us by example how to challenge students’ ideas and assumptions, to empower them and assure them that, if they work for it, they, too, are capable of butting in.

Jane spoke openly about her working-class background and the struggle she had with being at an Ivy League college as an undergraduate. When I told her how uncomfortable I had been as an M.A. student at Columbia University, she put her hand on mine and said, “I knew we had something in common.” I know it pleased Jane to know that she attracted not just feminists, but also many queer students, working class students, parents, political radicals—those of us who might feel like outsiders in the academy. Her scholarship, her activism, and her pedagogy were all in sync on this point. Like Woolf, she valued trespassers. I am thinking, of course, about the final passage of Woolf’s 1940 essay, “The Leaning Tower,” in which she declares, quoting her father, “Whenever you see a board up with ‘Trespassers will be prosecuted,’ trespass at once” (181). Jane wanted us to know we had value and that even if we didn’t feel we had a place, we should take our place anyway. In the front of the room. And speak up.

In preparing this tribute, I thought about the lessons I’ve learned from Jane about being a teacher and mentor and how she would want us to bring the legacy of having been her student onto our campuses and into our classrooms. Undoubtedly, she would want us to inform students of the work of those pioneers, of whom Jane was one, who opened up the academy to new fields of study, such as Women’s Studies, Africana Studies, Working Class Studies, Lesbian and Gay Studies. Moreover, we should make them aware that they are part of that legacy. She would want them to realize that hard work is important (how she valued the strict nuns who taught her!). To paraphrase one of her favorite writer-activists, Audre Lorde in “Poetry is not a Luxury,” “not only is poetry not a luxury, neither is literature, neither is art. Intellectual work is necessary, especially if you are an outsider.

One of the last, long conversations I had with Jane, at the 2013 Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900, was about her pending retirement. She knew she needed to retire, to focus on finishing her book projects, to get a well-deserved respite from a lifetime of battles with university administration, and to look after her health better. Nevertheless, she seemed to fear not having contact with students. She admitted how draining it could be, dealing with all of us and all of our needs, worrying about our progress (or lack thereof), our jobs, tenure, the challenges we faced at our home institutions, and, always,
the quality of our personal lives. She also talked about how she thrived on being needed and fulfilling important roles for us, and what her life would be like without that.

Jane Marcus will always be known as a ground-breaking scholar of feminism, Woolf studies, and modernist studies. I am grateful that JMFU’s event organizers, Ashley Foster, Cori L. Gabbard, and Conor Tomás Reed, recognized that many of us were also blessed and forever influenced because we also knew her as a passionate teacher and wise mentor. One lasting lesson I will always hold dear is that those of us inside the academy who aspire to be intellectuals must care about our students as much as we care about our scholarship.

Dining with Jane
Page Delano, Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY

My first box of dinners from Blue Apron made me think of Jane. Not just the yummy meals, with great ingredients and a grand outcome, but the doing of it. The fixings had come, in measured packages: polenta, three garlic cloves, butter, cheese, shrimp, and one scallion. But I had to put them together. This process seemed quite Jane-like: she offered the ingredients, and from these I composed a meal. Of course, this metaphor doesn’t correlate exactly, for in the classroom, and in my dissertation-focused spaces with her, she offered not only some of the ingredients but also ways to cook in the form of methodology. In addition, she encouraged searches in the archives and the library stacks for other ingredients. Nor does this metaphor apply to the typical relationship between a graduate student and her faculty, for Jane paid attention to the garlic, the salt and pepper and to the direction to cut on a bias—which indicated her sense of adventure, the sending of her students into their own cooking spaces, and the assumption that what would be plated would be delicious and worthy. This cooking homage also speaks to the fact that when we commended one another, much of it was about ourselves: in other words, that we were finding our places, and figuring out how to gather up our own ingredients. Yet too this homage speaks of collaboration, in the best of sense, where one learned and glowed in Jane’s profound light as a feminist, radical mentor and seeker.

I came to academia with a checkered past. I had barely studied literature when I returned to college to get my B.A. in history, but I resumed writing as well. In the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins, I’d translated my years as a red activist in the coalfields of West Virginia into poetry. I’d entered the English Program at the CUNY Graduate Center with ambivalence; it was a necessary pathway to getting a full-time job after years of adjuncting, but I was also excited about putting my experiences, both of gender and politics, into an intellectual if not theoretical framework. Here I encountered Jane, and her class on women in World War I. She admired and normalized my background, taking it for granted that when we commended one another, much of it was about ourselves: in other words, that we were finding our places, and figuring out how to gather up our own ingredients. Yet too this homage speaks of collaboration, in the best of sense, where one learned and glowed in Jane’s profound light as a feminist, radical mentor and seeker.

In Jane’s class on both the Americans and British in World War I, I found my way. I’d been working with my then-husband on anti-war Vietnam veterans, and he was suffering the woes of writing a dissertation. Now I had my own war, although I later turned to World War II. Jane (metaphorically) sang me through my dissertation on American women, “Loose Lips Sink Ships: Sexuality and Citizenship in World War II.”

These ties of academic love and friendship came about in part because of the remarkable projects she sent us on in that first year at the CUNY Graduate Center. I went to the New York Public Library, turning through volumes of file cards that noted women’s memoirs about wartime experiences, and from there, I was hooked on the project of women in wartime, with the awareness that dozens, if not more, voices had not yet been acknowledged or included in discourses of war, gender, theory, citizenship and nationhood. Through the informality (and excitement) we brought to class, Jane demanded we deepen and formalize our thinking and writing.

I renewed my ties with Jane years later, when she invited me to speak at an English program forum with a new group of students who were working on the Spanish Civil War. My own work, after I dug through the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA), paid attention, to continue with the trope of food, to the chickpeas and sherry that were American nurses’ constant fare. But I also found that the American Medical Brigade had equipped women workers with condoms. Hence, I was making the argument that these women had love lives, affairs, and breakups, in the difficult framework of intense independence and Republican/Comintern discipline. Thus began a study of the nurses as fuller, sexual actors, keeping in mind Simone de Beauvoir’s view that to be a full citizen, women must possess civic and sexual agency. But more than that, Jane’s rigorous and intellectual curiosity fired up this work to challenge the traditional narrative of commitment and service by revealing the real and complicated lives of women. I’m never sure whether or not I have lived up fully to her instructions and expectations, but her voice is always there speaking to and with me.

Jane Marcus, An Ongoing Legacy
Robin Hackett, University of New Hampshire

As a graduate student, I had Jane Marcus’ words, “write out of rage,” scrawled on a three-by-five card and taped to the wall above my computer. This advice served me well. I finished my degree by raging—one chapter at a time—against silencing forces that kept Sylvia Townsend Warner, for one, out of literary history. In job talks, I commented, with rage transformed into humor, that if Warner had cared to be remembered by literary history, she would have been smart not to have been both a lesbian and a communist. I got a job anyway—a success that I credit to both affirmative action and the fact that I came to an academy influenced by Jane Marcus. Jane’s work not only prepared me for the academic job market, but also, over the course of her career, helped prepare that same market to be open to me, among others, who belong to groups of people hitherto excluded.

Jane and her generational allies did this work—transformed the academy—in many ways, including by teaching one student at a time, and by encouraging those students to teach others. I ended up at CUNY working with Jane because I had had the previous good fortune to take a class with Julia Allen, who had been Jane’s student in Texas, and who directed me to Jane. Since I started teaching, I have also sent students to Jane—a few to work with her directly, and a great many others to read her books and essays. Some of those students have subsequently gone off to be teachers in Jane’s mold themselves.

These expanding networks of teaching and learning have made the academy a more inclusive institution. Such networks, including the people and processes that resulted in this conference, are a large part of Jane’s legacy as a teacher and as a writer. She challenged and transformed academic institutions; her interventions into academic culture continue through her students, and through the colleagues she influenced, as well as through her published writing.

But her legacy is richer than that. By reminding us to write out of rage still, through her example and her books, she reminds us to keep looking for ways to transform the academy, including in ways that she herself might not have imagined were necessary.1 Her legacy is her continuing insistence not only to keep expanding the curriculum, but also, in the current moment, to turn the tide against crushing student debt; to stop

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1 For Marcus and other feminists working in the 1970s, expressing anger, as well as grief and fear, constituted a political intervention. Since then, critics working with affect theory, notably Sara Ahmed and Eve Sedgwick, propose a more complex understanding of the work emotions do. They clarify, for instance, that emotions produce subjects and objects, including the subjects who feel. Even still, anger continues to be a source of feminist politics and activism. For a discussion of Marcus’ comments about anger through the lens of affect theory, see Margot Kotler’s “After Anger: Negative Affect and Feminist Politics in Virginia Woolf’s Three Guineas,” Woolf Studies Annual (2018) 24: 35-54.
administrative bloat; to convert positions filled by contingent faculty into tenure-track lines; and to fight against the perpetuation of exclusionary, academic politics that are disproportionately aimed towards people of color at every level of higher education. We who have benefited from Jane’s work, done in rage and also in love, can’t stop acting in Jane’s name and in her spirit now. Such is the case even though many of us teach in departments and universities that have been so profoundly transformed that they are barely recognizable as the institutions against which Jane raged as an undergraduate, as a graduate student, and as a professor. I, for one, teach in an English department in which more than half the tenured and tenure-track faculty are women.

To write out of rage as Jane asks us to do means to go on writing into existence the ideas we need even as we also continue to discover what those needs are. Jane Marcus did not simply find, in Virginia Woolf, one of the mothers through whom to think back. She wrote that Woolf into being. She stretched Woolf and appropriated her: first as the force she, Jane, needed as a young scholar awakening, as she says, to issues of class and gender. Later, Jane wrote Woolf into being as a force against fascism, and empire, and racism, and homophobia. Woolf is not this author without Jane Marcus whose readings are expansive and associative. She allowed possibilities to become truths-enough about Woolf.² It was truth-enough, for Jane, that Woolf raged against racism, and homophobia, and empire, just as she raged explicitly against patriarchy and fascism. For Jane, these revolutionary truths-enough inspired her to share Woolf’s “dangerous mission” to “become [her] co-conspirators against culture” (Art & Anger 83). The truths-enough meant, for Jane, redeeming Woolf as a foremother who enables her students and colleagues, in turn, to “become our own redeemers” (Art & Anger 83). This is not to say, of course, that Jane was not a rigorous scholar with prodigious knowledge. But the way Jane knelt together the fragments she uncovered is uniquely hers. Her advice to “write out of rage” is as demanding as it is permissive. It prompts each of us to discover what needs to be transformed now, what needs to be written now, and to keep training students to find what will need to be written in twenty-years’ time. Jane wrote to clarify the pulse of the academy she found as a working-class, woman student. To follow her advice, and to honor her legacy, we have to keep trying to clarify the whole range of forces arrayed against us now, in academia and beyond: the erosion of tenure and the assault on black life increasingly captured on body cameras; the murders of trans people; and also the treatment of refugees. Writing out of rage also means transforming that emotion into action: finding the textual and curricular adjuncts of that violence and exposing the harmful effects of curricula and policy that can be packaged as parity, or as freedom of speech. Jane asks us to collect data, as Woolf did in Three Guineas, and to explain—repeatedly and collectively—where the data shows a pattern of assault. This responsibility will require writing out of rage ongoingly, supporting students who do so, as well, and working to prepare the job market for these students, as Jane prepared the job market for many of us.

This obligation was critical on the September 2016 weekend of the conference, Jane Marcus Feminist University, when I made these comments. It became even more urgent two months later after the November 2016 presidential election.

How do we accomplish the tasks set before us? What are the concrete steps? At my institution, and perhaps yours, they include meeting with like-minded colleagues in advance of hiring and tenure processes in order to anticipate and defend against bias; sitting on graduate admissions committees; finding out how colleagues at other campuses are addressing the erosion of tenure, and building on their efforts to convert contingent faculty to tenure track; writing and teaching the history motivating the Black Lives Matter Movement and support students’ involvement; collecting data about the erosion of academic freedom in the Trump era; and finally, making each other lunch while you do this work and more, because none of it is easy, and because making the work reinvigorating is part of the work itself. These endeavors are the legacy of Jane Marcus.

“The Women We Carry in Our Minds:”
Jane Marcus, Mentorship, and Memory
Jaime Weida, Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY

“We must make the literary profession safe for women […] It is our historical responsibility. When the fires of our rage have burnt out, think how clear the air will be for our daughters.”

—Jane Marcus, Art & Anger

I enrolled in Jane Marcus’ Modern British Poetry class during my second year as a doctoral student in the English Program at the CUNY Graduate Center. We were assigned a massive reading list and an overwhelming amount of work. There was approximately one student presentation per week on the course material: the more scholarly, the better. Since it was a small class, we all ended up presenting multiple times. There was a full research paper due each month, the guidelines for which were comparable to the final research papers I’d been assigned in my advanced undergraduate classes.

Yet I quickly realized that this seemingly torturous workload was not intended to punish, but rather to challenge and encourage us. Jane, in her no-nonsense fashion, did not allow any of us to shrink into the shadows during class discussion of the readings. She demanded our thoughts, our analysis, our opinions. However, she never belittled or diminished our contributions. I had entered the CUNY Graduate Center as a modernist; my entrance essay was on T. S. Eliot. When Jane found out, she immediately —without disparaging my love for Eliot—encouraged me to look beyond the canonical male modernists, examining them and their work with critical eyes. She introduced me to female modernist poets of whom I had never heard, such as Hope Mirrlees, Edith Sitwell, and Nancy Cunard.

As much as Jane expected from us, she gave us far more. Her gifts included hundreds of pages of copies of rare books and poems, many from her own library. I had an annotated copy of Mirrlees’ long poem Paris with Julia Briggs’ notes years before it was formally published. Jane gave us all copies of issues from Edith Sitwell’s radical poetry journal Wheels. I still have a copy of Nancy Cunard’s poem “Parallax” that I got from Jane. It is, years later, the only copy of this important modernist poem I have ever seen. (Trying to follow in Jane’s footsteps, I brought copies of my copy to Jane Marcus Feminist University). Some of Jane’s gifts were reminiscences of her own, such as her meeting with T. S. Eliot or her interviews of and friendship with Rebecca West. One personal story that felt like a special gift to me was her revelation that she came from an unpretentious working-class background and felt out of place and like an outsider behind the ivy-covered walls of Harvard University. Jane brought visitors and guest speakers to our class, such as Jean Mills and Marilyn Hacker, including us in a sisterhood of academics.

By the end of the course, I knew I wanted to work with Jane on my oral exam and my dissertation. Despite the fact that I had by this time established a relationship with her, I was still surprised and flattered that she agreed to take me on as her student. During this time, Jane introduced me to some of her other graduate students and actively encouraged fellowship and collaboration among all of us. (I ended up going to a conference at Stirling University in Scotland with two of Jane’s other students, where I presented a paper on Hope Mirrlees and T. S. Eliot that later became one of my dissertation chapters). Trendy catch-phrases such as “learning communities” and “collaborative teaching
and learning” proliferate in current pedagogical theory. Yet Jane did not employ these concepts as buzzwords or part of “best practices”—to her, they were the foundation of academia. She saw as it as her responsibility to help her form alliances to assist us professionally and personally in graduate school and beyond. This approach was in direct contradiction to the culture of competition I’d experienced in academia. Yet it was an academic culture I liked far better. To Jane, we were not in competition with each other: we were in competition with institutional sexism; entrenched patriarchal ideologies that inform the literary canon and literary studies in general; and essentially the persistence of repressive practices and ideologies both within and without the academy.

For these reasons, while Jane did not hesitate to take on male students, the majority of her graduate students and mentees were women. She had experienced sexism throughout her academic career, and her staunch feminism led her to speak out openly for and support her female colleagues, as well as her female students. Jane was a “champion” for many of us on several levels; her own long history of activism is no coincidence or surprise. When I was in the running for a full-time position at the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC), Jane personally advocated for me. When I was coming up on the five-year deadline to finish my dissertation or forfeit that full-time position, Jane, even while seriously ill herself, worked intensely with me on a weekly basis through an entire semester so I could successfully defend my dissertation in time. Yet at the same time, she refused to accept mediocrity or “rushed” work. I believe I wrote my chapter on C. S. Lewis four times before Jane finally said it was acceptable; I re-wrote the introduction even more times than that before I finally hit on the “authenticity of voice” she demanded from me. Even now, when writing scholarly articles for publication, I turn to the notes Jane made in the margins of my dissertation drafts.

Many people who think of Jane Marcus doubtless will think of her ground-breaking work on Virginia Woolf and her fundamental publications like Art & Anger and Hearts of Darkness: White Women Write Race. I think of a mentor who launched me on my current career and scholarly path and opened my eyes to so many possibilities beyond the traditional patriarchal ivory tower of literature and literature studies. I think of the discovery that colleagues, especially women, do not have to compete with each other for favor with the administration, grant money, or even slots in prestigious publications. Mostly, I think of Jane when I teach. I talk about feminism and the importance of activism in my classes, just as Jane did. So far, I have guided two students through the BMCC honors program. I have tried to be a mentor to my students in ways both small and large, from simply listening when they come to me with personal problems to being a strong resource when they run into difficulties within or without BMCC. And, as Jane did for me, I try to give my students “gifts,” some of which are stories about Jane herself. I hope these endeavors will be my enduring eulogy for Jane.

Jane Marcus: Cultivating Sisterhood
Tracyann F. Williams, The New School

By virtue of a pen stroke, I was Jane’s research assistant for a few years. The then Executive Officer of the CUNY Graduate Center’s doctoral program in English thought that Jane Marcus was someone whom “it might be good for [me] to know.” Those few years evolved into twenty, over which time I took three of her courses, at the CUNY Graduate Center and at City College. Jane ran a democratic and animated classroom, assigning what seemed like thousands of pages each week. Because of the seemingly effortless and masterful direction of the discussions that would emerge, Jane’s students eagerly read these pages. At least, I did. Seeing Jane open her eyes wide or shoot a knowing glance in my direction let me know that there was a human being in there who cared for all of her students.

Jane came into my life at a critical juncture when I was becoming disenchanted and frustrated with my graduate studies. I had been trying to justify my area of focus, which often felt like a discussion over whether I could even pursue my doctorate. The transformative beauty and possibilities of literature to impact people’s lives—some of the core beliefs that drove me to graduate school—seemed far off. Jane provided a model for how one could weather the challenges and isolation I sometimes experienced. She mentored, advised, and mothered me through a dissertation process that I wasn’t always sure I would see to the other side. Without her steadfast belief in my abilities, I perhaps would not have my degree now. Our conversations also were interwoven with dialogues about families, professions, and, most importantly, being female in the academy. She also revealed pressing issues and causes for which she fiercely agitated. (Oh, how I pitied the simpleton on the receiving end of Jane’s ire.) I also learned that she loved dark nail polish, a good handbag, and women who were stylish.

Jane’s research and scholarship were compelling, challenging her readers to rethink commonly-held beliefs. Similarly, she encouraged me, often with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, to “go there,” and not be afraid to push my analyses where I wanted to take them. Though she was always kind, there was also an urgency in her guidance. Jane embodied what Marc Lowenstein, as paraphrased by Susan M. Campbell and Charlie L. Nutt, asserts is the very essence of a good mentor: “An excellent adviser does the same for the student’s entire curriculum that the excellent teacher does for one course” (Campbell and Nutt 3). In this way, Jane provided unending support for possibilities in my research, scholarship, and teaching. She was excited to hear about my professional career and how I finessed it and offered real advice for how to survive. Busy though she was with her own research, writing, and teaching as well as advising and mentoring her undergraduate and other graduate students, Jane had the uncanny ability to make me feel as though I were special.

Yet I was clearly not the only one. In the course of our meetings and communications, Jane would speak of other students or colleagues with whom she was working. She was constantly in the process of making connections. For example, Jane would send me an e-mail about a conference in some far-flung place and suggest the necessity of attending—and, by the way, she would suggest contacting or collaborating with so-and-so as well. One such adventure found me in Birmingham, UK, with a group I organized, thanks to Jane. Although the airline lost my luggage, and I had limited time and money to secure clothing and essentials, I still had an amazing academic and professional experience.

Jane’s insistence that her students and colleagues know each other is the well-spring of feminist work. These connections form a network of binding sisterhood. And, as bell hooks notes, this community or “sisterhood [is] where all our realities could be spoken” (58). This sisterhood is part of Jane’s radical feminist legacy, a way of making sure that her sisters had empathy for and an interest in each other’s work. She formed another literary sisterhood through her urgency to recommend books for reading and further consideration.

I saw Jane in September 2014, as she was preparing to leave on a trip to Mexico. She was, in fact, traveling the next day, but insisted that I meet her. Though I was pregnant (with a daughter who would be named Penelope Jane) and moving slowly, I uncharacteristically left work in the middle of the day and met Jane for lunch. We talked about the process of creating. We mused about Mexico (since I had gone on a few trips there in recent years). And, we laughed a lot. At one point, sitting there with Jane, she insisted I read Margaret Walker’s Jubilee; she wondered why she hadn’t delved more deeply into the novel and urged me to write about it. She said she couldn’t wait to see how my mind would work through it, even though it was unrelated to my current research. Rather than just being teacher and student or mentor and mentee on that day in September, she devilishly remarked that she and I were now “just two ladies having lunch.” She picked up the check and assured me that I could get the next one.
Unfortunately, there would not be a next meeting for Jane and me. We exchanged e-mails with plans to get together in June 2015, though she passed away a few weeks before we were to meet again. Jane was a great teacher and friend to me. She says, in the introduction to Art & Anger, “[i]ke most feminist critics of my generation, I had no female mentor” (xvi). Well, Jane ensured that a generation of feminist scholars would not face the same fate that she did. I had a female mentor, Jane Connor Marcus, to whom I will be always indebted.

**BREAKOUT WORKSHOPS**

The collaboration that characterized the planning and actualization of Jane Marcus Feminist University was, in its homage to Jane’s own methodologies, unconventional, to say the least. It started with Conor organizing a conference call that had upwards of twenty people on the phone; then a collaborative Google Docs; and then a series of other conference calls, each grappling with the question of how to construct a forum that reflected the spontaneity and creativity of Jane herself. We all felt the impetus to involve the conference attendees in interactive ways, moving beyond the standard model of three papers and a Q&A session. The breakout sessions (mini-workshops that organically coalesced the day of the conference) were intended to do just that: to give audience members opportunities to become participants and co-creators of the discourses in which they respectively engaged. We had four topics that registrants could choose from during the morning coffee hour, and each topic had a volunteer leader. The leaders had lightly prepared materials to consider, and participants were asked to share their questions and expertise as well. The following contributions describe the workshops that were offered and the discussions that they generated.

**Modernist Women Writers as Activists**

**Nancy Berke, LaGuardia Community College, CUNY**

The “Modernist Women Writers as Activists” breakout session was my individual commemoration of Jane Marcus, her dazzling and courageous work on behalf of female intellectuals, and their embrace of radical ideas and causes. The best way for me to honor Jane was, of course, to “teach” some of the works I studied under her tutelage. They reflected my area of specialization, twentieth-century American women’s poetry, and offered me an opportunity to discuss Jane’s passion for those modernist women who engaged in various forms of political and “aesthetic” activism.

It was through Jane that I learned the art of recovery—recovering neglected women writers, and the radical histories that often go along with this digging out process. Although Jane focused on British women and I on American, she taught me that this recovery work was itself a form of radical and feminist activism. Indeed, Jane, in her nurturing mentorship, was responsible for the recovery of and new attention to countless neglected literary women. Jane had a special term for these understudied, lost, and often unfashionable women writers: she called them “low” modernists. And one of the places to which Jane steered me was a one-off journal published by a group of young artists and writers in Harlem.

**A Southern Road**

*Kay Boyle (1901-1992)*: Boyle’s “Communication to Nancy Cunard” (*The New Republic, 9 June 1937*, pp. 126-127) was written for her friend, the poet, activist, and anthologist Nancy Cunard. “Communication to Nancy Cunard” documents the infamous Scottsboro case in which nine black men and boys accused of raping two white women were convicted and imprisoned based on the two women’s perjured testimony. The racial injustice exemplified by the outcome of the case became an international cause célèbre, which found the Communist Party working alongside the NAACP to free the Scottsboro nine, who were eventually acquitted after a 1937 Supreme Court decision. “Communication to Nancy Cunard” relied on source material from Carlton Beals’s reporting in *The Nation, Cunard’s essay “Scottsboro—and Other Scottsboros,” and personal communication with one of the defendants, Haywood Patterson.*

1 Lola Ridge was born in 1873 and died in 1941.

2 Muriel Rukeyser (1913-1980): “Absalom” is from the twenty-poem cycle “Book of the Dead” (*U.S.I, Covici-Friede*, 1938, pp. 27-28). Rukeyser traveled to Gauley Bridge, West Virginia to document the Hawk’s Nest Industrial Disaster which exposed workers to siliconosis. The New Kanawha Power Company, on whose watch the disaster happened, did not require workers to wear masks, all the while knowing the fatal effects of toxic dust on human lungs. When survivors sued New Kanawha’s parent company, Union Carbide, they received minimal compensation which was mostly eaten up by lawyers’ fees. Sources for Rukeyser’s poem-cycle include the records of a federal investigation, which came about because of the company’s attempts to conceal illegal drilling practices.

3 Kay Boyle (1900-1990): Boyle’s “Communication to Nancy Cunard” (*The New Republic, 9 June 1937*, pp. 126-127) was written for her friend, the poet, activist, and anthologist Nancy Cunard. “Communication to Nancy Cunard” documents the infamous Scottsboro case in which nine black men and boys accused of raping two white women were convicted and imprisoned based on the two women’s perjured testimony. The racial injustice exemplified by the outcome of the case became an international cause célèbre, which found the Communist Party working alongside the NAACP to free the Scottsboro nine, who were eventually acquitted after a 1937 Supreme Court decision. “Communication to Nancy Cunard” relied on source material from Carlton Beals’s reporting in *The Nation, Cunard’s essay “Scottsboro—and Other Scottsboros,” and personal communication with one of the defendants, Haywood Patterson.*

4 Genevieve Taggard was born in 1894 and died in 1948.

5 Helene Johnson (1906-1995): “A Southern Road” appeared in *Fire!!! Devoted to Younger Negro Artists* (Wallace Thurman, Ed. *The Fire Press*, 1926, p. 17), a one-off journal published by a group of young artists and writers in Harlem. Now considered a groundbreaking text of the New Negro Renaissance, the magazine sought to be a cultural upstart, favoring a rich literary and visual aesthetic celebrating Harlem’s young artists. The often-anthologized stories “Wedding Day” by Gwendolyn Bennett and “Sweat” by Zora Neale Hurston were first published in *Fire!!! While “A Southern Road” has a political agenda (albeit through an impressionistic lens) by virtue of its subject, lynching, *Fire!!! was criticized for its refusal to follow a script of social and racial uplift, as well as for its sexual frankness.*

6 Marie de L. Welch (1905-1974): “Harvests” (*The New Republic, 27 December 1933*, p. 187) originally was published as “The Harvest.” It was inspired by the waves of strikes led by Mexican workers and organizers from the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union in California’s Central Valley. As a member of a local citizen’s group, Welch visited a striker’s camp in Corcoran, California. She helped document the camp’s conditions in radical papers such as the *Western Worker* and *Pacific Weekly* and confronted sheriffs and district attorneys with stories about the grower’s rampant vigilism.

This poster image of a big white man, which spurred some debate, was an interesting symbol with which to begin. The Mooney case lasted almost as long as the modernist period itself, from the trade unionist’s arrest in 1916—the same year that Margaret Anderson devoted space to agitation on behalf of Mooney in her iconic *Little Review*—to his pardon in 1942. In hindsight, I wondered what Jane would have made of my decision to share “Stone Face,” a poem from the 30s, when Ridge’s earlier work is more representative of her feminism. Yet this image of Mooney, which I pulled out of the archives at Beinecke Library, is an artifact of the poet’s activism. Ironically, it prompted our sole male participant to ask, “What do we make of these images that honor the plights of men?” Good question! Jane would have loved the quarrel.

In response, I redirected the conversation to Genevieve Taggard’s “Feeding the Children,” in which the wives of striking marble workers speak out. “Feeding the Children” was composed while Taggard was a member of the United Committee to Aid Vermont Marble Workers (organized by the artist Rockwell Kent). Taggard owned a home in Vermont and wrote a number of poems pertaining to the 1936 strike in Rutland, which appear in her most activist book, *Calling Western Union* (1936). In a contentious strike that pitted the townspeople against them, the workers struck against the Vermont Marble Company, suppliers of marble for monuments in Washington, D.C., including the Supreme Court building. Taggard’s poem tells the story of the strike from the women’s perspective: the wives, mothers, and daughters of the marble workers. These women’s testimonies appear prominently in the Committee’s 36-page strike report, which I dug out of Taggard’s archive at the New York Public Library.

As we decided upon what poems to review next, we discussed how the modernist poetry that engaged with the radical political currents of its time brings back forgotten moments only to become forgotten poems because they explore those moments on the periphery of history. So the discussion turned to teaching. How would we teach these poems? We looked briefly at “A Southern Road” and the remaining poems. “A Southern Road” requires a look into religious symbols and lush landscape, while at the same time introducing the social injustice and trauma of lynching. Comments surfaced about images, language, and difficulties. How do we teach poetry, that “difficult” art? How do we teach that difficult art when it explores, through the fragmented and defamiliarized language of modernism, that unspeakable horror of lynching? Perhaps, as we learned from Jane, with a little help from the archive.

8 Genevieve Taggard, “Feeding the Children.” *Calling Western Union*, Harper & Brothers, 1936, pp. 54-55.

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**The Spanish Civil War**

**Margaret Carson, Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY**

“The Spanish Civil War produced an avalanche of artistic response, in painting and propaganda, powerful posters never surpassed in artistic power since the Russian Revolution, poetry, fiction, journalism, and even music.”

—Jane Marcus, introduction to Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas*

A core group of Jane’s former students—Page Delano, Anne Donlon, Jen Prince and I—gathered to consider a basic question: how did we get to the Spanish Civil War through Jane? How did Jane’s critical engagement with the War and with figures of the literary and artistic movements of the Thirties shape our own subsequent investigations, discoveries, and writings? We were especially honored that Michael Marcus, Jane’s husband, joined our session and shared memories of observations from visits that he and Jane made to internment camps for Spanish Civil War refugees in the south of France.

In the discussion that followed, we traced the beginnings of our projects to conversations with Jane, to her seminars on women and modernism and the Spanish Civil War, to her non-canonical reading lists, to her enthusiasm for archival research, and to her groundbreaking essays. We talked about Jane’s feminist rethinking of received narratives of the Spanish Civil War, about her interest in recovering lost texts, especially by marginalized or forgotten voices, and about her inspiring mentorship (“Do it!” I hear Jane saying emphatically).

Anne Donlon told us that she first studied Langston Hughes in Jane’s seminar on British writers and the Spanish Civil War, and that while looking through Jane’s photocopies of Langston Hughes’ and Nancy Cunard’s correspondence in the 1930s, she came across an unpublished poem by Hughes, “A Note from Spain.” That poem, along with the Hughes/Cunard correspondence and other archival materials, was included in *Langston Hughes, Nancy Cunard & Louise Thompson: Poetry, Politics & Friendship in the Spanish Civil War, a Lost & Found volume* she edited.

More recently, she has been investigating Nancy Cunard’s Spanish Civil War scrapbooks, exemplars of cultural productions that were once treated as ephemeral but that are now valorized thanks to the pioneering work of Jane and other feminist scholars.

Jen Prince shared with us her discovery, through Jane, of the little-known U.S. writer Gamel Woolsey, who married the British writer Gerald Brenan and settled with him in the 1930s in the south of Spain. Jen’s dissertation on representations of the Spanish Civil War in texts written by US and Spanish women includes a discussion of Woolsey’s memoir of the Spanish Civil War, *Death’s Other Kingdom*, which was first published in 1939 and has been long out of print.

Page Delano told us about her investigations of U.S. women nurses who volunteered with the American Medical Brigade in the service of the Spanish Republic. As she later wrote in an e-mail:

I think I turned to Spain almost by accident. I was on sabbatical, planning to return to France in the spring to do more work on American women in France during World War II, but circumstances kept me in New York. I figured, why not go to the Tamiment? I was not long into the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA) folders about American nurses in Spain before I discovered (or actually re-discovered, in the footsteps of Frances Patai) that the American Medical Brigade offices in New York had equipped these nurses setting out for Spain with condoms! Driven by my concerns about sexual agency (as Beauvoir has noted, women need both political and sexual agency to be full citizens), aware that the CPs [Communist Parties] and Comintern had a highly puritanical streak, I began writing about the nurses, their letters home, their relationships and liaisons with men (largely men in the Brigades). I was guided by Jane’s huge curious angel on my shoulder, along with concerns the like of Nan Enstad’s; who has argued that in studying working class women of the early twentieth century, one needed to note that not only were they interested in unions, but [also that] they liked to buy shoes—that we needed to give our ‘fighting women’ real lives, especially those who had presented themselves in their letters as stalwart anti-fascists if only a bit tired of chickpeas and sherry, enthralled by the bravery of their Brigader comrades and the heroism of the Spanish people. Embedded in this [perspective] is a critique of the CP’s line on women and the

1 Frances Patai (1930-1998) was a feminist scholar and activist whose research focused upon the experiences of U.S. nurses who aided the Republicans through the medical services they provided in Spain for the span of the Spanish Civil War.

historical perspective that looks on the International Brigade with uncritical dewy-eyed affection.

I spoke about my discovery in the 1990s of the Hungarian photographer Kati Horna, who traveled through Spain in 1937 on assignment for Spanish anarchist periodicals such as \textit{Mujeres Libres} and \textit{Umbral}. Unlike other photojournalists of the Spanish Civil War (including her compatriot Robert Capa), Horna focused on civilian life behind the lines, taking many photos of women and children in towns near the Aragonese front and at evacuation centers for mothers with infants. I was pleased to introduce Jane to the little-known work of Kati Horna, whose documentary photos and photomontages she shared with students in her Spanish Civil War seminars.

Michael Marcus reflected on a trip that he and Jane took in 2008 to the south of France to see the ruins of the refugee camps—concentration camps, really—where Spanish Republicans fleeing Spain in 1939 were interned. In a subsequent email, Michael recounted their visit in more detail and provided the photos that accompany this report (see figures 1-4).

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\caption{Rivesaltes Internment Camp. Courtesy of Michael Marcus.}
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Jane and I visited the camp at Gurs on May 31, 2008 and the one at Rivesaltes, on June 3, 2008. Both of these camps are in France, close to the border with Spain. Gurs is close to the ocean on the west coast, and Rivesaltes is close to the sea on the east coast. In 2005, Jane and I had been at Collioure, on the east coast, close to Rivesaltes, looking for remains of the camps, but we found nothing. We went to Collioure because Jane had read news reports from 1939 about the refugees confined to the beaches there. In 2005, the existence of these camps was sort of a secret. Our sophisticated, left-wing French friends had never heard of them. But just at this time, things were changing. There were programs on French television about them, and in 2008, they were listed in the Michelin Green guides.

There seems to be no trace of any camps around Collioure, which is a popular resort town. The camp at Rivesaltes was just a collection of deserted buildings, although on the small country road that passes it, there are three monuments: one to the Spanish refugees who were interned there, one to the Jews who replaced them in World War II, and one to the Algerians who had fought in Algeria with the French army and fled when the French were defeated. They had been promised resettlement to France, but De Gaulle broke that promise and put them in camps. At Gurs there is [no longer any] camp, [although] there is a small outdoor display of photos and art work from the camp (behind glass and under a roof) and a beautiful small park that contains grave stones of some of the refugees from Spain who died there. We were there on a sunny day. It was serene, heartbreakingly sad, and inspiring. We felt as we did when we were visiting the acres of soldiers’ graves from World War I, on the north coast of France. It was overcast and grey when we visited the camp at Rivesaltes. It was hauntingly beautiful. The scene was even more impressive than the lovely memorial park at Gurs. We walked around for a long time and didn’t speak to each other. The place was totally deserted. Earlier today I looked at Google maps to refresh my memory. (I learned that the camp at Rivesaltes was also called Camp Joffre.) There is now a museum there. It looks very impressive. I don’t know whether it gives equal attention to the three classes of victims imprisoned there.

Jane and I made several trips to France looking for places where things she had read about happened. We found the farm where Virginia Woolf vacationed in Cassis. We found the house in the small town in France where Nancy Cunard lived when she left Paris. And we found the camps. I think it was necessary for her to bring life to the things in which she was interested.

This session on the Spanish Civil War was held in gratitude to Jane for so generously sharing these interests with us, and for encouraging us as we opened up our own paths as feminists and scholars.
In “Changing the Subject: Archives, Technology, and Radical Counter-Narratives of Peace,” J. Ashley Foster, Sarah M. Horowitz, and Laurie Allen quote Jane Marcus’ assertion that “a socialist feminist criticism [...] wants to change the subject” (Art & Anger xvii). Our Feminist Digital Pedagogy Break Out Session asked how we can use digital tools to change the subject of what we teach and how we do so. If, following Marcus’ example, a feminist pedagogy means teaching students to engage the complexity of literary history, becoming wary of approaches that simplify or compromise this process (Art & Anger xvii), then a feminist digital pedagogy prepares them to navigate the past and present, developing control over changing modes of communication while assessing and designing new resources.

Our consideration of how one could achieve feminist ends using digital tools began with a list of questions and readings for future exploration (see the lists of bullet points below). Throughout the discussion, participants offered strategies for teaching with technology and we considered recent examples, such as Smith College’s Massive Online Open Course on the “Psychology of Political Activism: Women Changing the World.” The wealth of participants’ perspectives—from a graduate student instructor to digital humanities (DH) practitioners and seasoned faculty—led to conversations addressing issues in pedagogy, curriculum, and technology, including questions of labor and access, that speak to those at the heart of Marcus’ scholarship and teaching.

- What is feminist digital pedagogy?
- What makes digital pedagogy feminist?
- What makes feminist pedagogy digital?
- How might a feminist digital pedagogy continue Jane Marcus’ work?

A feminist digital pedagogy engages goals, topics, and projects that demonstrate equality—fairly addressing students and texts, including formerly overlooked voices—using digital tools. A digital pedagogy is one that incorporates technology, inviting students to interpret texts in new ways. A feminist pedagogy has a wide range of implications, from how we approach everyday interactions to the questions we ask and the materials we collect, and technology provides a means of working toward these goals. Learning Management Systems, for instance, often allow for the curating and collecting of materials, and one group member perceived building such libraries in her classes as a feminist practice that continues Marcus’ distribution of reading lists to her students that call attention to writers and texts critics have overlooked. Another participant added that creating class websites makes the syllabus and materials more accessible for students.

Digital work can realize feminist goals in new ways. The Shape of History, a project that Lauren Klein and her students developed in the Digital Humanities Laboratory she oversees at the Georgia Institute of Technology, revives in digital form the work of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, a nineteenth century teacher and historian. The resulting website combines digital affordances, such as the ability to click on boxes, with the visual design of Peabody’s handmade charts with squares that stand in for historical data. In its form and content, The Shape of History is a Feminist Data Visualization, and as such it not only presents a new standard for projects to follow, but also models the goals of data collection and display that Klein, along with digital scholars Catherine D’Ignazio and Miriam Posner, have articulated elsewhere.

As we have seen, both feminism and the digital humanities inspire change in what we interpret and how we do so. Lisa Marie Rhody underscores that “[t]he language of feminist analysis, which challenges traditional modes of knowledge production, is well aligned with the practice of defamiliarizing a textual corpora in order to ask ‘new’ questions at different scales” (337). In a similar vein as Klein and D’Ignazio, Rhody proposes that in collecting data, one “might begin by exposing implicit and explicit choices that influence the construction of textual corpora, articulating the rationale for their selection, and carefully scoping the claims they make in deference to the representative limitations of their datasets” (537). While Rhody is addressing research, her findings also hold for teaching, as students can and should engage the ways that power shapes decision making.

- What types of assignments, assessments, texts, or topics could a feminist digital pedagogy include?
- What kind of short or long-term projects? What kind of in-class digital tasks, discussion topics, writing assignments, or other forms of scaffolding?
- What is a course, text, project, or assignment that demonstrates aspects of a digital feminist pedagogy?

Short- and long-term projects can work toward feminist aims as students interpret texts and respond to others’ perspectives in digital contexts. Inviting students to annotate passages of a text using an online collaborative site, for instance, allows them to work together to contextualize and read more thoroughly, while also influencing future readings of a text. The text in question could be one that is lesser known, and students can introduce others to its value or that of the texts or concepts to which it alludes. Longer term projects can build from smaller exercises, and are not limited to in-person classes, as one participant recommended using Slack to manage student digital group projects in online courses.

The role of labor has been a vital concern in the digital humanities and in teaching. One wants students to develop critical and digital skills while collaborating and receiving credit for their efforts. In “The ‘Whole Game’: Digital Humanities at Community Colleges,” Anne B. McGrail stresses that students should see a project through from beginning to end; in doing so, she is drawing on a “‘whole game’ approach,” which she attributes to David Perkins (McGrail 19). In McGrail’s class, digital literacy extends from learning “a key sequence of steps in digital archive projects—collaborative data tagging and proofreading for precision” (24) to writing an essay addressing the ways that “filter bubbles” and other means shape users’ encounters with information (26). McGrail argues that “the creation of new knowledge that can occur at all levels of DH [digital humanities] practice is one of its signature features” (16), and her assignments are inspiring to instructors who may have hesitated to experiment. While access to resources was a concern in the breakout session, McGrail models the creativity that can accompany teaching with technology, even as resources may never be ideal.

- How would you incorporate more digital components in a current course or assignment?
- How can feminist digital pedagogy have a public function?
- How can feminist digital pedagogy make students more aware of the political contexts that texts engage?

The public role of the digital humanities, the fact that students can have an impact on others’ lives, mobilizes Marcus’ goals. Margaret Konkol designed an immersive interterm project in which students built a digital archive of circus master John Ringling’s library. Important to Konkol’s project was that students became authors, creating knowledge. Konkol argues in “Public Archives, New Knowledge: Moving Beyond the Digital Humanities/Digital Pedagogy Distinction” that “[t]eaching is about give and take, active dialogue, making knowledge, and welcoming new thinkers into the world of ideas and problems.” Her course invites
students to take part in the social work that Marcus advocates in her scholarship. Konkol clarifies that

digital curation projects make public archives and the cultural heritage they contain accessible to broader and more heterogeneous audiences. Considerations about how these digital archives are assembled and structured are critical questions that ideally we should ask each time we undertake a project. The benefit of involving students in the planning and ongoing assessment of a digital archival project such as this is that it is a necessary and fruitful exercise to articulate our assumptions about who interprets the archive and who controls historical narratives. In the process, Konkol empowers students, teaching them to intervene in the creation of meaning and distribution of power. Curating materials and crafting an audience, her students also enact social change, making texts accessible and inspiring new questions.

Feminist digital pedagogy puts Jane Marcus’ activism into practice. Rather than ignore the digital world, we teach students to redefine it, engaging new texts and asking harder questions that alter our sense of the past and the future. Following Marcus’ example, technology becomes not an obstacle, but an intellectual challenge to confront, doing so with our students.

Reading List Shared with Participants


Jane and New Historicism

Jean Mills, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY and H. Aram Veeser, City College of New York, CUNY

“Jane and New Historicism,” an interactive session organized by H. Aram Veeser (Hap), provided a forum to discuss Jane’s mentoring of historical literary scholars and editors and to debate her strategies and methods. Her strategies were wide ranging, radical, and transformative for the feminist reassessment of feminist authors, notably Virginia Woolf; moreover, Jane’s unprecedented essays on the suffragettes’ political demonstrations and actions also introduced theoretical advances in new historiographic literary criticism. She made decisive contributions to New Historicism, injecting it with a progressive political charge even in the face of its stark abandonment of canonical Marxism. She brilliantly synthesized her very original approach to deployments of the historical archive with her ongoing feminist theory and practice. The session, whose participants included Jean Mills, Tracyann Williams, Jolie Hale, Cheryl J. Fish, and Laura Hinton, began with a discussion of Jane’s essay “The Asylums of Antaeus—Women, War and Madness: Is there a Feminist Fetishism?”

Tracyann Williams, Jolie Hale, and Cheryl Fish commented on Jane’s intervention in the critical landscape as one example of the artistry, originality, and unexpectedness of her method. The suffragettes come into Jane’s focus by means of comparisons across a wide field of disparate evidence, which ranges from the forced feeding of incarcerated women political prisoners to the hobble skirts introduced by the Parisian fashion house of Worth. Jean Mills and Hap Veeser proposed that Jane had tried to push away from the conventional game of interpreting literary texts and instead had advanced a mission to unveil historical subtexts. Her chosen objects of investigation were more often things other than books. Objects such as hobble skirts, force-feeding tubes, African bracelets, and Suffragette posters were foregrounded in her seminars, research, and published work, becoming crucial springboards for magnifying and reshaping theoretical discourse. Tracyann Williams and Cheryl Fish offered their own examples of Jane’s unexpected objects of scholarly investigation. One example can stand for many: Jane’s incisive reading of Nancy Cunard’s African bracelets and necklaces as an improvisational aesthetic adopted by Cunard as a visual expression of critical race theory.

Jean Mills spoke of Jane’s contribution to feminist activist scholarship, pointing especially to her role in re-thinking Virginia Woolf from a political and social justice standpoint, and Hap Veeser suggested that the staging and performing of gender achieved sharp definition in Jane’s work years before the appearance of Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble. Jane’s combative-ness was praised, with detailed examples, by Laura Hinton, who made the strongest case for Jane as an activist and organizer on many fronts. More academic examples of Jane’s radicalism occur in “The Asylums of Antaeus” which sharply qualifies a Sandra Gilbert essay in terms just as strong as the language she uses against the British War Office. Jane’s brilliant interventions in female fetishism and her pioneering role in feminist cultural studies were additional points in a discussion led by Jean Mills. While Jane contributed to the rise of critique and symptomatic reading, she was not accusatory, according to Hap Veeser, but rather strove to treat her textual objects of study as her accomplices instead of as her patients. The session opened up into a wide-ranging, deep insight analysis of Jane Marcus, replete with personal recollections and poignant stories. Especially moving were the many recollections Jane’s incite-ful mentoring and her intellectual and emotional generosity.

JANE’S ART

In her 2006 introduction to Three Guineas, Jane declares, with her customary intrepidness, that “if [we] have read Three Guineas without the photographs, [we] have not read the book Virginia Woolf wrote” (ix). Although Jane’s assertion specifically addresses how the absence of the photographs distorts the ideas in Three Guineas that Woolf intends to convey, it arguably speaks to a broader conviction about the indispensability of visual art to language insofar as dialogue between the two genres creates meaning that is far richer and far more complete than that which can be communicated by either of these genres alone. Indeed, the framed images of Spanish Civil War propaganda and the covers that Vanessa Bell designed for each of Woolf’s books that still hang from the walls of Jane’s Manhattan and East Hampton homes testify to this very
principle. At the same time, the illustrations of irises and squash that also adorn Jane’s walls reflect her passion for nature and for most of the pleasures that life has to offer, the latter of which often took the form of cooking for family, friends and students.

In this light, Linda Stein’s *Virginia Woolf 370* (2002) (see figure 5) exemplifies the significance that art had for Jane. As a multi-image depiction of the modernist writer, *Virginia Woolf 370* situates itself in conversation with the essays, poems and other images included in this record, thereby adding dimension to our understanding of its subject. As a gift that Stein created for Jane, *Virginia Woolf 370* is an enduring tribute to their friendship.

![Image of a watercolor painting of Virginia Woolf](2002 Watercolor with digital input 12.5” x 11.5” Linda Stein Reproduced with permission by Linda Stein)

**Figure 5: Virginia Woolf 370**

Unapologetic:
Jane Marcus and Nancy Cunard on the Level of the Sentence
Jean Mills, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY

In the past year, I’ve been speaking and writing quite a bit about Jane, my intellectual mother—who certainly was an intellectual mother to all of us at Jane Marcus Feminist University—and whose death in May 2015 came so close on the heels of my own mother’s death, in April of that same year. Having been heavily engaged in the process of establishing an archive in Jane’s name, and oddly, simultaneously, in that of gathering together my own mother’s papers, which also resulted in the establishment of an archive, albeit of a very different nature (i.e. gay Star Trek fan fiction), I’ve mostly shared my experiences about what stays and falls away in the midst of such a process, about the content of Jane’s extensive collection, and its scholarly significance moving forward, as her papers are now officially housed at Mount Holyoke College, after nearly two years of sorting and organizing in essentially two very dark and different basements.

But today I want to talk about tone—about mood/atmosphere—as we instruct our students—but more about tone as sound, or, rather, voice. Jane didn’t give me a voice, but she gave me the confidence, as she gave to so many of her students, to express my own ideas. This encouragement was an extraordinary gift to me as it led me once and for all away from my former writing life as a ghost-writer to writing under my own name with a conviction that I had long been trained to sublimate or check at the door.

And so I want to apprehend Jane on the level of the sentence and to read a bit from her unfinished manuscript on Nancy Cunard, which I’m currently working on, to share some vintage and quintessential Jane ‘mic-drop’ prose. This paragraph appears in the second section of her first chapter “Outlaws: The Making of the Woman Poet as a Perfect Stranger” and is entitled “The Artist as AntiChrist: Thamar, the Demon Lover” (cue the music from the crypt, please). What follows is the second paragraph after she has contextualized one of Cunard’s early poems, “Answer to a Reproof”:

Cunard’s poem sets a tone of talking back to authority that became her literary and political signature. This was not always a sensible move for a woman. Combined with her bad girl posture in highly publicized photographs by Man Ray and Curtis Moffat, and her public appearances with boxers and jazz musicians, Nancy Cunard’s writing and publishing as an outlaw from her family, class and culture suggested the dangerous possibilities for public activities by once private women. When the woman poet also declared that the finest poets of her age were not going to ‘grammarize’ or ‘prison’ her imagination, she made the leap from humble apprentice to the masters of modern culture to claim the status of ‘mastermind itself’ for woman, marking her mentors as enemies, herself their match—even as an enemy. Of course they and their biographers have outmatched her as enemies, as she certainly knew well before she died, vilifying or leaving her out of the literary and cultural ‘modern’ she helped to make so vital. The communists have seen no reason to claim her as their own and her steadfast black friends have not had the cultural power to assert her claims to influence. The artist who had chosen the figure of the outlaw as her first poetic mask, much as Virginia Woolf defined herself as an ‘outsider’ as a woman and a pacifist in *Three Guineas*, joined the despised and rejected and their left-wing defenders and became an outlaw herself. Much of the modernism that has become legendary is about exile and expatriatism: Pound and Eliot in London, then Italy, Stein and Hemingway in Paris, the Sapphic modernists making a new Mytilene in Natalie Barney’s French salon, homosexuals chasing the south wind from Berlin to the isle of Capri or North Africa; African, Caribbean, Latin American, Asian, and Indian intellectuals in London and Paris, in the cafes and at the European universities, White Russians and red ones in the European capitals,

Rumanian [sic] painters and Spanish ones in Montparnasse, Afro-American jazz musicians in Venice and Paris, the International Brigades fighting fascism in the Spanish Civil War, giving Madrid a particular situated meaning in modernist discourse, European communists visiting Harlem, refugees everywhere, from Spain, from Belgium, from the horror of the First World War—to the new apolitical and unassimilating communities of rich English and American expatriates settling in the South of France from Nice to Cannes after the war. Nancy Cunard’s journeys touched all of these ports and others, engaged many forms of exile and displacement, though some were more alienating than others.

Nancy Cunard’s first step as a poet was to reject western culture and define herself in relation to it as an outlaw. (excerpt, unpublished ms)

What immediately strikes me about this passage is its tone, its pace, its speed, its passion, and its voice. It’s also packed with politics, and the reader often has to keep up: Jane wrote final copy, according to her widow, the distinguished mathematician, Michael Marcus. Each sentence takes a ball and runs with it, and she’s always inviting the reader not so much to play as to forever question the rules of the game. Both in her style and tone and in the content of the argument, Jane challenged complacency of thought, and that quality is especially evident on the level of the sentence. Many of the same qualities Jane finds in her subject, Nancy Cunard—independence, courage, voice—are qualities we can easily assign to Jane as critic, and these are the same qualities that drew her to Nancy, when she began her research back in the mid-1990s. In one of her last published works, *Hearts of Darkness: White Women Write Race*, Jane asserts that “[i]f Cunard, the poet and activist, is dismissed as an heiress, Mulk Raj Anand is not described at all. And yet he was at the center of Bloomsbury cultural life in the thirties and forties. It is my opinion that the study of the period would be greatly enriched by wresting it from the hands of those who leave out the women and the people of color who were active in the struggle for social change in Britain” (*Hearts of Darkness* 180-181). Jane’s manuscript on Nancy Cunard is another example of her scholarship “wresting” a portrait of a woman, an outlandish outsider, to be sure, from the shadows not only of obscurity, but of inaccuracy and misinformation to shape a portrait of Cunard we have yet to encounter. Ultimately, what I’ve discovered in working on the manuscript is that Jane’s work, as well as her example, will live on, and she’ll be doing for Nancy Cunard what she did in helping to create the portrait of Virginia Woolf we have today: that of a woman politically engaged, active, relevant, and in Cunard’s case, unapologetic, living life out loud.

**Thinking Back through an Intellectual Mother:**

**Demeter, You Are My Persphone**

Laura Hinton, City College of New York, CUNY

My introduction to Jane Marcus was in a vision. This sighting was not a “vision” of a saint or the Virgin Mary—no mystical moment at a Lourdes (although Jane would have liked that). It was the literal vision of a book cover, as I stood next to the new-release table of Printer’s Inc., the independent bookstore in, Palo Alto, CA, where I bought cups of coffee in the café for 60 cents with free refills while studying for my Ph.D. qualifying exams in the 1980s. The image on the book cover was captivating: a black and white print depicting Salomé lifting up the head of John the Baptist. But what attracted my gaze was, in fact, its red-lettered words: “Art & Anger”—no subtitle—“Jane Marcus” (no “by”). I felt as if I were looking at Moses’s radioactive burning bush. This title, this name, flashed provocatively, unapologetically, with so much power and information.


But it also alludes, of course, to the speaker in Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, who in Chapter Two, and in the context of describing her reaction to the misogynist Professor von X, makes a “sketch of the angry professor” (31), whose tomes on women’s “inferiority” caused “Anger” to snatch “my pencil while I dreamt […] what was anger doing there?” (31).

While viewing the cover of *Art & Anger*, then hot off the press, I was a single parent and doctoral student at Stanford University, on a scholarship and working three part-time jobs. I never thought to buy a new book. It would be awhile before I read this collection of some of Jane’s most dynamic, steely, and brilliant feminist literary criticism. But one can sometimes judge a book by its cover—and its author. Jane as a person was dynamite, steely, and brilliant—as I would learn several years later, when Jane Marcus became my colleague.

When I met Jane during my first decade at the City College of New York (CCNY), she was wearing a baseball cap to hide her hair loss from chemotherapy. Yet she took one wizened, interested look at me, summing up my blonde, blue-eyed younger-female story. She later reported comments to me made about my physical appearance by the male champion, a man in charge of my tenure. When I was denied tenure, in political retaliation for having reported such unseemly comments, that denial was later reversed. It was so because, among a few other champions, Jane and two ladylike senior women colleagues met with our-then female CCNY president and threw words around like “harassers” and “bastards” in her presidential office. When I was repeatedly denied promotion, in spite of having as many and sometimes more publications than other candidates for the same position, Jane’s testimony helped me to win my civil rights case for retaliatory gender discrimination in federal court. When Jane bore the brunt of the effects of her legal testimony, because the CCNY English Department Executive Committee of that time immediately voted—in an overtly retaliatory move—to revoke her status as a Distinguished Professor, we mobilized a letter campaign, with protest letters pouring in from leading scholars far and wide. These letters having been delivered to the CCNY Chancellor, he reportedly was fuming against our college’s leadership, declaring, *only I can get rid of a D.P.* Jane and I won our battles for women’s rights as civil rights. But each win took its toll, on health, on nerves, and on careers that appeared to move backwards while advancing forward.

But we nevertheless had a great impact on our CCNY students—shared students, who would come and go from Jane’s legendary Spanish Civil War course to my American Women’s Experimental poetics seminar—often in the same semester. Our students were like buzzing bees carrying our intellectual pollens as words back and forth. Jane Marcus said this, or, what would Laura say about that? Once when Jane had left her bright-red lipstick on a Styrofoam coffee cup rim, which sat in the instructor’s seat that we concurrently shared, I humorously kissed it, making our students laugh. But they got it: I loved Jane.

Sometimes, I think, she loved me.

One Mother’s Day a few years ago, I called Jane and Michael at their home in the Hamptons. I first wished her husband, Michael—who I had learned by then was quite a brilliant straight-man comedian, as well as Jane’s lover and protector—a Happy Mother’s Day. (I was to find out from their daughter, Lisa Marcus, that this “salutation” had not been an inappropriate gesture; Michael had been her “Mr. Mom,” she said). Jane next came to the phone, and I used this silly American sentimental occasion to thank her for being such an important intellectual mother—a foremother to me and so many others, a woman scholar and writer who had fought so valiantly for our women’s rights, whose own battles and strength had made it possible for me, for example, to follow our passions

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for study and literature. Had Jane and a few other significant women scholars not gotten down into the dirty literary-studies trenches to fight for our equality and recognition, my own guns would never have shot back. Jane’s guns—and her righteous anger—meant that I could live my current life. I never told her about my reaction to her Art & Anger book cover. But on that Mother’s Day, I knew that my vision had come full circle.

* 

The Art & Anger collection that I couldn’t afford to buy in the 1980s but have owned for many years since—because Jane Marcus and other foremothers like her made it possible for me to be a feminist-scholar professor with a salary—contains a rather modest, almost apologetic, rhetorical beginning, an introduction that reads as if students and colleagues just wanted her to put together this seeming disconnected assemblage of essays. But what an assemblage and what essays! The theme and mode of an anger well-vented and well-used runs through the book. And the uses of anger are put to the task of reading the “gendered text,” one that operates not through the genitals but through the politicalized, feminized mind. These essays not only serve collectively to critique “[t]he repression and suppression of anger” that “was an absolute condition of the Victorian female’s life” (Art & Anger xix) but they express Jane’s own “anger” at the way women themselves too often approach, or are approached by, literary criticism.

For example, in “Nostalgia Is Not Enough: Why Elizabeth Hardwick Misreads Ibsen, Plath, and Woolf” from Art & Anger, Jane offers a blasting critique of the sentimental and ahistorical approach to feminist literary criticism, one that for her is exhibited by Hardwick’s Seduction and Betrayal: Women and Literature. She pounces on the fact that Hardwick, who writes in “a high elegiac style” (49), offers “a rearguard pretense that one can write outside ideology, from some pure objective position [...]” (49); and critiques Hardwick’s overly mournful attitude towards the passive female “heroine” in literature, like Tess of the d’Urbervilles, whose “[t]ranscendent stoical suffering” at the hands of men and fate” make this character “too impossibly passive for many modern readers” (51). Although Jane could be righteously insistent when her feminist dander was up, she was never a bully. Here Jane explains, quite cogently, that Hardwick’s position—which suggests that “[s]ex is no longer a serious subject” (51)—is a paltry excuse for a supposedly feminist style, written “from an ivory tower where novels and their characters exist outside of literary history, outside of social context, and social history, like well-matched pearls on a string” (55). Jane dashes to bits the “glamorous, charming, and ladylike, but ornamental” (55) critical approach of attempting to “write outside ideology” (49).

In this book as in life, Jane thrives on negation, her philosophical and professional method. What Jane insists by way of negation (one of the epigraphs at the beginning of the book, “[F]eminist criticism begins in negation,” comes from Susan Stanford Friedman) provides a sketch of her own alternative methodology and critical belief in Art & Anger: that no one can write outside of the subject of power; and also that a feminist writer like Hardwick should “put her pearls away, and hang around her neck a magnifying glass, a pair of scissors, and a pen with a very sharp point” (51). Anger, at long last for women, is seen as a productive and necessary sharpening tool. Jane’s introduction, after all, is entitled “Changing the Subject.” It calls for an entire shift in method for feminist literary studies, one that radically did shift much of the feminist thought of the late 1970s and 80s. Whether it is the subject of psychoanalysis or the “subject” of the subjugated in Marxist theoretical terms, Jane demands that her female subject become fully socially aware, not passively asleep. Jane’s essays throughout Art & Anger insist that we acknowledge, analyze, and write about culturally masculinist power and its historic diminishment of women, no matter how painful or provocative that might be.

In my favorite essay in this volume, “Thinking Back through our Mothers,” Jane focuses on her literary hero, Woolf, and Woolf’s own search for “the mother” in literature and scholarship. Through Jane’s uncompromising, textually rigorous, historically informed scholarship, Woolf is no longer the mad woman of depression and suicide, or the female victim of patriarchy of prior literary scholarship, but the unconventional, brilliant woman artist, intellectual, and activist that Woolf actually was, one who “set an example for the female critic” (Art & Anger 51) and who was “[a] guerrilla fighter in a Victorian skirt” (73). Woolf becomes Jane’s own literary mother through that passionate, angry stance.

So when I think back through my intellectual mothers, I think back through Jane’s copious, beautifully inscribed critical work. Jane, too, has descended into the seeming darkness—but it is a fertile darkness, where Persephone is never lost. And my Demeter has given me both the courage to move my mouth in misogynistic rooms and the power to make my hands write—knowing that another daughter might be out there reading. I miss Jane. But I keep some of her in part. In the shadow of annihilation, our joint collectivity works like a language, together, forming new bridges.

JANE’S READING LIST

What distinguished Jane as a reader herself was the eclectic nature of her own collection. On the one hand, Jane’s books spoke to the infinite bounds of her curiosity and to her brilliance and creativity as a thinker who discerned unexpected connections between disparate sources, literary and otherwise. At the same time, her volumes also spoke to her commitment as a working class, feminist activist and scholar whose mission was to raise awareness of and catalyze new research on texts by underrated and neglected writers. Needless to say, the breadth of Jane’s reading informed her approach as a literary scholar and thus as a writer whose incisive ideas enriched the libraries of her readers and put her in conversation with them even as the works of others expanded her own.

During this segment of JMFU, participants read aloud from a text or works of their own choosing in Jane’s honor. As indicated by the participants’ selections here, which include excerpts from Jane’s own criticism or texts she introduced to her students, as well as poetic tributes, they testify to the centrality of language and literature in Jane’s life as a medium of personal connection, intellectual inspiration and legacy.

Raw Meditations on Money
Meena Alexander, The Graduate Center, CUNY
Things sold still have a soul. They are still followed around by their former owner...

—Marcel Mauss, The Gift

1. She Speaks: A Schoolteacher from South India

Portions of a mango tree the storm cut down,
a green blaze bent into mud
and they come to me, at dawn

three girls from Kanpur, far to the north admittely
we know this from national geography class,
the borders of states, the major cities).
They hung themselves from fans.
In the hot air they hung themselves
so that their father would not be forced to tender gold
he did not have, would not be forced
to work his fists to bone.
So that is how a portion of the story goes.

Slowly in the hot air they swung, three girls.
How old were they?
Of marriageable age certainly.

Sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen, something of that sort.
How do I feel about it?
What a question! I am one of three sisters,
most certainly I do not want father to proffer money
he does not have for my marriage.
Get a scooter, a refrigerator, a horde of utensils,
silks, and tiny glittering bits of gold
to hang about my ears and throat.

Gold is labour time accumulated . . . labour time defined.

Who said that? Yes, I am a schoolteacher, fifth standard
trained in Indian history & geography,
Kerala University, first class first.

The storm tree puts out its limbs and
I see three girls swinging. One of them is me.
Step back I tell myself.

Saumiya, step back. The whole history
of womankind is compacted here.
Open your umbrella, tuck your sari tight,
breathe into the strokes of catastrophe,
and let the school bus wait.
You will get to it soon enough and the small, hot faces.

See how the monsoon winds soar and shunt
tropic air into a house of souls,
a doorway stopped by clouds.

Set your feet into broken stones
and this red earth and pouring rain.
For us there is no exile.

Originally published in Meena Alexander’s *Quickly Changing River* (TriQuarterly Books). Copyright © 2008 by Meena Alexander. Published 2008 by Northwestern University Press. All rights reserved.
Each night she comes, my mother kneeling at the swamp’s edge, both hands held out,

and I become a nothingness in air, a homeless thing a white flag fleeing.

My son, more precious than this, this, she points to her flesh her belly streaked with red mud, her breasts,

my son more precious than all the gold heaped in the countinghouses of Upper Egypt. May you shine under the blue dome of heaven.

~

O a fire, a flag, an earthen jug, something white, something bright, her cut hands waving.

3. She Speaks: A Seventy-Four-Year-Old Woman to Her Daughter

By the Blue Nile, in your childhood there was talk often of slavery. People dragged from the south at gunpoint, bought and sold for money in the markets of Kirio and elsewhere; sometimes I tried to shut my ears. We too were strangers, what could we do?

But it was an abomination, yes I use that word. Human creatures bought and sold like beasts. Under night skies I prayed for lost souls.

They had fled into the skies and were staring down at me. The stars were huge as burnt eyes.

In our own country no one wants girls as you well know. Black money forces dowries up and all those deaths by kerosene.

Why ask me these questions, child? I cannot think straight anymore about money and certainly if you tried to live off your poems you would starve like a desert sparrow. Which is why we gave you a good education.

When I was a girl it was never spoken of. Money was the unseen hand, smoothing father’s shawl, raw silk he slung over the charka, needing it when the cold winds bit the clouds.

Now Kanthama, who cuts the grass for me under the mango trees, shivers in those winds. I gave her the sweater you brought me once, I hardly need it now. She has sent her daughter to Dubai so they can fix the roof of their shack, put cement on mud floors, and so forth. We grow older now. We step into the garden for mangoes.

What we bring back is sunlight and loneliness. The body is nothing but the spirit’s house, money has nothing to do with it.

But you tell me you can’t afford to come from America this summer. It is two whole years since I saw you last. I feel my house is on fire.

Note


“Jane Marcus Feminist University”:

Plath, Sitwell, Wagner, and Woolf

Reagan Lothes, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY

When Jane and I would meet—almost always at her apartment—sometimes we’d talk in her study, and through the course of the conversation, she’d hand me, perhaps, a book or two to take with me, or suggest a name or two to contact (“Put together a panel!”), but more often, we’d talk at her kitchen table. And as we’d talk, her husband Michael would tend to her, bringing her breakfast and coffee, and she’d take her pills as she listened, as she was doing this particular morning, while I read aloud to her from one of Edith Sitwell’s poems. “Wagner,” she said when I finished. She had recently had a heart procedure and looked tired; she should have been resting instead of meeting with me.
But of course Jane liked to keep moving—able body or no able body, her mind was already off. “She’s playing with ‘Spring Song,’” she said, with that smile as though she were up to something and you were in on it.

That semester, I’d been taking Jane’s course on women and modernism. “Course,” though, doesn’t seem quite the right word; more fitting would be something that could better communicate the space of collaboration and connection into which she invited us. She gave us the sense from the very beginning that we were all engaged in the same larger project, pointing to where our interests overlapped, to archival research we could share. And it was within this context that I happened to visit the Sylvia Plath archives at Smith College in Northampton, MA. I’d been there before, having started researching Plath’s works my first semester at the CUNY Graduate Center. But this time, I found that Jane had prompted what she might call a fundamental shift in my “angle of vision” (Marcus, “The Years as Greek Drama, Domestic Novel, and Götterdämmerung” 278). On my first visit to Smith, I had focused on Plath’s drafts. I still had a good number of them left to work through when I went back to Northampton but found myself instead struck by all the modernist women writers on Plath’s bookshelves. (I had expected to find Virginia Woolf, of course, but Sara Teasdale? MurielRukeyser?) In other words, Jane had helped shift my attention from Plath alone to Plath in relation to—or, better yet, in conversation with—other writers, particularly modernist women writers.

And that’s how I happened upon Sitwell—simultaneously in Jane’s course and on Plath’s shelves—which brings me to the essay of Jane’s from which I read for Jane Marcus Feminist University. That morning, sitting with Jane at her table, I confessed how very little (pretty much nothing) I knew about Wagner and really about opera in general. “You have to see it!” she said (The Ring was playing at the Met at the time), and then she pointed me toward her essay offhandedly, in something of an afterthought. How unprepared I was for it, even after having experienced what can only be described as Jane in the classroom and in our private dissertation meetings. The sheer breadth and depth of her research as well as her range of reference were all on full display even in just the essay’s title: “The Years as Greek Drama, Domestic Novel, and Götterdämmerung.” And her artistry—her essay, in part, about opera, seemed itself, even to someone as uninitiated as I was, operatic, full of swells of intensity and grand, sweeping gestures that could contract, instantly, into quieter moments of subtlety and detail. It’s perhaps this passage from the essay’s final section, “An Opera for the Oppressed,” that I remember most clearly in this sense:

The Years is romantic, Wagnerian, loosely structured on The Ring, shaped in a Dantesque downward-moving spiral within the burning circle of London, and full of allusions to Purgatory and Hell. It is Virginia Woolf’s Twilight of the Gods, with the old order crumbling and the new not yet achieved. […] The doomed old gods of the novel, as of the opera, are capitalism, the state, and the domestic lares and penates of the patriarchal family. The orchestration is bigger and brassier, a sort of Wagnerian contest between the single voices and massed street noises, from men crying “old iron” to organ grinders, newsboys, and loudspeakers. The instrumentation is very brassy indeed, from cornets and drums to automobiles’ horns. Against the noise of history on the march, London on the move, the single voice soars and falters, breaks, tries again, lifts itself above the chorus, sings with the mass, repeats itself, in various accents and inflections, demanding, as The Ring does, despite everything despicable in human history, our human passion for “joostice and liberty.” (293)

And yet, coming back to the essay, what I find myself most drawn to is Jane’s own “angle of vision,” the interrelational bent of it, the way in which it places Woolf into conversation with others—other artists, other texts, other traditions—and the way in which it focuses not so much on particular characters from the novel as on the relationships between them:

The ruined house in Virginia Woolf’s The Years is inhabited by the Pargiter family, three branches in three generations, and the novel portrays their decline and fall with the realism of a family chronicle. At the same time, because The Years is as daring in the use of mythical motifs and as radical in form as Ulysses and The Waste Land, it attains the power of a threnody for the dawning Victorian patriarchal family. Drawing for themes and structure on both Sophocles’ Antigone and Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung, the novel […] is a kind of Greek opera, simultaneously a dirge and a dithyramb celebrating the death and rebirth of the Spirit of the Year. Even as a family chronicle its angle of vision is radical, for the relationships it dwells upon are those of daughter/father, sister/brother, of female cousins, of maiden aunt with niece or nephew. (276-8)

And in the London of the novel—“at once a city of incest like Sophocles’ Thebes and yet ablaze like Wagner’s Valhalla”—“[t]he rose and gold light which suffuses the work shines into some very musty corners of British family life” (278). Here, “[t]he fathers are wounded from their wars; they have renounced love for money; and the daughters are buried alive” (278).

This “angle of vision,” too, shapes not only the essay itself, but also its footnotes. And in this essay—where tall, dense columns of notes dwarf the eight lines of essay spread thin across the top of those first two pages—the footnotes are, in a very real sense, the main text. Full, as we would expect, of her extensive research, they document Woolf’s pervasive interest in Wagner, but they also root Woolf’s thinking in “the work of the great classical scholar, Jane Ellen Harrison […]” (277). A significant part of what this “main text” serves to highlight, then, is the way in which, by placing Woolf back into conversation with Harrison, Jane helped to recover the classicist from the cracks through which she had so unjustly fallen, as Jane so adamantly argued in both her writing and her teaching.

And highlighted, too, are the ways in which Jane’s own writing and thinking were rooted in, and in conversation with, the writing of others. Indeed, the footnotes trace for us a rich web of connection and collaboration: starting us off at the 1975 MLA seminar on Woolf, they then call us to the other essays that appear alongside her own in the special Woolf issue she had edited for the Bulletin of the New York Public Library (Winter 1977); then to the work of and “conversations with” (276) multiple scholars; to another scholar’s unpublished paper given at a conference; and to the “editorial attentions” (276) she herself had been given, leaving us, in the end, in the company of “Madeline Hummel, who,” Jane tells us, “set [her] to reading Jane Harrison, an undertaking not only useful for this essay but an education in itself” (276).

“Her mother was terrible to her,” Jane told me as we sat at her table that morning, thinking through Sitwell. That’s how it was with Jane. Writing seemed always part of a life, created in a certain set of circumstances, under certain conditions, within certain relationships. With her students, then, she wanted to know how the writing was coming but also what was going on in our lives. Jane once demonstrated just how attuned she was to how inextricable one’s goings-on and one’s writing can be in a single-sentence email that simultaneously asked after both: “Dear Reagan, let me know what’s happening”—and around this time what was happening was that I was working on my dissertation and was pregnant. I named my daughter Olivia, imagining that if she ever had a sister, I’d name her Chloe so that sometime in the future, if they were arguing, I could say, but “Chloe liked Olivia,” and they would know what that means (Woolf, A Room Of One’s Own 63). And perhaps, then, that’s how I imagine the pedagogy of a Jane Marcus Feminist University, a pedagogy that roots writing in a web of interrelated lives and thinking.
Jane Marcus and “The Strange Necessity”
Seamus O’Malley, Yeshiva University

Jane directed my dissertation, in which there are two chapters on Rebecca West. She told me to read West’s “The Strange Necessity” (1928) for our next meeting. I dutifully read the 200-page essay on Joyce, Pavlov, art and literature. I didn’t understand any of it.

I figured my next meeting with Jane might clear things up. Our chats were always stimulating, sometimes exhausting, never unproductive: I usually came away with a bundle of ideas for chapters or essays, and twice with clothes for my small children. If I met her at her apartment, there would be food and wine. If I went to her office, we would talk about food and wine.

I told her of my problems navigating the essay. She replied, “Of course you couldn’t understand it. You’re a man.” Will I ever experience such lovely and loving frankness again?

From “The Strange Necessity.” Extract from The Strange Necessity and Other Essays by Rebecca West reprinted by permission of Peters Fraser & Dunlop (www.petersfraserdunlop.com) on behalf of the Estate of Rebecca West.

I shut the bookshop door behind me and walked slowly down the street that leads from the Odéon to the Boulevard St. Germain in the best of all cities, reading in the little volume which had there been sold to me, not exactly pretentiously, indeed with a matter-of-fact briskness, yet with a sense of there being something on hand different from an ordinary commercial transaction: as they sell pious whatnots in a cathedral porch. Presently I stopped. I said ‘Ah!’ and smiled up into the clean French light. My eye lit on a dove that was bridging the tall houses by its flight, and I felt that interior agreement with its grace, that delighted participation in its experience, which is only possible when one is in a state of pleasure.

I was pleased by a poem that I had just read; the following poem:

ALONE
The moon’s grey-golden meshes make
All night a veil,
The shore lamps on the sleeping lake
Laburnum tendrils trail.
The shy reeds whisper to the night
A name—her name—
And all my soul is a delight,
A swoon of shame.

It may seem inconceivable that this poem should bring pleasure to any living creature, for as art is in part at least a matter of the communication to the audience of an emotion felt by an artist, this is plainly an exceedingly bad poem. ‘And all my soul is a delight, a swoon of shame’ are words as blank as the back of a spoon. Nevertheless this poem gave me great pleasure, because I had considered it in light of its authorship. For it is not the words to a song, it is not by Mr. Fred E. Weatherley. It is not by Miss Helen Wills, whose sole poetical production (published, I think, in Vanity Fair) it very closely resembles. It is, on the contrary, as one might say, by Mr. James Joyce. It is one of the poems, and not noticeably the worst, included in the collection he has called Pomes Penyeach. And because he has written it I was pleased, though not at all as the mean are when they find that the mighty have fallen, for had he written three hundred poems as bad as this his prose works would still prove him beyond argument a writer of majestic genius. Indeed, the pleasure I was feeling was not at all dependent on what my conception of Mr. James Joyce is: it was derived from the fact that, very much more definitively than five minutes before I had a conception of Mr. James Joyce. Suspicions had been confirmed. What was cloudy was now solid. In those eight lines he had ceased to belong to that vast army of our enemies, the facts we do not comprehend; he had passed over and become one of our friends, one of those who have yielded up an account of their nature, who do not keep back a secret which one day may act like a bomb on such theory of the universe as we may have built for our defence.

For really, I reflected, as I went on my way down the Street of the Seine, this makes it quite plain that Mr. James Joyce is a great man who is entirely without taste (13-15). […] James Joyce, good Latinist, good Aquinist, master of tradition, who can pour his story into the mould of the Odyssey and do it with such scholarship that the ineptitude of the proceedings escapes notice, who pushes his pen about noisily and aimlessly as if it were a carpet-sweeper, whose technique is a tin can tied to the tail of the dog of his genius, who is constantly obscuring by the application of arbitrary values those vast and valid figures in which his titanic imagination incarnates phases of human destiny (57). […] But what is the necessity that is served in me by the contemplation alike of a young man with damp dark curls and a snuff-coloured coat and of a Dublin slut? What is the meaning of this mystery of mysteries? Why does art matter? And why does it matter so much? What is this strange necessity? (58)

[…] An analogy strikes me. Is it possible that the intense exaltation which comes to our knowledge of the greatest works of art and the milder pleasure that comes of our more everyday dealings with art, are phases of the same emotion, as passion and gentle affection are phases of love between a man and a woman? Is this exaltation the orgasm, as it were, of the artistic instinct, stimulated to its height by a work of art which through its analysis and synthesis of some experience enormously important to humanity (though not necessarily demonstrable as such by the use of the intellect) creates a proportionately powerful excitatory complex, which, in other words, halts in front of some experience which if left in a crude state would probably make one feel that life is too difficult and transform it into something that helps one to go on living? I believe that is the explanation. It is the feeling of realized potency, of might perpetuating itself. But…do I really love life so much that I derive this really glorious pleasure from something that merely helps me to go on living? That is incredible, considering that life has treated me as all the children of man like a dog from the day I was born. It is incredible, that is, if things are what they seem, if there is not a secret hidden somewhere… I can’t justify it, I can’t half answer the questions I ask myself. I can just gape and wonder and turn over in my hands this marvellous jewel which, there’s no question, there’s no question, I certainly do possess. ‘There’s a whole lot of things I’d like to know about you, my lad!’ exclaims the exasperated douanier, dashing off to peer into a peasant woman’s basket, or touch his hat to an automobile, or somehow to deal with the respectfully objective. I want him to come back and bully me, for I too would like to know a lot of things about myself. Not only am I wandering in the universe without visible means of support, I have a sort of amnesia, I don’t clearly know who I am…what I am…. And that I should feel this transcendent joy simply because I have been helped to go on living suggests that I know something I have not yet told my mind, that within me I hold some assurance regarding the value of life, which makes my fate different from what it appears, different, not lamentable, grandiose (196-98).
On Jane Marcus “Invisible Mending”  
Magdalena Bogacka-Rode, Queensborough Community College, CUNY

My home library contains many books from Jane. She always had two or sometimes three copies of whatever was the trending modernist/feminist/Spanish Civil War book. Her library was a life-sized free little library, just a subway ride from Queens to the Upper West Side. Another branch was located in East Hampton. Both were always open, serving hot coffee and homemade jam. Both were every graduate student’s dream: a source of books, food and even lodging for the night, but most importantly, of beautifully rendered stories about life, work, writing, activism and motherhood told by Jane. Listening to those stories is what I miss most, and I wish I had recorded them. For me, Jane’s “Invisible Mending” is emblematic of her as a feminist scholar, teacher and woman who by “tell[ing] her own tale… hope[s] that the process of reweaving the threads of [her] own life […] may help other women make sense of their lives and work” (Marcus, “Invisible Mending” 382).

“Invisible Mending” is an abbreviated version of her intellectual biography, which begins with her attendance at a Catholic school in Boston, and progresses to her work—first as a nurse with cerebral palsy and later as an Irish maid for the family of one of her Radcliffe professors in exchange for room and board plus the bonus of quality hand-me downs—before laying the groundwork for her feminist scholarship which was supported and encouraged by an ever widening circle of women wielding pens, ladles and needles. Those who knew Jane have heard her tell this story and when they read it can hear the conviction with which she claims and owns her “working class-intellectual” status as she emphasizes the value of women’s support networks in doing the work of recovering women’s lives:

My own situation—as academic in the seventies, jobless for four years, working in a study off the kitchen, a seven-by-seven food space—showed me how depressing working at home, piecework for small amounts of money, must have been for my mother […]. If I were in a shop with my sisters—the university—a paycheck would give me self-respect and the definition of the collective identity of “working.” As it was, the space I occupied, transformed by my husband’s effort of building bookshelves to the ceiling, retained the warm damp smell of its previous existence as the laundry. I wrote at a desk looking out the same window where I folded diapers and patched blue jeans, letting out, taking in, the rather coarse and very visible mending of a mother with growing children. (388)

As Jane puts it, “[p]reserving the fabric of history is the same job as mending the family’s jackets and sweaters” and the “extremely delicate and meticulous kind of darning, the mending of moth holes and cigarette burns, is exactly like the skill I have tried to develop as a writer and historian” (381). It is also the skill of a teacher. Anyone who had the privilege of working with Jane has been taught to employ invisible mending in her research and pedagogical practice.

On September 9, 2016, I drove to a subway station and made my way to the CUNY Graduate Center for Jane Marcus Feminist University. I re-read “Invisible Mending” in its entirety, still unsure which excerpts to share during the “” session. I hope that those I read captured Jane’s voice and spirit and reminded us to “keep our pens and needles sharp against the cloak of invisibility that our culture would still like to fling over us” (395).

Extraordinary Colloquy: Jane Marcus as Mentor and Friend  
Lisa Brundage, Macaulay Honors College, CUNY

The first time I met Jane Marcus was in 2000 when I took one of her CUNY Graduate Center courses as a non-matriculated student. She strode into our classroom and declared in her throaty, assertive voice, “I’m Jane Marcus. You know me because I am the person responsible for getting Virginia Woolf back into print. Who are YOU?” I was scared to death of her.

Around the table we went in answer to her question. I was just shy of twenty-four years old and wanted to take her “Women Writers in the 30s” class because I had loved reading “Storming the Toolshed” in my undergraduate feminist literary theory course. She wasn’t a real person to me; she was a legend. My turn came, and I squeaked out something about loving Jean Rhys. She told me she didn’t have a sense of who I was. I confessed that I barely did; either; I couldn’t have been more cowed than if Virginia Woolf herself had walked into the room. Jane sent the class away with instructions to read Sylvia Townsend Warner’s 1936 Summer Will Show and to return with a one-page written reaction paper in response to the novel for her to evaluate.

I spent the next week holed up with one of the most absorbing and confusing books I’ve ever encountered. It’s a piece of historic fiction, in which Sophia, an aristocratic Englishwoman, goes to Paris, becomes lovers with her husband Frederick’s former mistress, Minna—and gets swept up in the 1848 revolts, ultimately becoming a communist. I accepted the plotline, but I could not get over the novel’s troubling racial politics. At the novel’s climax, Sophia’s “half-caste” nephew—the child of a colonial landholder uncle—kills Minna on the barricades, and in turn, Sophia kills him. I wrote up my one-page critique and handed it in, afraid that I had miscalculated and overstepped my bounds. I kept fairly quiet in class—again.

The following week—my third class—she came back and plunked the page in front of me. “Read this out loud,” she said. I read it, shakily, not sure where the task was headed. When I finished, she congratulated me on helping her see something new in a book she had read so many times. I was floored; I was ecstatic; I was humbled. As Minna does to Sophia, Jane had extended a hand and brought me into a new world of companionship and belonging—full of possibility, but also of demands: to think, to question, and to be accountable.

To pay tribute to Jane, I could think of no better reading than an excerpt from Summer Will Show which I continued to discuss with her for the rest of the time that I knew her. In the scene I chose, Sophia is deeply infatuated with Minna, and the two have, together, had a confrontation with Frederick. Sophia has taken Minna out to dinner, as the revolution begins, and is thrilled by the novelty of being a woman, in public, with another woman, a woman she loves. She asks Minna:

“Am I as good as Frederick?”
“Are you much better.” (161)

Eventually, they come to a conclusion: “Poor Frederick!” (161). Sophia and Minna are women who would traditionally be plotted as rivals but instead become comrades and can laugh in the face of masculine authority. In conversation, they share “fantastic freedom from every inherited and practised restraint” (156) and “[n]either woman, absorbed in this extraordinary colloquy, [has] expressed by word or sign the slightest consciousness that there [is] anything unusual about it” (157). Jane modeled this possibility for us in the ways she invited all of her students into her life and connected us to each other. Jane’s style as a mentor and friend was to bring us along, to allow others to see, and to know that voicing the critique was always preferable to suppressing it. She invited her students into her homes, she fed us, and she never shied away from displaying her affection in public. Work created an intimacy that was visceral, and she pushed us to be bold and intellectually rigorous. Like Sophia and Minna, she didn’t care who was watching. My awe of Jane never faded, not even after I became accustomed to cozy, demanding talks in her library, or her patting my pregnant belly in front of a room full of students, or eating her jars of jam. She sharpened my mind and my rebelliousness. I remain in gratitude for the generosity she showed me, and I miss her.
the big one
Sabine Broeck, Universität Bremen
here we are, eating, two women of appetite
enamored
giddy with our brains
how did we get through the void years
your sentences in my thinking
so close i don’t even remember
reading you brings home the
me alone
white women’s melancholia
lifted by your raging
what joins us:
there must be a space
without theft
old hags that we are we enjoy
playing the smart beauties
on the loose
against the years
against the ills
against the echoless-ness
we can speak now of generations
our own and schooled ones
of little boys and toys
of sons grown into fullness and
into pain
of daughter mother
we speak, as we have always,
of food
of flowers
and, ferociously, of treason
your kind man smiles—
gifting us with linguine.
breaking out in giggles
nasty ones, but also tender
jokes we need
buoyed by our grown bodies
across
indifferent terrains
your voice so near again
i fall
into step
i look at you
knowing
you are big
because
you contain multitudes
bine, june 30, 2013
in your dear house among the pines
and—pace the deer—the eyecatching bounty of yellow, purple, blue,
green, orange,
white and all the in-betweens.

JANE’S PLAYLIST
In “Amy Lowell: Body and Sou-ell,” Jane writes that when she
peruses the poet’s works, “they still echo with the rhythm and blues of
black clubs in Roxbury where [she] first read them in the little books
[she] carried on streetcars from high school and Harvard […]” (186).
Recollections of her adolescence aside, Jane’s identification of Lowell’s
poetry with “rhythm and blues” speaks to the intensity of her love for
music which manifested itself not only in regular attendance at both
concerts and the opera, but also in her scholarship where, in particular,
frequent references to Wagnerian figures emerge.
The playlist compiled for JMFU, then, both honors Jane’s enthusiasm
for music in and of itself and reflects its connection to some of the
texts and themes that distinguish her work. Lili Boulanger’s Nocturne,
for instance, relates to Jane’s scholarship only insofar as it is the
composition of a prominent woman composer at a time when such
individuals were rare. In contrast, Mrs Dalloway alludes prominently
to Guiderius and Arviragus’ dirge from William Shakespeare’s
Cymbeline whose words are the lyrics for composer and singer Loreena
McKennis twentieth-century adaptation.

Musical Selections for Jane Marcus Feminist University
The Voyage Out
Perf. Daniel Barenboim.
Perf. Claudio Arrau.

Between the Acts & Selections from Façade. Edith Sitwell, lyrics;
William Walton, composer
Fanfare, Hornpipe & En Famille from Façade
Sing a Song of Sixpence (trad. nursery rhyme).
Fox-trot & By The Lake from Façade
The Last Rose of Summer. Thomas Moore (1779-1852), lyrics;
John Andrew Stevenson (1761-1833), composer.
Perf. Hayley Westenra.
Tarantella from Façade
***
Gymnopédies Nos. 1, 2 and 3. Erik Satie, composer.
Prélude Op. 3 No. 2 in C# Minor. Sergei Rachmaninoff, composer.
Perf. Sergei Rachmaninoff.
Nocturne. Lili Boulanger, composer. Perf. Yvonne Astruc, violin;
Nadia Boulanger, piano.
Chorus of the Plymouth Music series, featuring Eiddwen Harrhy.
***
Between the Acts & Selections from Façade. Edith Sitwell, lyrics;
William Walton, composer.
Who’ll Buy My Lavender? Carly Battersby, lyrics;
Edward German, composer. Perf. Corinne Walker.
Polka & Waltz from *Façade*.
Wot Cher! Knocked ‘em in the Old Kent Road (music hall song, 1891). Albert Chevalier, lyrics; Charles Ingle, composer.
Man from a Far Country & Jodelling Song from *Façade*.

*The Voyage Out*
Chaconne in G minor. Henry Purcell, composer.
Perf. Anton Batagov.
D’you Ken John Peel (trad. 18th c. ballad). Arr. P.M. Adamson.

*Night & Day*
from Pamina’s Aria (Ach, ich fühl’s es ist verschwunden) in *The Magic Flute.* Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, composer.
Perf. Anna Moffo.
“The String Quartet” (Notes, *Complete Shorter Fiction* 301).

*Jacob’s Room*
Liebestod from *Tristan and Isolde.* Richard Wagner, composer.

*Mrs Dalloway*
Fear No More. William Shakespeare (*Cymbeline*), lyrics; Loreena McKennitt, composer.

*Orlando*

*The Waves*
Westron Wind (Middle English). Perf. Sirinu, *Court Jesters*.

*Three Guineas*

*Between the Acts*
Hornpipe from *Water Music.* Frederic Handel, composer.

“A Simple Melody”
Greensleeves (trad. English folk, instrumental version).
Perf. Jordi Savall.
Scarborough Fair (trad. English folk, instrumental version).
Perf. Caroline Adomeit.

WORKS CITED

1 This list includes quoted texts only, with the exception of those unquoted works that are a focus of the pieces that respectively allude to them.


Klein, Lauren. *The Shape of History: Reimagining Elizabeth Palmer Peabody’s Historical Visualization Work.* shapeofhistory.net/


——. “*The Artist as AntiChrist: Thamar, the Demon Lover*” from “Outlaws: The Making of the Woman Poet as a Perfect Stranger.” Unpublished manuscript on Nancy Cunard.


the critical theorizing of the professions and their ideology is traceable throughout her entire body of work. Chan similarly argues that any consideration of this topic was inherently personal to Woolf, who often ruminated on the curious borderland fixed between the public and private, the personal and social, and the professional and amateur. In a study that is both sweeping and succinct, Chan argues that “Woolf’s criticism of the professions was on the whole not a device to gain more status or money, but comprised a sincere attempt to build a better society” (20). Woolf also uses her writing to consider what the world might look like if women’s professionalization were personally rewarding in addition to being socially or materially rewarding. Indeed, what would it mean for a woman to see brainwork as “fulfilling activity” or participation in the professional world as “personally meaningful,” as opposed to an exclusionary area designed to highlight a woman’s lack of specialized education (3)? Chan further turns our attention to the ways in which Woolf “formulate[d] her own political and aesthetic responses to the professions in her writing,” and offers numerous examples of Woolf’s engagement with professional values in her short fiction, novels, and criticism (16).

Chan’s book is divided into two large sections. Part I, “Two Professions and Three Women of Vocation,” examines two professions that were essential to Woolf’s own life and understanding of professionalism: the medical and the literary. Chapter One, “The Ethics and Aesthetics of Medicine,” links Woolf’s engagement with the medical profession—and professionals—to concurrent debates on medical professionalism that of which Woolf would have been aware (24). The historical significance of these debates is also worth noting, as Chan explains, because by the time Woolf was writing the medical field was not only powerful, but also embodied “the kind of social order that professional systems created” (29). Chan’s comments on William Bradshaw in Mrs Dalloway are especially compelling—and I find the chapter’s emphasis on the relationship between the historical and literary to be significant to the history of both fields. One example of this pairing comes from a 1923 article from the British Medical Journal which Chan reads alongside Bradshaw’s idealism in “sociopolitical rather than medical or occupational terms” (35). As Chan notes, “Bradshaw’s planned confinement of Septimus into a home is a ‘question of law’ […] Bradshaw’s consulting room is no longer private, and legal and social conventions must dictate its workings” (35). Woolf and her characters are not simply victims of the medical profession; rather, Woolf’s rhetorical positioning in Mrs Dalloway empowers her to articulate a view that challenges and seeks to improve upon the status quo.

In Chapter Two, “Amateurism and the Professionalisation of Literature,” Chan shifts her argument to the relationship between professionalism and literature. One key aim of this chapter is to historicize and problematize the terms “amateurism” and “professionalism” (24). Although the chapter effectively captures Woolf’s often ambivalent opinion of professionalism in literature, there are certain curious exclusions. For one, there is scant mention of Woolf’s The Common Reader (1925) or The Common Reader: Second Series (1932). Early in the chapter, Chan notes that Woolf was often hostile to the professional and intellectual hierarchy of university education in England. In the same vein, one might consider Woolf’s attempts to elide herself with the common reader as analogous to an aversion toward what Chan calls an “authoritative monopoly on how to read and write” (68). Woolf similarly expatiates on the merits of reading “slowly and unprofessionally” in the final essay of The Common Reader: Second Series, “How Should One Read a Book?” (270). Another point that is not fully pursued is Woolf’s professional work for the Hogarth Press (mentioned only in passing instances). It would be worth extending Chan’s discussion on

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1 Several books published in recent years indirectly consider Virginia Woolf and the professions. Chan points to Lois Cucullu, Anna Snait, and Melba Cuddy-Keane as examples of critics who have engaged with ideas similar to her own. One might also consider the recent work of Kathryn Simpson (who complicates Chan’s idea of gender exclusivity), or Jeane Dubino’s edited collection Virginia Woolf and the Literary Marketplace (2010) which includes many rich essays on Woolf and the modernist marketplace.
the nuances of this terminology to consider, as critics like Laura Marcus have, how Woolf’s connection to the Hogarth Press allowed her an uncommon degree of professional freedom. Chan’s detailed analysis of this specialized language throughout the chapter, though, is ultimately very useful to the rest of her study.

Chapter Three’s reconfiguring of Lily Briscoe and Miss La Trobe does nicely develop the interconnections between Woolf’s fiction and criticism. Although Woolf herself may have been stymied in her attempts to find balance between her roles as an amateur and professional, Chan’s reading of these two characters suggests that their status as professionals is not necessarily hampered by a lack of formal education or training. Instead, we might refigure these characters as representative of a “disinterested professionalism” that Woolf believed could unsettle the confining social models that were generally imposed upon women artists of previous centuries (122). These characters do remain isolated figures in their respective texts. However, they also enjoy a certain freedom that comes from being unconcerned with material wealth or social institutions.

Part II of Chan’s book attempts to relate three of Woolf’s later texts, *The Years* (1937), *Three Guineas*, and *Between the Acts* (1941) to shifting social and political situations in the early to mid-twentieth century. Chapter Four, “Translating the Fact of the Professions,” uses research collected from the holograph version of *The Years* to suggest that Woolf’s equivocal feelings about women and professionalism informed the rewrites of the novel and her political self-fashioning in *Three Guineas*. Chan asserts that Woolf feared a proliferation of educated women entering the marketplace would blur the lines between professional and personal lives, or that attempts to attain professional success would eventually blight personal growth (141).

Chapter Five, “A Balancing Act,” returns to the idea of specialization. Chan argues that specialization “contributes to the aesthetics of concurrent cohesion and fragmentation in *Between the Acts*”—and that the novel seeks to balance “specialization in society and within the existing professions, so that the self can expand yet retain a meaningful, different identity” (151). This final chapter offers an implicit reminder, too, that Woolf’s aim in the novel, and in her consideration of the professions more broadly, was to improve the world for the individual in society and, in doing so, work to build a stronger society. As Chan aptly notes, *Between the Acts* does end on a reasonably hopeful note; “destruction and construction are two sides of the same coin,” she writes, “[and] the world would eventually be rebuilt differently” (177).

Evelyn Chan’s monograph pairs strong close readings of Virginia Woolf’s novels and non-fiction with astute historical insight to develop our understanding of Woolf’s role in the professional world. Her study will certainly prompt many important and interesting questions about the interpenetration of modernism, professionalism, and history.

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**REVIEW**

**THE WORLD BROKE IN TWO: VIRGINIA WOOLF,**  
T. S. ELIOT, D. H. LAWRENCE, E. M. FORSTER, AND THE YEAR THAT CHANGED LITERATURE

by Bill Goldstein. Henry Holt, 2017. 368 pages. $30 cloth; $18 paper.

Taking his title from Willa Cather, Bill Goldstein focuses on 1922, a “remarkable year” during which four writers invented “the language of the future” (1). Culling from their diaries, letters, memoirs, and biographies, Goldstein alternates from one writer to another, portraying the processes of creation.1 His vivid short stories that make up the four larger narratives are imminently readable and revealing.

Though 1922 began with influenza and doubts about the future, the four writers, Goldstein says, progressed toward their contributions to the modernist revolution. In January, Woolf is in and out of bed with the flu, but reaching for new books to read and write. She ends the year, after positive reviews of Jacob’s Room, inventing Mrs. Dalloway. With the publication of *The Waste Land* almost a year away, Eliot begins 1922 in Lausanne after a breakdown, worrying about his wife Vivien’s health. At the end of the year, he has published *The Waste Land*, and his good reviews are dampened only by the gossip about his bank job and his breakdown published in the *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury*. After a miserable stay in India, Forster, nurses his would-be lover Mohammed el Adl and then sails back to Weybridge and his mother. He ends 1922 taking Leonard Woolf’s advice to visit more people and return to his Indian novel, *A Passage to India*. Lawrence begins another mobile year in Taormina, Sicily. He accepts Mabel Dodge’s invitation to her ranch in Taos, New Mexico, and when he and Frieda finally arrive, Dodge and the landscape both stun and disappoint him. He ends the year, having survived a tangled censorship battle with The New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, still restless and searching for the right place to write his autobiographical Australian novel Kangaroo.

For Woolf’s readers, Goldstein includes many compelling stories. Chapter 7, “The Usual Fabulous Zest,” for example, begins on a cold March 26, 1922—as does her essay “Byron and Mr. Briggs.” Reading and admiring Proust’s *Du côté de chez Swann* that spring, Woolf “reluctantly and almost against her will” orders a copy of *Ulysses* but then lets Leonard have it first (138). “Aware of its interest and yet distrustful of its influence” (139), she later reads it as she moves from publishing Jacob’s Room to writing *Mrs. Dalloway*. Proust’s language and Joyce’s experiment encourage her to evaluate her own.

At the same time, Woolf is, Goldstein reminds us, also trying to write her book on no less than “the state of reading in contemporary England” (124). In December, she had chafed against Bruce Richardson’s editing of her Henry James article. In February, considering Katherine Mansfield’s popularity, Woolf declares in her diary “I’m to write what I like; & they’re to say what they like” (129). Goldstein claims that “Byron and Mr. Briggs’ was the first work she wrote in this new state of mind” (129). Using Mr. Briggs as her surrogate, Woolf uses “herself as the protagonist of her work,” delivering “her message in person for the first time” (125).

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1 Most of Goldstein’s information is from primary sources. For example, in Chapter 7, which I discuss below, his notes refer to Woolf’s papers, letters, diaries, essays, novels, and short stories. In a bibliographic note at the end, he refers to Julian Briggs’ *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* and Lyndall Gordon’s *Virginia Woolf: A Writer’s Life*. Elsewhere he cites Quentin Bell’s *Virginia Woolf: A Biography, Bloomsbury and Bloomsbury Recalled;* Leonard Woolf’s letters and autobiographies; Nigel Nicolson’s *Portrait of a Marriage;* and Hermione Lee’s *Virginia Woolf.*
Imagining the questions he thinks Woolf was asking herself (“what might she do that would please the common reader and herself?” [128]), Goldstein pictures Woolf as she developed “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street.” In the unfinished “Byron and Mr. Briggs” Woolf imagined a dinner-party conversation among characters from her earlier novels—one of whom was Clarissa Dalloway. (This “hybrid form” of essay will lead a year later to Mrs. Brown sitting in a train car.) Reconsidering her relationship with her readers, discussing writing with Forster and Eliot, reading Proust, reading Joyce, re-imaging her character from The Voyage Out convince her that “a living character could be revealed only if she were seen from within” (130). Remembering Leonard’s recent analysis of her “puppet” characters in Jacob’s Room, Woolf takes a minor character from The Voyage Out (whom Lytton Strachey had praised) and invents a new living Clarissa.

Goldstein points out that the influenza epidemic killed more than 16,000 people in England and Wales in these same first three months of 1918, so that by March, when both Virginia and Clarissa step out of their houses, they are tentatively testing their strength, escaping the confines of illness. As she herself recovers and relapses, Woolf creates Clarissa Dalloway, a character who feels well enough to walk through London on a mundane errand that merges into Big Ben’s chimes, connecting the present morning with past mornings. The past and the present, as Proust has shown, happen simultaneously; memory and experience “illustrate a character’s state of mind” (136).

Goldstein’s affections for and knowledge of the writers create a colorful tapestry of the private and professional. He may not make major discoveries, but he encourages us to read the works and biographies in new contexts—both between the writers as individuals and as a group. His readings and his ability to tell stories remind us of the details that make up the writers’ lives and the works that resulted. We remember that as she finished Mrs. Dalloway and re-read Proust, Woolf wrote in her diary: Proust “is as tough as catgut & as evanescent as a butterfly’s bloom” (292).

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**REVIEW**

**LITERARY AESTHETICS OF TRAUMA:**

**VIRGINIA WOOLF AND JEANETTE WINTERTON**


In Literary Aesthetics of Trauma Reina Van der Wiel uses the works of Virginia Woolf and Jeanette Winterson to suggest new literary applications of trauma theory, proposing that “it is possible to aesthetically express trauma in a way that reaches beyond ‘complete identification’ and ‘affective connection’ to encourage working-through and contemplation instead” (217). Van der Wiel does so by shifting the theoretical focus of her book from Freudian to both (neo-)Kleinian psychoanalysis and British Object Relations Theory in order to explore symbolization, thinking, and working through of traumatic experience and also by shifting her emphasis from traumatic memory to the role of thinking within trauma.

The volume is organized into seven chapters. After an introduction tracing the history of trauma theory in literary criticism and in the humanities, with a particular focus on Modernism, the first chapter, “Writing the Body: Trauma, Woolf, Winterson,” focuses on the presence and relevance of body in Woolf’s and Winterson’s work and aims to show how the main difference in the two writers’ perspectives on the body resides on Woolf experiencing it from “the inside out (body-as-lived-depth)” (46) while Winterson does it from “the outside in (body as surface)” (46). The book points to Elizabeth Grosz’s model of the Möbius strip as a most constructive one “to represent the relationship between body and mind” (27): “an inverted three-dimensional figure eight” re-theorizes bodies and minds not as two distinct substances but as two entities inflecting into each other, where one side becomes another, with a relationship of “mutual constitution rather than intersection” (27). Van der Wiel focuses on the impact of trauma on Woolf’s narrative aesthetics, reading her formal experimentation and abstraction in To the Lighthouse and The Waves as “a means to symbolize and thus work through trauma” (30).

Chapter 2, “Symbolization, Thinking and Working-Through: British Object Relations Theory,” is entirely concerned with psychoanalytical theories related to symbols, symbolism and symbolization, a difference Van der Wiel illustrates in detail, examining the origins of Melanie Klein’s theory of symbolization and the importance of symbols, and then moving on to analyze the importance of the process of thinking, particularly regarding the argument that “trauma damages the capacity to think symbolically” (63). This helps her to suggest a specific correlation between trauma and art: “the more formal or structured a work of art, the better it is able to function as container by offering a means to control its emotionally overwhelming content and transforming it into thought” (66). Van der Wiel’s point here seems to be that to be able to work with traumatic material the artist needs a psychological distance that can be accomplished through the “transformative abstraction of symbolization which underlies an enhanced capacity to think” (67).

Although a large number of critics and psychologists are taken into consideration in this book—from Roger Luckhurst to Caroline Garland; from Louise DeSalvo to Melanie Klein; from Dominick LaCapra to Sigmund Freud, to mention but a few—Literary Aesthetics of Trauma is mainly indebted to Patricia Moran’s Virginia Woolf. Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Trauma (2007), as the author explicitly acknowledges: “Moran’s deconstructive, symptomatic reading of modernist form has become the norm in current literary scholarship” (68), which more and more identifies modernist literature as a literature of trauma. Yet Van der Wiel suggests that a more optimistic, redemptive and reparative view of modernist form has been too often overlooked, and thus she reads modernist aesthetic as a model that represents a “transformational process of working-through of trauma by successfully containing its emotionally overwhelming content with formal and stylistic means” (69), taking To the Lighthouse and The Waves as the best examples of this model.

The most articulated and—in my opinion—fascinating chapter is the third, “The Most Difficult Abstract Piece of Writing”: ‘Time Passes’ as Container,” particularly as it is concerned with those elements that contribute to narrative abstraction in To the Lighthouse. As the author explains, the chapter “draws together the modernist turn to abstraction and spatial form, read through a model of cultural crisis or trauma, and the psychoanalytic concept of symbolization” (72), proposing a correspondence between Woolf’s increasing use of abstract form of narrative and the process of symbolization that Van der Wiel presented in detail in chapter 2. Van der Wiel interestingly describes “Time Passes” as Woolf’s attempt to symbolize trauma, assuming that in writing this “most difficult abstract piece of writing” (D3 76), Woolf creates a container for the traumatic emotions she needed to articulate bringing together two fundamental issues of trauma: “the apparent difficulty of putting it into words, of speaking or writing trauma, and the abstractive quality of symbolization” (76).

While the first three chapters focus on an aesthetic of trauma from the writer’s point of view, chapter 4, “Ideas of Feeling”: Symbolic Transformation in Modernist Formalist Aesthetics,” investigates the workings of aesthetics as experienced by the reader. It considers the
modernist poetics in a broader sense, touching the influence of the art criticism and theory of Roger Fry and Clive Bell on Woolf’s work. What Van der Wiel argues is that, when trauma is formally worked through, its symbolic expression “allows the reader to have an aesthetic experience which enriches his or her intuitive knowledge of trauma and its working-through” (125).

This matter is further developed in chapter 5, “Woolf’S Embodied Cognitive Aesthetics: The Waves,” which suggests the importance of solitude in Woolf’s cognitive aesthetics and suggests that detachment can only be achieved through solitary thought, offering non-discursive symbolization. A useful structural model to read Woolf’s approach is offered by Winnicott’s theory of the isolate, which argues that “each individual is an isolate, permanently non-communicating, permanently unknown, in fact unfound” (145). According to Van der Wiel, because of her knowledge of suffering, Woolf felt that art had the power to offer a relief, but such a relief is obtained through “indifference, silence and permanence” (149). It is on this point that Woolf’s and Winterson’s work are most different with respect to trauma, and in chapter 6 Van der Wiel explicitly proposes the idea of Winterson’s shift of focus from the form of her prose to the representation of feelings.

The question posed by the chapter 6, “From Form to Feeling: Trauma and Affective Excess in Art & Lies,” is whether Winterson’s modernism can be considered to function as a cognitive aesthetic of trauma based on containment and symbolization, as it is for Woolf’s, and the answer seems to be that an affective excess is what prevents works like Winterson’s Art & Lies (1996) from such function, because it invites “overidentification rather than contemplation and working-through” (159). Contrary to the modernist cognitive aesthetics relying on formal detachment and non-discursivity, Winterson’s tone in most works is preaching and polemic, and this makes of Art & Lies a book “symptomatic rather than a symbolic expression of trauma” (171).

The seventh and last chapter of this dense volume, “The Story of My Life: Winterson’s Adoption, Art and Autobiography,” considers what Van der Wiel describes as a move from feminist auto/biography to a “traumatic real” (178) in Winterson’s fiction. It is primarily focused on adoption as traumatic experience in her fiction, mainly in The Stone Gods (2005) and Weight (2007), underlying how Winterson’s second cycle of fiction is built on the compulsive repetition of the traumatic adoption story. The chapter traces what Van der Wiel calls Winterson’s “radical shift in her outlook on, and practice of, the relationship between art and the ‘real’” (178), a shift that interested a broader “traumatic turn” (178) to autobiographical narration in British and American cultural production, and that in Winterson’s Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal? (2011) can be read as a process of working-through of Winterson’s founding trauma.

Overall I expected a more consistent connection between Woolf’s and Winterson’s work, although a comparison of their work is found in the first and in the last two chapters. The most interesting aspect of the book is, I believe, Reina Van der Wiel’s reading of Woolf’s use of formal experimentation as a literary aesthetic aimed at working-through trauma instead of indulging in patheticism and melancholy. As Van der Wiel argues: “Instead of being interested in putting her personal grievances on full display or being called [. . .] Woolf wished to transform them into a broader meditation on trauma, loss, death and war—a transformation she accomplished through the abstract writing style” (105).

Literary Aesthetics of Trauma: Virginia Woolf and Jeanette Winterson is a challenging book. To echo the opening of Winterson’s first novel Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit (1985), the reader has “to wrestle” with the numerous and complex theories dealing both with psychoanalysis and literary criticism; yet this book proposes fascinating sparks in the critical reading of the aesthetic of trauma in both writers.

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REVIEW

MODERNISM: KEYWORDS

Modernism presents rich and fertile ground for utilizing a ‘keywords’ approach to thinking across, through, against and with, as Raymond Williams’s pioneering Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society did in 1976.¹ Melba Cuddy-Keane, Adam Hammond and Alexandra Peat lead a welcome and painstaking project to adapt and expand Williams’ method to the permutations, connections, and paradigmatic shifts in 39 keywords revealing literary modernism as practiced by, mostly, American and British writers. Their range of terms—e.g., ‘Bigness, Smallness, ‘Hygiene,’ ‘Queer, Gay’—drawing upon more than 1100 primary texts (xi), provides a highly readable and engaging book that immerses readers within the juxtapositions, streams and interactions animating literary modernism between the dates of 1880 and 1950.

The focus, stated in the editors’ Introduction: Unsettling Modernism, announces the project’s intentions and its variation from Williams’s

¹ Raymond Williams had originally intended the ‘keywords’ as a glossary appendix to his pre-eminent book, Culture and Society: 1780-1950 (Croom Helm, 1958) but the publisher balked at its length, as Colin MacCabe relates in his Foreword to the newest (2014) edition of Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society: a New Edition (Oxford UP). Instead, Williams kept collecting important ‘keywords,’ eventually publishing the book in 1976 as Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (Oxford UP) with cultural, not strictly etymological, definition/discussions of how 109 words had changed in usage over time. It appeared in a revised edition in 1983 with 21 additional entries. The 2014 edition is a reissue of the 1983 edition; an exhibition of British art contemporary at that moment (i.e., the 1980s) at the Tate Liverpool was inspired by and accompanied the 2014 publication (https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/keywords-art-culture-and-society-1980s-britain). A joint venture between the University of Pittsburgh and Jesus College, Cambridge University, launched The Keywords Project, a website with ongoing new entries based on Williams’s original project (http://keywords.pitt.edu/about-book.html) and will appear in print form in Fall 2018 from Oxford UP.

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original one: “our subject is written modernism and our audience is, first and foremost, a readership engaged in the study of English Literature” (xi). The book “envisions a mobile history through the trope of ‘the bounce,’ conceiving the words of the past as bouncing against each other as well as out to us” (xii) and it achieves this aim: this is no collection of “definitions,” but rather a lively experience of how words (re)shape, collide and integrate themselves into lived human life and culture.

Woolfians in particular will welcome the many contributions by Virginia and Leonard Woolf cited within these entries; the team draws frequently upon their essays as well as diaries, letters, reviews, and fiction (reveling, some readers might say, the particular research areas of the editorial team). Bloomsbury itself is located as one of the primary terms through keyword ‘Coterie’ and nearly all of its members are cited across diverse entries.

One of the many strengths of Modernism: Keywords is its commitment to discovering modernism through a wide range of traditional sources such as little magazines and journals while also utilizing newer databases such as the Modernist Journals Project and the TLS Historical Archive among others, as well as in less traditional spaces such as advertising and medical journals. It seeks inclusivity as well as range, while highlighting tension and variation, all contributing to the stated goal of “unsettling” modernism. Keywords were selected, not only based upon frequency, the editors state, but on their “wide circulation” and “uncertainty and variation in use” (xiv-xv).

A fascinating effect of reading via a keywords approach is that one can read in multiple ways: for example, starting with one term and utilizing the helpful ‘see also’ at the end of the entry to jump to other related entries, or moving from A to Z. Cuddy-Keane, Hammond and Peat’s inclusion of quoted lines from actual texts of the period, with a complete bibliography at the end of each entry, provides an incredibly beneficial service to readers and reveals the kind of meticulous care with which the team undertook its work. Expected terms—such as ‘Empire/Imperialism,’ ‘Race,’ ‘Woman, New Woman,’ ‘Manifesto’—meet more unusual ones—‘Einstein,’ ‘Hamlet’—in the course of exploring the 39 selected keywords. Because of the strategic methodology and care with which the writers drew upon the available resources, even anticipated keywords are revealed as more complex and uncertain: see ‘God, Gods,’ ‘International, Internationalism,’ ‘Fascism.’

Of course, there will inevitably be limits to such an endeavor. Readers who might ponder the omission of a particular term (e.g., ‘citizenship’) may find relevant discussion via keywords that are included (e.g., ‘Democracy’). The authorial team’s stated methodology is also important to keep in mind: “We do not index key concepts, but only words that are in some way being contested or in flux” (263). The text also includes important and welcome supplemental materials in the form of two appendices. The first is an Index of Modernist Keywords drawn from the quotations used in the book that were “chosen to illustrate modernist usage of the thirty-nine keywords (and their cognates) that constitutes our main entries,” the authors write. This expanded list of keywords offers “seeds for future entries on keywords” (263). The second is an Index of Modernist Authors. This helpful list nevertheless may reveal omissions for some readers (Katharine Anne Porter’s absence, for example, seems questionable). Multiply these kinds of readerly challenges, however, and one comes back to the inevitable dilemma faced by the team in providing a compact, readable text. The value of the book—appropriate for advanced scholars, common readers, and beginning students of modernism—lies in its assemblage of rich connections as well as its provocations. The layering and intertwining of multiple perspectives will likely stimulate many classroom and online conversations, as well as encouraging supplemental editions.

Remarkably, the book enacts in spirit and practice, through keywords such as ‘Rhythm,’ ‘Difficulty/Obscurity,’ ‘Readers, Reading,’ ‘Unconscious’ and indeed, this reader’s arguably personal favorite, ‘Words/Language,’ the “lapsing and flowing” of language and meaning Woolf described in her essay “Craftsmanship”:

[Thus] one sentence of the simplest kind rouses the imagination, the memory, the eye and the ear—all combine in reading it.

But they combine—they combine unconsciously together. The moment we single out and emphasize the suggestions as we have done here they become unreal; and we too, become unreal—specialists, word mongers, phrase finders, not readers. In reading we have to allow the sunken meanings to remain sunken, suggested, not stated; lasing and flowing into each other like reeds on the bed of a river (202).

The ‘Words, Language’ entry beautifully demonstrates the vitality suffusing this volume: drawing on 31 textual citations by 22 writers, one gleans the history of the OED as well as the modernist precursor for developing a ‘keywords’ approach, all intertwined within a lively debate revealing modernists’ obsession with language and ‘haunting by words’ (252) in politics, literature, and private life.

The only area of genuine concern lies outside the purview of the editorial team, and that is the cost of the book. The announced price risks excluding the very readers—undergraduates and graduate students—who will likely find the book most useful. Not having the book available in a more accessible format and for a more reasonable price may deter instructors from requiring it. While the two electronic indices are (happily) available as free PDFs on the publisher’s site, the substantive and rich entries that comprise the formal book may well be beyond reach for student and common readers. This reviewer encourages the publisher to reconsider.

Modernism: Keywords strives to reclaim the wealth of “sunken meanings,” grounded in the actual usage of these terms by writers of the period, especially for new generations of readers. It restores to these words their shifting, evocative connections within the specific time frame, but perhaps equally important, the volume provides those of us reading today yet another lens through which to glimpse the ongoing relevance of these debates to our own time and culture.

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Works Cited


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Works Cited


REVIEW
CHEAP MODERNISM: EXPANDING MARKETS, PUBLISHERS’ SERIES AND THE AVANT-GARDE


The Edinburgh Critical Studies in Modernist Culture series aims “for a breadth of scope and for an expanded sense of the canon of modernism, rather than focusing on individual authors” and addresses “the various cultural, intellectual and historical contexts of British, American and European modernisms” (x). In this latest book in the series, Lise Jaillant takes a close look at how effectively cheap format books by modernists, writers, made available these sometimes-difficult texts to a reading public far beyond those more exclusive “coteries” that we have tended to presume read the texts in expensive first editions. Recent years have seen the welcome growth of the study of modernist magazines, but, claims Jaillant, the publishers whose cheap reprint series really made modernism available to a mass readership, have largely been ignored by scholars owing to the fact that libraries and archivists when building their collections tended to omit them. In this fascinating study, Jaillant begins the process of correcting this omission by foregrounding those publishers and including the Woolfs’ Hogarth Press in the fifth and final chapter. Not only were a number of Woolf’s own books included in several of these publishers’ lists, from 1929 the Hogarth Press published an affordable Uniform Edition of her works.

Jaillant explains that, although the German publisher Tauchnitz, with its distinctively small and uniformly-designed paperbacks for the continental market, had started as early as the mid-nineteenth century, by the 1920s other “commercial publishers realised that texts initially perceived as radical could be sold to mainstream readers in cheap series” (6). From this realization came the gradual wider distribution of novels that had previously been the preserve of the highbrow elite. Thanks to series such as the Oxford World’s Classics, Cape’s Traveller’s Library, Chatto’s Phoenix Library, Random House’s Modern Library, and in Europe Tauchnitz and Albatross, the works of Woolf, Joyce, Wyndham Lewis and Lawrence, for example, were distributed far wider and in greater numbers than their original publishers could have dreamed of.

In this very well-researched volume, Jaillant provides us with the individual histories of these publishers (Chapter 4 is devoted to Tauchnitz and Albatross, which published in English for continental readers) and the relevant series in the case of the already-established publishing firms. Salient publications are highlighted by Jaillant individually. Their particular merits are discussed and the reader is led along the frequently twisty paths through the tangled issues of copyright, consents and publishing rivalries.

Although the chapter on the Hogarth Press comes at the end of the book, there is much to interest Woolfians in the preceding chapters as well. The first chapter looks at the Oxford World’s Classics series and in particular the eminent modernist writers—Woolf and Eliot in particular—who were commissioned to write introductions for them. The OUP were not slow to realize, Jaillant believes, that the well-known status of some distinguished contemporary writers lent the old books a new prestige that had previously been the preserve of the highbrow elite. Thanks to series such as the Oxford World’s Classics, Cape’s Traveller’s Library, Chatto’s Phoenix Library, Random House’s Modern Library, and in Europe Tauchnitz and Albatross, the works of Woolf, Joyce, Wyndham Lewis and Lawrence, for example, were distributed far wider and in greater numbers than their original publishers could have dreamed of.

In this very well-researched volume, Jaillant provides us with the individual histories of these publishers (Chapter 4 is devoted to Tauchnitz and Albatross, which published in English for continental readers) and the relevant series in the case of the already-established publishing firms. Salient publications are highlighted by Jaillant individually. Their particular merits are discussed and the reader is led along the frequently twisty paths through the tangled issues of copyright, consents and publishing rivalries.

Jonathan Cape, however, shrewdly used the notoriety of the author of the still banned Ulysses to excite interest in Joyce’s previous works—Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man—republishing both in the Travellers’ Library with great success. Chapter 3 is devoted to Jaillant’s intriguing account of Wyndham Lewis’ rewriting of his novel Tarr for its publication in the Phoenix Library (which included works by authors as diverse as Lytton Strachey, David Garnett and A. A. Milne). It was a “rare moment,” according to Jaillant, “when Lewis did cross this [highbrow] line to reach all kinds of readers—the ‘aristocratic audience’ he desired but also the ‘lowbrow’ readers of John O’London’s Weekly and Everyman” (90).

Finally, in Chapter 5, “Classes behind plate glass”: The Hogarth Press and the Uniform Editions of the Works of Virginia Woolf,” Jaillant explains that the Uniform Edition of Woolf’s writings, intended to be complete, marked Woolf’s “canonisation” as an “author whose work deserved to be collected and preserved” (121). The Uniform Edition was conceived at a crucial time, following the success of To the Lighthouse and Orlando, the impending publication of A Room of One’s Own and the fact that Jacob’s Room and Mrs. Dalloway were out of print. Although the volumes were cheaper than their original first edition prices (only five shillings per volume) by comparison with the Travellers’ or Phoenix Libraries’ volumes (three shillings and sixpence each), the edition was still relatively expensive. Jaillant points out that this “decision is all the more surprising given that after 1920, Duckworth sold the second edition of Night and Day for only three shillings and sixpence [the first edition sold for nine shillings]” (123). Jaillant traces the source of this decision to advice given to Leonard by Jonathan Cape; the comparatively higher price would raise the series into an upmarket position over their rivals’ series.

What this book manages to reveal—the result of Jaillant’s impressively wide research—is how the reprint publishers expanded the reading audience for the greatest modernist writers. There is plenty in this book for Woolfians as well as those interested in modernist publishing and the book trade. It helps push forward the scholarship of print cultures in an exciting area already gathering momentum as a result of the excellent work being carried out by the Modernist Archives Publishing Project and others. This study is highly informative and an enjoyable read; a rare combination.

Stephen Barkway
Independent Scholar
Greetings! I hope you all had a wonderful summer and that the new school year is off to a great start.

I’d like to begin the column by offering tremendous thanks to Derek Ryan and his team—Ariane Mildenberg, Peter Adkins, and Patricia Novillo-Corvalán—for hosting the 28th Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf from June 21-24 at Woolf College, University of Kent, Canterbury. Festivities began with a pre-conference day trip to Knole and Sissinghurst, where delegates enjoyed strolling the grounds, touring rooms, climbing up to the towers, and marveling at the gardens—in full, glorious, fragrant bloom—of these two historic homes of Vita Sackville-West that were so vital to the life and writing of Virginia Woolf.

The four-day conference offered a plethora of innovative and thought-provoking papers, panels, films, and other artistic works geared toward the conference theme, “Virginia Woolf, Europe, and Peace.” The impressive lineup of keynote speakers included Rosi Braidotti (via videotaped lecture), Philosopher and Distinguished University Professor at Utrecht University; Claire Davison, Professor of Modernist Studies at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris; and Jane Goldman, Reader in English and Glasgow University and General Editor of the Cambridge University Press Edition of the Works of Virginia Woolf. Coffee breaks, lunches, and receptions provided welcome opportunities for attendees to chat, laugh, and relax together as well. Saturday evening’s pre-banquet reception took us to a beautiful and peaceful outdoor green space, where we enjoyed cocktails and snacks with the majestic Canterbury Cathedral in the background. Thanks again, Derek, Ariane, Peter, and Patricia, for a wonderful conference from start to finish! We now look forward to the 29th annual conference, “Virginia Woolf and Social Justice,” hosted by Drew Shannon at Mount St. Joseph University in Cincinnati, OH, from June 6-9, 2019.

Speaking of 2019, I hope to see you in Chicago for MLA January 3-6. Mary Wilson of U Mass Dartmouth will be presiding over our guaranteed panel, “Night and Day at 100” (exact time and day TBD), which promises to yield fresh insights into Woolf’s second novel upon the centenary of its publication. Jean Corbett of Miami University of Ohio will present “Feminist Generations in Night and Day”; John Young of Marshall University will present “That vagulous phospheresence”: Mrs Hilbery in Mrs. Dalloway”; Moyang Li of Rutgers University is presenting “Katherine as Mathematician in Night and Day”; and Mary Wilson will present “The Place of Night and Day.” Also, the 2019 panel for Louisville’s Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900 is now finalized and will feature Patricia Morgne Cramer, (University of Connecticut at Stamford), “Hidden Treasures: Rhoda as Socrates’s Lesbian Sister”; Zoe Rodine (University of Minnesota), “‘I am the Foam’: Woolf’s Waves and Modernist Embodiment; Emma Burris-Janssen (University of Connecticut), “‘suspended, without being, in limbo’: Temporality and Abortion in Virginia Woolf’s Between the Acts”; and Maria Aparecida de Oliveira (Federal University of Acre), “Virginia Woolf and the common Reader in Brazil.”

I hope you also enjoy reading in this issue of the Miscellany the winning essay of the fourth annual Angelica Garnett Undergraduate Essay Prize: Isabel Perry, a senior at Northwestern University, won the contest with her essay entitled, “The Flight Within the Mirror: Chekhov and Virginia Woolf’s Between the Acts,” which she wrote for Christine Froula’s class Studies in 20th Century Literature: Virginia Woolf & Bloomsbury.

Woolf continues to make her presence felt in contemporary culture, with sightings everywhere from interior design magazines to fashion runways to quotations (sometimes of dubious provenance) popping up all over the place. I know many of us wait with bated breath for the upcoming film Vita & Virginia, written by Eileen Atkins and starring Elizabeth Debicki as Woolf and Gemma Arterton as Sackville-West. The filmmakers call it a “timeless love story, told in a contemporary style, about two women who smashed through social barriers to find solace in their forbidden connection.” We shall see! As always, stay tuned to Paula Maggio’s Blogging Woolf for daily updates on all things Woolf in the world.

Warmly,

Kristin Czarnecki
President, IVWS

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