TO THE READERS:

Since this publication is a miscellany devoted to Virginia Woolf, there is no obligation that its contents adhere to any particular theme. It is quite possible, however, that certain trends in Woolf studies might be reflected in its pages, sometimes by coincidence, sometimes deliberately. There has been great interest, appropriately so, in the recent publication of Louise DeSalvo's Virginia Woolf: the Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on her Life and Work, reviewed in the last number by Jean Guiguet. (Readers should also be aware of the quite long and powerful review by Kenneth Fraser that appeared in the November 5, 1989 issue of The New Yorker as well as one by Quentin Bell in the March 15, 1990 issue of the New York Review of Books.) One impressive aspect of DeSalvo's study is her command of the literature about child abuse. I thought it might be of interest to our readers to have a short statement giving the latest thinking about the effects of childhood sexual abuse, written not by a Woolf scholar but by the historian and therapist, Erna Olafson, and the psychiatrist, David Corwin, the eminent authority on child sexual abuse. Readers can then decide to the degree that such a discussion is helpful in thinking about Virginia Woolf.

It is striking how much of Virginia's sexual life should be involved with "brothers," first off with those who were legally so, her half-brothers, Gerald and George Duckworth. There was her serious flirtation with her brother-in-law, Clive Bell, in 1908. There were her brother Thoby's friends, the two Trinity contemporaries, Hilton Young who proposed to her in Cambridge in May, 1909, and Walter Lamb who told her in July, 1911, that he would like to be in love with her. Although Thoby and Clive Bell were not members of that famous band of brothers, the Apostles, their great friends were, and the two of them, Lytton Strachey and Leonard Woolf, also proposed to her. The first was not very serious although he was accepted for a few hours, but the second was, although Virginia took some time to make up her mind. Both Lytton and Leonard were quite devastated by Thoby's death in 1906 and their reaction to it might have been part of their motivation in proposing to Virginia some years later. Leonard had met her only a few times. While in Ceylon, with Strachey's encouragement, he conceived the plan of proposing to her, perhaps by telegram, then when he thought he would be home in December, 1910. He did not return until June, 1911; he asked her to marry him in January, 1912 and was accepted in May.

After her breakdown the next year, whether Leonard's choices can then decide to the degree that such a discussion is helpful in thinking about Virginia Woolf.

THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN

"All being corrupt together, what is the use of investigating each other?" E. L. Godkin, editor of The Nation, wrote despairingly in 1873. Published statistics about our culture's high prevalence of child sexual abuse provoke a similar despair. If child sexual victimization is really so common, who remains to protect the young? If we dare to consider the scope of this nursery holocaust, what discom­fitting paradigm shifts must we make?

Thus cultural despair becomes cultural denial, and a "shared negative hallucination" obscures the issue of child sexual abuse. Sigmund Freud initially believed his patients when they told him about childhood sexual traumas, but faced with the ostracizing disbelief of his peers when he presented these findings in 1896, he changed his mind. Alfred Kinsey minimized his 1953 finding about the great prevalence of childhood sexual abuse among his respondents. Virginia Woolf told what happened to her, and was little heeded—even in Elaine Showalter's feminist The Female Malady, which described Woolf's nervous disorders and their treatment without reference to her childhood abuse. This cultural blindness to sexual abuse persists in many circles (including some psychiatric ones); books like Louise DeSalvo's biography of Woolf may serve to bring this "apparition" out of the fog.

DeSalvo's account of Virginia Woolf's childhood sexual abuse and its effects on her is largely consistent with current research in the field. There is now some consensus that incest and other forms of child sexual victimization are widespread and that the effects can be harmful and persistent. Somewhat less is known about the molesters, who do not seem to fall into a single category, and a good proportion of whom show normal personality profiles. For example,
researchers who recently administered a standard personality instrument to incest families found non-pathological elevations for the incestuous fathers and reported, "The findings in this study clearly support the hypothesis that individuals who have been victims of incest will demonstrate greater psychopathology than either the fathers who victimized them or the non-participating mothers." The authors speculated, "It is not psychopathology that produces incest but incest that produces psychopathology."

The statistics DeSalvo quotes on incidence are borne out by other community surveys, with some variance having to do with the definition of sexual abuse used. In the largest national survey to date, 27% of the women and 16% of the men reported a history of childhood sexual abuse. Among clinical populations, the incidence is far higher. A recent community survey shows that among women currently suffering a major depression of the sort Virginia Woolf repeatedly experienced, almost half describe a history of childhood sexual abuse. A recent study of female psychiatric emergency room patients found a childhood sexual abuse rate of 70%.

It is not, as professionals once comfortably believed, only the squalid poor in their crowded rooms who use their children so. Community surveys show that sexual abuse is as common among the higher strata of society as among minorities and the poor; it is, however, less commonly reported to the authorities when it occurs among the privileged. Those who work in this field know that it is far easier to get the system to protect the children of the pick-up truck and gun-rack subculture from their beer-bellied, incestuous daddies and brothers that it is to protect the well-behaved children of the middle classes from the articulate, respected, incestuous males in their families.

As for symptoms, comparative studies of the effects of sexual abuse first appeared only in the 1980's, and the field is developing rapidly. Disturbed sexual functioning, from promiscuity to inhibition of sexuality, characterizes well over half of the victims. Diminished ability to trust or to be intimate with others is also common. Depression, hopelessness, anxiety, despair, low self-esteem and a generalized sense that one is damaged or ineffective are very frequent and persistent effects of sexual abuse. Self-mutilation, substance abuse, and suicidality are also significantly correlated with a childhood history of sexual abuse. Some victims victimize others in turn, or are themselves revictimized. Anamnesis for the abuse may also occur, suggesting that the numbers in the national self-report surveys may be low. Other symptoms, such as eating disorders and sleep disturbances, may be related to a history of sexual abuse. If abuse begins early in childhood, is prolonged and severe, and remains untreated, as was apparently the case for Virginia Woolf, it can profoundly affect personality structure and self-image.

Finally, there is growing evidence that victims of severe abuse may be driven to dissociative defenses similar to the " trance" states Woolf described. For victims who survive childhood sexual assault by repressing, dissociating, splitting, or developing multiple personalities, the adult period of recall, reintegration, and eventual recovery can be dangerous and turbulent. Dissociation numbings over-whelming pain, a pain that is then felt for the first time, as it were, when memories intrude. For many incest victims, remembering can bring unbearable anguish. It seems to have done so for Virginia Woolf.

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THE IMPACT OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE ON VIRGINIA WOOLF'S READING OF SARA COlERIDGE

Virginia Woolf's essay on Sara Coleridge, written in September 1940 in the intervals between bombing attacks on the Sussex downs, offers corroborative of Louise DeSalvo's view that Woolf was a pioneer in speaking out about incest and sexual abuse and in recognizing that "sexual violence" was "sometimes meted out by those very people who were the heroes of history." Thus, "at the very end of her life, Woolf devoted a considerable amount of her writing energy to describing the common experience of sexual assault in women's lives." Although DeSalvo emphasizes Woolf's concern to document her own circumstances and those of her female relatives, the essay on Sara Coleridge suggests that Woolf was alert to the mercest hint of the tell-tale symptoms of an incest survivor.

As Berenice A. Carroll indicates, Woolf was an expert at writing obliquely about volatile issues. Of course, Woolf could not, based solely on the oblique evidence of a fragment of autobiography, openly accuse a culture hero like Samuel Taylor Coleridge of the vile crime of sexually molesting his daughter. Yet, it seems probable, based on subtle textual indicators in the essay, that she did believe Sara Coleridge had been abused. Not coincidentally, the features of Sara Coleridge's life that Woolf isolates correspond closely to her own experiences in a dysfunctional and sexually abusive family.

Woolf was probably more sensitive than many other readers to what might be seen as occluded references to incest in Sara Coleridge's brief, truncated autobiography or in her male biographer's version of her life. Woolf comments that "Mr. Griggs has written her life, exhaustively, sympathetically, but still... dots intervene." A further frustration is that "That extremely interesting fragment, her autobiography, ends with three rows of dots after twenty-six pages." Quoting from the autobiography, Woolf indicates that, though Sara Coleridge "intended... to end every section with a moral, or a reflection," the text breaks off abruptly after she has stated that, "On reviewing my earlier childhood I find the predominant reflection..." As Woolf then muses: "She said many things in those twenty-six pages, and Mr. Griggs has added others that tempt us to fill in the dots, though not with the facts that she might have given us." Significantly, Jane Marcus has observed that in A Room of One's Own Woolf uses the "Dot dot dot" of the ellipsis as a strategem to indicate the omission of sexually coded material.

Woolf's reflections on Sara Coleridge's life are definitely sexually charged. Without so much as a transition, she begins the second paragraph of the essay by citing Samuel Taylor Coleridge's sexual description of Sara Coleridge in infancy. "Send me the very feel of her sweet Flesh, the very look and motion of that mouth... I, could
drive myself mad about her.‘ Of Sara Coleridge’s visit to the Wordsworths’ with her father, Woolf says: the visit was full of […] contracts and conflicts. Her father cherished her and petted her. “I slept with him and he would tell me fairy stories when he came to bed at twelve or one o’clock…” Then her mother, Mrs. Coleridge, arrived, and Sara flew to that honest, homely, motherly woman and “wished never to be separated from her.” At that—the memory was still bitter—“my father showed displeasure and accused me of want of affection. I could not understand why… I think my father’s motive,” she reflected later, “must have been a wish to fasten my affections on him… I slunk away and hid myself in the wood behind the house.”

The confused affect of this passage suggests the inarticulate manipulative emotional blackmail by means of which the abuser silences the victim.

Woolf mentions—twice—that Coleridge slept in the same bed with his young daughter. Since Woolf had vivid and repellent memories of being molested in her own bed by her step-brother George, the idea of a young girl sharing a bed with an adult male relative is certainly fraught with unpleasant import for her. Further, Woolf, who states in her essays and in her autobiographical reflections that modesty and chastity are innate to women, observes that, while Sara stayed at the Wordsworth’s home, “to her shame they bathed her in a room where men came in and out.”

To reinforce a description of Sara Coleridge’s beauty as a suggestive hiatus: “I have seen Miss Coleridge… and I wish I had such a—daughter.” Woolf had witnessed her own father’s bitter, selfish, and—according to DeSalvo—sexually motivated opposition to the marriage of his step-daughter Stella. Thus, perhaps, it is no surprise that she asks:

Did Coleridge wish to keep such a daughter? Was a father’s jealousy roused in that will-less man of inordinate susceptibility when Sara met her cousin Henry… and almost instantly, but secretly, gave him her coral necklace in exchange for a ring with his hair? As DeSalvo observes, citing Judith Lewis Herman’s and Lisa Hirschman’s Father-Daughter Incest, “incest survivors often display impressive strengths; but they rarely, however, truly enjoy ‘the benefits of their hard labor or derived much satisfaction from their competence and strength.’” Also, she notes that many survivors “suffer severe substance abuse.” Is it merely a coincidence, then, that in her work Sara Coleridge “was diffusse, unable to conclude, and without the magic that does instead of a conclusion,” or that “like her father, [she] had need of opium?” It will never be proven absolutely that Woolf believed Sara Coleridge had been molested by her father. However, the evidence does suggest that Woolf suspected this to be the case even though she could never have said so directly. Though the censoring Angel in the House could not prevent either Woolf or Sara Coleridge from telling the truth of the body, it could only be told slant.

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4. Woolf, p. 111
5. Woolf, p. 111; ellipsis added.
6. Woolf, p. 111; ellipsis in text.
7. Woolf, p. 111
9. Woolf, p. 111
10. Woolf, p. 112; bracketed ellipsis added.
12. Woolf, p. 112
13. Woolf, p. 113
14. DeSalvo, p. 58
15. Woolf, p. 113; ellipsis added.
16. DeSalvo, p. 10
17. DeSalvo, p. 11
18. Woolf, pp. 116, 115

THE HORSE WITH A GREEN TAIL

In Between the Acts, Isa Oliver picks up her father-in-law’s copy of the Times, and reads:

“A horse with a green tail…” which was fantastic. Next, “The guard at Whitehall…” which was romantic and then, building word upon word she read: “The troopers told her the horse had a green tail; but she found it was just an ordinary horse. And they dragged her up to the barrack room where she was thrown upon a bed. Then one of the troopers removed part of her clothing, and she screamed and hit him about the face…”

That was real; so real that in the mahogany door panels she saw the Arch in Whitehall… This rape actually occurred on the night of 27 April 1938. The girl was aged fourteen and nine months at the time. As she and two companions were passing under an archway leading to the stables a soldier asked her if she wished to see a horse with a green tail. Leaving her companions, she accompanied him to the stables. There he tried to kiss her and got her into a loose box, but she resisted his advances. Trooper Pullin arrived and the first soldier left. The Times reports:

The girl said that she was crying and shouting, and he said if she shouted it would be the worse for her. She screamed and tried to push him away and punched him, and he said he would hit her back and hurt her, as he had been a champion boxer. She testifies that then Pullin raped her. Afterwards he allowed her to leave, but she was intercepted by other soldiers and dragged upstairs to the barrack room and thrown on a bed and was again assaulted.

The trials of Troopers Pullin, Thomas, and Reeves took place at the Old Bailey on 27, 28, and 29 June 1938. Since Pullin was tried separately from Thomas and Reeves, the girl had to give her evidence twice. Pullin was found guilty of attempted rape. In sentencing him to 22 month, Mr. Justice Du Parcq expressed his regret that the maximum sentence for the offence was only two years, for: he said: Sometimes an attempt to commit rape is as dreadful in its serious consequences as rape itself. The girl went through a terrible experience. Thomas was found guilty of rape and Reeves was found guilty of aiding and abetting him. In addressing them, Mr. Justice Du Parcq said that he found it impossible to make any distinction between their cases. He had seldom heard of a more horrible case than this horrible offence.

Since Pullin was found not guilty of rape:

The girl went through an experience which must have reduced her to a condition of misery and despair. One would think that every Englishman, especially English soldiers, would be anxious to help her and protect her. He then sentenced each to four years’ penal servitude. As a result of the rape, the girl became pregnant. Mr. Alec Bourne, a respected surgeon at one of the London hospitals, openly performed an abortion. He in turn ended up at the Old Bailey, where he was tried on 18 and 19 July 1938. At that time abortion was completely illegal, except for the purpose of “preserving the life of the mother.” Mr. Justice Macnaughten extended the meaning of that phrase when he directed the jury that if the probable consequence of the continuance of the pregnancy will be to make the woman a physical or mental wreck, the jury are quite entitled to take the view that the doctor, who, in those circumstances, and in that honest belief, operates, is operating for the purpose of preserving the life of the woman. The jury found the accused not guilty. On the 25th July the Minister of Health was asked in Parliament: whether, as this was a test case, he intended introducing legislation to clarify or amend the law dealing with such offences. But nothing was done for almost another thirty years. Until the

Virginia Woolf and Sigmund Freud—each a “formidable architect and carpenter of modernity” according to Catharine Stimpson in her Foreword to this book—have taught us to read and interpret the gaps and silences of discourse. Learning from both, Elizabeth Abel notes Woolf’s insistence on the significance of what people “don’t say,” and uses the Freudian vocabulary of resistance, deferral, and displacement to interrogate Woolf’s dismissive remarks about Freud in her diary and letters. Although she may well not have purposively read Freud’s writings (that the Hogarth Press began to publish in 1922) until late in her life, Woolf herself acknowledged that psychoanalysis was frequently a topic of conversation among her friends and relatives. Abel’s knowledgeable and powerful account of the parallel and contemporaneous trajectories of the fictions of psychoanalysis and Woolf’s narratives argues that this concurrence may also have evoked considerable anxiety in Woolf.

Concerned not with influence but with intertextuality, Abel argues that Woolf’s fiction “de-authorizes psychoanalysis, clarifying the narrative choices it makes, disclosing its fictionality.” Following an account of Freud’s narrative visualization of development (in the Oedipal story), the impact of his theory in England, and the challenges posed to it by Melanie Klein, Abel reads Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse as narratives that question the paternal genealogies of Freud (and, incidentally, anticipate object relations theory). The submerged story of Clarissa’s evolution from Bourton to London is played against Freud’s contemporaneous Oedipal narrative. In a strikingly fresh approach to the novel, Abel reveals how the development plot reverberates throughout: The pattern of Clarissa’s move from a female-centered natural world to the heterosexual and androcentric world of London and marriage is paralleled, for example, by Rezia’s life and ultimately modulates to a conflict between life and death that Clarissa resolves in her experience of Septimus’s suicide. In a text haunted by the mother’s absence, Abel sees Woolf as challenging Freud’s narrative construction of female sexuality and indicating “the price of equating female development with acculturation through the rites of passage established by the Oedipus complex.”

In discussing To the Lighthouse, Abel seeks to correct the usual reading of James’s relations with his mother and father as a Freudian Oedipal narrative and notes how Woolf “suggests the narrative repressions that inhere in the narrative of repression.” Woolf’s narratives of the 1920s seem much closer to the Kleinian developmental story than the Freudian. This is apparent in Lily Briscoe’s aesthetic and psychological struggles, her story being played against those of James and Cam. Abel analyses Lily’s paintings to demonstrate their connections with the controversies within psychoanalysis over the matrilineal and patrilineal status of cultural origins. Lily’s position as the non-biological “daughter” of Mrs. Ramsay enables her to effect a union with the “mother” through the medium of paint, constituted for the artist by an interdependence of presence and absence.

In A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas, Abel traces a shift in Woolf’s narrative from maternal to paternal genealogies; this, I believe, is the most challenging aspect of her book and one that deserves a discussion that goes well beyond the presentation of the case herein. These discursive texts, Abel writes, “resituate her career, and its diverse intersections with psychoanalysis, within the social history of gender.” In this turn, Abel perceives the beginnings of Woolf’s difficulties in constructing an oppositional maternal metaphor, difficulties that quickly became acute with fascism’s rise and appropriation of that metaphor. Finally, in Between the Acts, the move from Kleinian to Freudian fictions is complete.

When she came to write her last fiction, Woolf recorded in her diary her explicit attention to Freud. Moses and Monotheism and Between the Acts are “crisis texts that share a sense of a world that is ending.” Astutely, Abel points out that while Freud was exploring the decline of patriarchy, Woolf was conceding its triumph—a shared despair from very different points of view. As she does with the other novels, Abel reads from a skewed perspective that foregrounds conjunctions hitherto unacknowledged. Her analysis of Mrs. Manresa is exemplary: the “wild child of nature” plays out that equation “nature = woman = mother” that, “as fascism insisted, is axiomatic to patriarchy.”

Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis uses history to mediate between literature and psychoanalysis, identifying not only the developmental narrative of psychoanalysis itself but also its particular English version. Abel acknowledges the specific perspective of her readings, and she notes in passing some alternatives; her argument, however, does not accommodate alternatives and as such, I believe, is pointing to a fundamental tension between psychoanalytic and biographical readings of Woolf’s fiction. The work’s scope might have been broadened to engage some of the arguments it implies, but perhaps these will evolve among readers as the book begins to challenge other readings of Woolf’s texts. It may also be fruitful for others to note the gaps and silences in Abel’s text, the things she does not say. Most significantly, this work focuses attention on the sexual politics of modernism, the question of what might be termed the gender of modernity, and makes clear that Virginia Woolf, in her usual visionary way, is telling us stories that we may not yet quite understand but the plots of which we must live.

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Replying in 1967 to a letter from Noel Annan which asks how fully letters and diaries reveal inner character, Leonard Woolf suggests that people tend “much more often to write when they are miserable than when they are happy” (p. 561). Among the innovative features of Frederic Spotts’s excellent edition is the inclusion in text or footnotes of correspondence such as Annan’s to Leonard that illuminate the surrounding letters in each of the six thematically structured sections. An early one from Trinity scholar Arthur Gaye describes the students in Leonard’s college rooms as “the most offensive people I have ever met.” Later ones clarify, among other subjects, an argument with H. G. Wells, a disagreement with Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones concerning Moses and Monotheism; and, a number of family differences. It will surprise many to read from his mother’s letter that she was not invited to Leonard’s and Virginia’s wedding.

The editor informs us of 125 surviving letters from the seven year tour of duty in Ceylon with by far the largest number written to Lytton Strachey. It is in this time of painful separation from Cambridge friends that Leonard’s words above seem especially apropos. These letters, however, remain among the most interesting of the collection because they resist, as
Lynton’s do not, a rhetoric of self-pity. Spotts, whose introductions are generally fair and factual, prefers the more serious voice that emerges in 1909 “when the Cambridge undergraduate matured into a tough colonial administrator” (p. xii). The “existential feeling” that he notes only in a letter to Leonard’s sister Bella I find persuasive and significant throughout this earlier correspondence. While Leonard is often tempted romantically to indulge his depression, he rarely ignores the existential impact of external things. A distinct smell of cheese on the street, a gust of wind that blows out his reading lamp, flies swarming over rotting oysters, an ugly woman on the streets of Jaffna, such details repeatedly root body and mind in a new generally discomforting world.

Open to new experience, Leonard’s discussions on the reality of “change” come to characterize these youthful letters to Lynton: “The scene has changed here too & one changes inside too.” Quoting G.E. Moore, Lytton remains unconvinced: “As for what you say about change of course I don’t believe it” (p. 137). It is precisely a tolerance for diversity and for difference that characterizes Leonard’s growing maturity. Respecting the inviolable independence of others, in the course of this volume, he continually seeks to restrain in himself an overbearing egotism. To enter the world of the other, whether human or otherwise, involves a cultivated self-renunciation of the sort William Rodney learns while courting Katherine Hilbery in Night and Day. From the letters one sees how Leonard’s problems inform Virginia’s second novel. It was clearly an independence he sought, not always successfully, to cultivate and preserve in friendship and in marriage.

No less than people, pets inhabit their own separate domains. In one of many references to his pets he writes in 1963 that they will generally “admit you into their world if you go about it the right way” (p. 524). If we presume that the right way is to be tolerant of something inviolable in the other, this enterprise becomes wholly admirable. But how does one behave once admitted into the world of another? Had Leonard studied Wittgenstein, he would likely have agreed with the philosopher’s assumption that “if a lion could talk, we could not understand him”: While a house cat is neither a lion, nor, more relevantly, a sick and sometimes delusiously wise, the presumption of controlling intelligence invites, in each instance, supervision rather than openness. It is perhaps not surprising that this tendency of Leonard’s should emerge after Virginia’s death as an exaggerated need to guard and to supervise her literary reputation.

In his exchange with Annan, Leonard expresses an ongoing concern that the full disclosure of letters and diaries, often “dashed off in half a minute,” tend to be served up by biographers “as if they were carved in stone” (p. 561). The fear, however valid particularly at a time when literary critics are often so inclined, reveals concurrently a tendency towards “shepherding” (p. 236) that Leonard recognized and reproved in himself. The impulse surfaces also in letters concerning his mother. At one point her complete independence seems to aggravate him unduly. “If she had ever allowed any one to do anything for her she would have been all right, but this she would not do” (p. 245). The demands of caring for Virginia during her illnesses understandably fed the protective need to remain in control of a situation that could collapse momentarily into crisis, the need to be awake continually to recurring symptoms and to read them correctly. But as Virginia noted of her father, such behavior invites too easily “a legacy of dependence.” Leonard’s letters to Trekkie Parsons, while full of good advice, remain significantly free of this shepherding proclivity.

There can be no doubt as to Leonard’s love and devotion to his wife throughout their long relationship and Spotts has chosen wisely to include all of their correspondence. His editorial criteria for selection are consistent with the principles he outlines in each introduction. Important exclusions in a one volume collection are all but inevitable. My interest in the early letters explains a certain disappointment that he chose to omit four of the five letters written at Cambridge and so much of the correspondence “regarding his everyday life” (p. xii). I suspect that other readers would like to have seen more of the omitted “memoranda on political matters,” and that some scholars may complain that the editor does not indicate the particular collection from which each letter has been taken. These are minor complaints in regard to a superbly researched and comprehensive edition that will predictably delight readers of both Leonard and Virginia Woolf.

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Writing To the Lighthouse, Virginia Woolf tells us, laid the ghosts of her parents. Yet, a number of her readers do not believe her. Virginia Hyman is one of them, and her book is a conscientious attempt to display the ways in which Woolf remained entrapped in her family romance and the ways in which Woolf employed the essential predicament of her family experience as theme and variations throughout her narrative writing. “In fact,” Hyman writes, “the transformations both within the autobiographical narratives and between them are as remarkable as the transformations she creates in her fictions” (x). Her aim, then, is to face directly some of the problems in Woolf’s art, to try to explain the cause of the problems, while celebrating the great art of this too often tormented artist.

Hyman begins, with the autobiographical narratives, analysing Woolf’s ambivalent accounts of her father and her mother, with supporting glances at the diaries, emphasizing, as is not often done, Woolf’s sense of identification with her father, especially in contrast to her rejection of the Duckworth men. Hyman touches lightly the theme of sexual abuse, deeming it not to be the fundamental cause of Woolf’s problem, but which, if stressed more, could have strengthened her argument as to the power of Woolf’s emprisoning predicament (see the review of DeSalvo’s recent book in the last issue of VWVM). Then follow individual chapters on the early fiction and four devoted to To the Lighthouse. Hyman then pauses to consider Woolf’s feelings about “Mothers and Brothers,” as well as Vanessa and the younger generation of writers, such as Julian Bell, whom she fears as rivals; next, the romance with Vita (a failure, Hyman believes), then “The Displacement of the Self” in which Hyman explores the depression that followed the completion of To the Lighthouse and Woolf’s intimations of mortality that preceded that strange and wondrous work, The Waves, and in which, Hyman contends, Woolf attempts to create people without forebearers living in a world without a past or a future.

The final chapters deal with The Waves: the agonizing self-censoring transformation of the explicitness of The Pargiters into the elusive symbolism of The Years, the inadequacies of Three Guineas, and the elegiac nostalgia of Between the Acts.

Though disclaiming any systematic theoretical approach, Hyman has certainly absorbed insights from psychoanalytical studies of Woolf (e.g. Shirley Panken). Her method is to take a piece of narrative and connect what Woolf does with it to what is happening in Woolf’s life and mind (as far as that can be determined from diaries and letters, etc.) in order to explore the way in which Woolf projects the psychic situation into the narrative. Why, she asks, does Woolf write her Reminiscences ostensibly to describe Vanessa to her child, and then spend the whole piece talking about their parents and saying very little about Vanessa? Hyman seeks the answer in what is going on in Woolf’s life and what it is that compels her to do other than she promises. Why was Woolf unable to write The Pargiters as she intended? Why does The Years’ ending (the couple in the doorway) seem to be so weak? Why, Hyman asks, in Three Guineas does Woolf present herself as a powerless “daughter of an educated man”? Why, when indeed “she was a famous and successful novelist” (no mere daughter) and as a publisher could exercise power over aspiring writers, male or female? Why does she advocate a society of outsiders who will secede from the rest of society, a strategy which will only intensify their isolation and confirm their
powerlessness? The answers Hyman provides to these typical questions are always provocative, often convincing, and sometimes provoking.

She works with published sources exclusively, and one could argue that her portrait of the Stephen household could have profited from examining manuscript letters and other materials; but it is significant that, while their diagnoses of the problem differ, she and De Salvo, who examined the 1897 diary among other primary sources, are not so far apart in their vision of Woolf as struggling, but never succeeding in breaking out of the cycle of the family predicament.

So Hyman sees Woolf again and again trying to find either a way out of her trap into a realm of freedom or a way back to some Edenic state (St Ives without fights with Thoby or suicides). And also, again and again, Woolf’s projection of the image of a man and woman in love as the redeeming act, an image which had its source in her father’s “immortalization” of his marriage with Julia, made further legendary by Woolf in “Reminiscences,” and which appears and reappears throughout her narratives and most movingly in “A Haunted House.” Hence, in Hyman’s view, Woolf’s art is essentially and wonderfully elegiac.

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MRS. WOOLF IN LONDON

The Playhouse A dark stage revealed minimal props: In the left foreground a blackboard on its triangular, wooden easel announced, “ARTS SOCIETY ... October 26th at 7:30 p.m. Mrs. Woolf will talk on WOMEN AND FICTION ... EMDEN ROOM ... GIRTON COLLEGE?” An unpretentious podium at the opposite end of the stage bracketed its frame of public objects, this makeshift sign and podium, within which were backgrounded domestic civilities. On the rectangular table covered with green cloth sat a decanter of water and a plain, half-filled drinking glass. Two nondescript chairs accentuated austere simplicity, offering introductory visual complement to Mrs. Woolf’s own position on the problem of poverty, while simultaneously rendering faithful recovery of the Woolf’s lack-of-frills lifestyle. Suddenly, a stark, disembodied, tape-recorded voice—Virginia Woolf/Eileen Atkins—interrupted the hushed murmurs of her audience.

“Thank God, my long toil at this lecture is this moment ended.” And so began The Playhouse Theatre performance of A Room of One’s Own, which has been adapted and directed for the stage by Patrick Garland. Immediately, 1500 or so time travelers were effectively transported to Virginia Woolf’s 1928 Cambridge lecture through the script of her reminiscences. It is a play in two acts. Its set implies both the Junior Common Room at Girton College, Cambridge, and Virginia and Leonard Woolf’s home at 52 Tavistock Square. A ghostly conflation of home and lecture hall recall Mrs. Woolf’s penchant for the oscillation of simultaneous alternatives. Successful transition from stage to history is partly the effect of Ms. Atkins’ inspired performance and partly her uncanny resemblance to the image of Virginia Woolf as she appears in the X-ray photograph of 1935, now in the National Portrait Gallery in London.

Ms. Atkins faced her audience in a medium grey, double-pleated suit, the long points of her white lace collar repeating angularity of features and fashion. A flowing scarf of dark brown patterned with light brown and pale blue leaves passed for adornment. The only other signs of frivolity were bows on her dark suede walking shoes. Her well-researched solo portrayal is not the literal replication of Woolf’s voice, which we know from sound recordings to be deeply melodic and sonorous in tone. Rather, it is the meticulous delivery of what Atkins refers to as “essence.” Her essential Woolf was elegant, powerful, and sincere. She played on the scathing understatement and extended wit of Virginia Woolf’s argument, capturing the spirited conviction and suppressed rage with which expressed with prophetic insistence that Shakespeare’s sister “will be born.”

The reviews were virtually unanimous: “spell-binding” (The Times); “witty and passionate” (The Independent). According to Valerie Grove in The Sunday Times, Virginia Woolf’s great niece said she “got it exactly right.” Not unsurprisingly, Mary Warnock, the mistress of Girton, asked her to perform it on the original site at Cambridge in October. What had begun as “a labour of love,” as Ms. Atkins has described the first show, a reading at the Bloomsbury and Beyond fund-raising series for Charleston Farm in 1988, went on to become a dramatic production at the Hampstead Theatre, London, which opened on May 8th. After her Hampstead success, Ms. Atkins was asked to do 21 performances at The Playhouse, where George Bernard Shaw’s Arms and the Man was first performed in 1894.

AROO devotees may grumble that the Chloe and Olivia chapter and many poetic passages have been omitted, and there is no mention of Vita Sackville-West, who accompanied Virginia Woolf to those Cambridge lectures. Nor did the occasional strains of Nigel Hess’ original cello score, played by Andrea Hess, successfully represent Mrs. Woolf’s mind, as Ms. Atkins said the music was meant to. But the concessions of print to stage have, nevertheless, returned a masterpiece. Ms. Atkins’ performance is confident and convincing; she is aware of the rhythms of Woolf’s prose and displays a love of language suited to her subject. When she reminds us that founding a college to educate women contradicts the structure of a patriarchal family and the historical conditions of women’s domestic labor, and that Mrs. Seton has been poor for a very, very long time, even misogynists have begun to question, says Atkins.

As the curtain closed on Act One at the June 24th matinee, a woman in Row 6 behind me exclaimed, “Incredible!” “Brilliant!” Three final ovations from a London audience further confirmed my own applause.

Brenda Lyons
Balliol College
Oxford


Elizabeth Richardson states that her aspiration in assembling this index of reproductions of pictures relating to the Bloomsbury group is to emulate Roger Fry’s “really useful collector...the creative collector...who by merely bringing objects together, classifying them, interpreting their interrelationships creates new values altogether.” It is a wide ranging guide to the portraits, sketches and photographs of Bloomsbury people, places and things reproduced in books, periodicals and exhibitions catalogues. It is an impressive reference work, painstakingly researched, and clearly a labour of love. The largest single entry—twenty-seven pages—is on Virginia Woolf, and in all there are 206 entries in 297 pages, ranging from Bloomsbury core members like Vanessa Bell, Lytton Strachey and John Maynard Keynes, to peripheral associates and friends like Lady Ottoline Morrell and Vita Sackville-West, the previous generation of Leslie and Julia Stephen, Julia Margaret Cameron, and Anne Thackeray, places like Asheham House, Charleston and the Omega workshops, and Hogarth Press dust jackets.

Despite its rather dry, conventional bibliographical format, no doubt essential for purposes of standardization, there are some nice touches. In the Virginia Woolf section, for example, item B76 has the explanation, “the drawing has been reversed, even the artist’s initials E.R.H. being in Jabberwocky!” The Lenare photograph B67 is described as “to the waist, a softer expression”; and in B32 “the man at her right is hidden behind a newspaper, and the man at her left shows as knees only.”

Perhaps inevitably in such a broad-ranging survey, there are confusions and errors. I have carefully checked the Leslie Stephen items, with which I am most familiar, and find a number of omissions and inaccuracies of page numbering, additional editions and reissues of books with portraits, and books which have been over-
looked altogether. There is a good deal of confusion in items A18, A19, A20, and A21, A22, for example as described as: 'Stephen Family and Visitors'; when A18 and A19 also include visitors. Richardson misses a fifth portrait in the familiar 1902 Beresford studio photographs of Leslie and Virginia Stephen. It is of Leslie Stephen alone and is reproduced in J.M. Robertson's A History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century (London: Watts & Co., 1929. One and two volume issues, but page numbering is consecutive in the two volumes and so in both issues the portrait is facing p. 404). Nor is there excuse for the omission in A36 of the Leslie Stephen portrait in Harold Orel's Victorian Literary Critics (London: Macmillan, 1984, facing p. 118). Such inaccuracies — and there are yet more tedious but annoying errors in the three pages of Leslie Stephen items alone—suggest that the work may be flawed throughout, but until a more definitive work is produced Bloomsbury watchers will have to make do with this, relying on and perhaps, like me, relishing their detective skills and superior, if clearly narrower, knowledge than the author's. Like all St. Paul's Bibliographies this book is beautifully produced. The layout is clear and unambiguous. There are comprehensive indices of artists, locations, photographers and subjects, fourteen pages of glossy illustrations, and a particularly good appendix on the Cameron photographs of Julia Stephen, with useful sketches by Sarah Black, who also drew the initials at the alphabetical breaks in the body of the Iconography. And the Angelica Garnett dust jacket is a nice and wholly appropriate touch.

Gillian Fenwick
Victoria University in the University of Toronto

WOOLF IN CHINA

In 1935–36, Julian Bell was professor of English at the National University of Wuhan in China. It was he who first introduced Virginia Woolf's novels to Chinese students. After that, three of her books were translated into Chinese in the 30s and 40s of this century. In 1949, the People's Republic of China was established. New China had to follow the example of the Soviet Union in all respects. According to the theories of the Soviet scholars, western countries were imperialist countries, and modern western culture imperialist culture. That's why nobody in China studied or translated the works of Virginia Woolf from 1949 to 1979.

In 1979, the Communist Party of China adopted the open-door policy. That encouraged Chinese scholars to study western modern literature again. The Mark on the Wall was translated into Chinese, and we had three Chinese versions of this essay within two years. I translated To the Lighthouse into Chinese in 1981. In the next year, I read nearly all the critical essays written by Virginia Woolf, and translated a number of them that I liked best. It was a hard job for me because it is not easy to convey the original images and rhetorical devices into another language.

My third book Studies on Virginia Woolf is an anthology of critical essays by American, English, French, German and Russian scholars. My fourth book is a monograph entitled Virginia Woolf and Her Art of Fiction. They have all been well received by the Chinese readers. My fifth and sixth books are now at the publishing houses in China. I am not quite sure when they will come out.

In China, Woolf's novels have had a strong influence on some young novelists. They have learned a lot of new techniques from her. They use internal monologues to present a character's psychic life at the prespeech level, to express deeper and more hidden emotions and feelings. They build up the framework of their fictional structure upon this character's psychological time. They express the private visions of their characters through private symbols. By the depiction of inner state of their characters, they have enriched fictional arts in China.

Those young novelists agree with Virginia Woolf that external reality is less significant than a person's perception of reality, i.e., his own vision. They came to know that external details are not enough, and that the reality which matters most is the inner being. They agree with Virginia Woolf that the novelists should feel bound neither by convention nor by tradition. And they adopt an experimental attitude in their creative writing.

Through the works of Virginia Woolf, they have also got some new ideas about the nature of the human being. In the past, Chinese people thought that the human being was single-dimensional. In traditional Chinese fictions, if character A was a good person, everything about him would be good. If character B was a bad one, everything about him should be bad. But Woolf pointed out: "You need fifty pairs of eyes to observe Mrs. Ramsay. And that's not enough." And now the Chinese novelists begin to adopt multiple points of view to depict multi-dimensional characters.

I have introduced the works of Virginia Woolf to the Chinese people, and I have also given lectures on Virginia Woolf in British and American universities. I hope that my work in the field of cultural exchange will help to increase mutual understanding and friendship between the east and the west.

Qu, Shi-Jing (Frank Chu)
Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences

THE VIRGINIA WOOLF SOCIETY ELECTIONS

Elections of new officers come up at the end of this year and the Society has received two nominations thus far:

I am happy to nominate Karen Levenback to be the next President of the Virginia Woolf Society. As Secretary-Treasurer of the Society, Karen has endowed even the most mundane of tasks (such as collecting the dues!) with grace and tact. She has worked very hard at keeping members abreast of activities related to Woolf scholarship, particularly by means of the thorough Bibliography. Karen has also contributed a great deal to the Society's friendly and open character (fostering the "party consciousness" Woolf knew was so essential to our wellbeing). In addition to her commitment to the Society, Karen's scholarship on Woolf and the Great War is an important contribution to our understanding of Woolf's life and work. Karen has been such an effective spokesperson for the Society as secretary-treasurer that her succeeding J.J. Wilson as President seems natural... so vote for Karen!

Mark Hussey

It gives me great pleasure to nominate Mark Hussey as the next secretary-treasurer of the Virginia Woolf Society. Mark is a fellow infmite wit, insight, and energy (witness The Singing of the Real World: The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf, which was published to rave reviews from members of the community and the skill and grace with which he organized the session, "Virginia Woolf: The Fiction, the Reality, and the Myth of War," for the last MLA Convention and edited the last issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany and the assiduity with which he's going about organizing the first Virginia Woolf Convention [see the VWS column]). More importantly, I think, Mark and I have worked closely both on my contributions to the session and to the VWM (he's a terrific editor/proofreader) and on any number of other matters involving the Society during my tenure as secretary-treasurer, and, I hope, we shall continue to do so in the future. He has always lent a willing ear and offered valuable counsel. Mark is committed to the Society and to the spirit of Virginia Woolf. AND, he has a computer (and a plan for managing mailing labels)! Moreover, as far as I know, he doesn't speak in an infinite regression of parenthesses (though one never knows, does one!).

With great enthusiasm—
Karen L. Levenback

A mutual admiration Society—how nice! But should anyone else wish to run for either office, please do send in your nomination in time for publication in the Fall VWM.
VWS "SOCIETY COLUMN" NEWS

As we enter the new decade (depending, of course, on whether said decade has begun or is yet to begin), we are again inspired by the huge response to Society-sponsored sessions at the MLA Convention (over two hundred people attending the session on "Virginia Woolf and Autobiography," led by Evelyn Haller, and the session on "Virginia Woolf and the Reality, Fictive, and Myth of War," led by Mark Hussey) and dismayed at the rooms at which we are assigned (leaving many members of the audience standing uncomfortably and many others unable to get in).

And, we are the more inspired by the good Southern cooking of J.J. Wilson (who quite literally prepared the good eats at the Society's party) and her sister (who so generously "lent" the Society her home) and by Lucio Ruotolo (who showed his slides) and Leslie Hankins (who showed us a video of her trip to the lighthouse).

Next year's MLA Convention in Chicago will again have two sessions sponsored by the Society (in rooms large enough to accommodate all those who want to attend, we hope). Ten-page papers for '90 MLA Convention in Chicago are needed by Marilyn Zucker/163 Old Town Road/ East Setauket, NY 11733 (516-275-6307) ("Virginia Woolf and the Tradition of the Essay") and Vera Neverow-Turk/229 South Boulevard/Nyack, NY 10960 (914-358-4364) ("Virginia Woolf and Humour") by 1 April.

Just now, Society dues are still coming in ($10 or $5 for students, retirees, and those not employed—anyone wishing to join please send the appropriate amount to the Virginia Woolf Society at 1545 18th Street, NW (107) Washington, DC 20036). Our members in Canada have to send international money orders or checks made out to American banks (the banks here charge a $10 service fee for Canadian checks). I'm sorry that I've not made this clear in the past and I apologize for the inconvenience that the checks returned to Canada caused and I thank you all for taking the time to get depositable dues to us.

We are please to learn that Professor Qu Shi-jing (Frank) has returned safely to China and we wish him well. Frank has suggested a Virginia Woolf Convention in Shanghai—some time in the future.

But in the not-so-distant future, Mark Hussey (with Vera Neverow-Turk) is organizing a Virginia Woolf Conference at Pace University in New York in early June 1991. He welcomes any suggestions for the program (please do not send papers) and (to use J.J.'s expression) for extra-curricular activities (including dramatic presentations and readings).

SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
Virginia Woolf Miscellany
Department of English
Rohnert Park, California 94928

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED.

Please write to him at: Department of English/Pace University/One Pace Plaza/New York, NY 10038.

For the present, there's a lot going on. And I thank members for keeping us up to date on the latest in the world of Woolf scholarship.

Diane Gillespie writes that she has "a little piece called 'More Bloomsbury Bookplates' in the Charleston Newsletter 23 (June 1989), 28-37." Diane has a scholarly piece, "Blake and Bloomsbury: Mental Warfare" in English Literature in Transition, 1080-1920, 33.1 (1990): 5-28. (Thank you, Diane, for sending me a copy.) Diane also alerts members that Pat Rosenbaum and Jim Hauke might be contacted for a list of the editorial committee and editors (of which she is one) for the forthcoming Shakespeare Head Press Edition of Virginia Woolf (Basil Blackwell), which is projected to appear in 1993. And, Diane thinks that Society members might be interested in knowing that the December 1989 issue of ART IN AMERICA "has a beautifully illustrated article by Jill Johnstone called 'Painting Charleston' (153-63, 192-93)."


Louise Desalvo's Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life is out in paperback (Ballantine Books).


J.J. and I again send our best wishes for a healthy, happy, and productive 1990.

Ever—
Karen L. Levenback
Secretary-Treasurer

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