FROM VWM HERSELF, in her hour of need...  

The VWM is gratified at the quality and the quantity of material sent us and only wishes our pages and budget were more elastic. Our new book review editor, our new pedagogy column, letters from you (always precious), the conference reports and future plans, and "theme issues" strain our resources and make us perhaps less "miscellaneous" than is our wont. And yet already another theme has been proposed for Fall 1993: Denise Marshall (Oswege) has offered to edit a "VW and Popular Culture" issue. An irresistible idea! (about which more later). But in the main we shall continue our brief, various, "common reader" approach to Woolf studies. Do talk with any of the editors (Mark Hussey, Lucio Ruotolo, Peter Stansky, J.J. Wilson) if you and your institution supported schools, we are way short of even our modest budget.  

NEW BOOK REVIEW PAGE  

To keep up with the lively publication of books on Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury, VWM will now have a page of short reviews of new books in each issue. Pat Laurence will edit it, but since we need at least "fifty pairs of eyes to see with," we would welcome reviewers for these books. In general, review length will be about 250 words so that books can be reviewed and publicized during the year in which they are published, along with occasional longer reviews. Deadlines will be July 1 and Dec. 1. If you have some experience reviewing and are interested in doing this on a rotating basis, please send in your vita with a sample review to Prof. Patricia Laurence, City College, English Department, 137th St. & Convent Ave., New York, N.Y., 10031. (J.J. has forwarded earlier letters on to Pat, by the way.)  

FROM THE READERS:  

It may be of interest to your readers to know that the sixty-nine surviving issues of the Hyde Park Gate News is now the property of the British Library. It is almost entirely—including the 'Cockney' serials—written out, not in Virginia's hand, but in Vanessa's.  

Anne Olivier Bell  
Firle, Lewes, E. Sussex  

I was delighted to read Anne Olivier Bell's letter concerning DeSalvo's book. As a psychoanalyst of 40 years' experience, as well as the author of Who Killed Virginia Woolf? A Psychobiography (Human Sciences Press), I agreed with Bell on every one of her major issues... My book is dedicated to the task of examining who and what contributed to Woolf's illness. After seven years of research, I came to the conclusion that heredity played a large part, as did her internalized relationships with both parents, her dealings at the time with Leonard, Vanessa, and Vita, as well as the traumatic nature of her adolescence; all of these factors experienced within the setting of her war experiences. It is significant that I, a practicing Freudian psychoanalyst, did not assess George's advances as pivotal enough to include as a major source of Woolf's pathology. While my findings are not as dramatic as DeSalvo's, they are much more in keeping with the realities one discovers in a lifetime spent in the exploration of mental illness.  

Alma H. Bond  
606 Truman Ave.  
Key West, FLA 33040  

Barbara Gates, (VWM, 1982, 18, Spring, 5) suggested that a rationale for Virginia Woolf's suicide could have been provided by her father's views on suicide published in 1882, the year of her birth, which argued that superior moral principles can overcome the prevailing moral code against suicide.  

There is one other feature in Virginia's life which is noteworthy in the light of her suicide. In a recent study of suicides famous enough to have a biography written about them, David Lester (Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica, 1989, 79, 450-452) found that 16 of the 30 had experienced the loss of a parent (or very close relative) in childhood. Fifteen of these losses were through death, and 15 of the later suicides were between the ages of five and fourteen at the time of the loss. Virginia (who was included in Lester's sample) was 13 when her mother died of natural causes.  

William Styron wrote an essay later developed into a book (Darkness Invisible) on his depressions and suicidal crises in which he described his growing realization that his problems were caused by his failure to complete the mourning for his mother who died when he was thirteen. He carried with him dammed-up sorrow, rage and guilt which eventually developed into a serious depressive illness.  

It is fashionable today, when the emphasis on the physiological causes of depression is popular, to dismiss Virginia's breakowns and suicide as the result of an inherited bipolar affective disorder (manic-depressive psychosis) which today would be treatable with lithium. However, the death of her mother and the likelihood that she too failed to complete the mourning for her mother, suggests an additional psychodynamic cause for her later depressions, making suicide even more likely when she was faced with crises.  

David Lester  
Center for the Study of Suicide  
RR41, 5 Stonegate Court  
Blackwood, NJ 08012  

And Maryellen Beech in McLean, Virginia has a large collection of VW books and autographs, for example a signed copy of "Beau Brunell." Before I offer them to a private dealer, I wish to make them available to VWM readers. My home telephone is (703) 621-0098.  

Anne Olivier Bell's piece in VWM #38 is an inspiration. Not only is it well written in standard (non-academic) English but it lets us look at the early years of a very great, very powerful modern writer in terms other than those of woeful victimization and exploitation. How refreshing and unusual! I hope it marks a new direction in Woolf investigation...  

Julian Moynahan  
Rutgers
And as part of a longer letter decrying the necessary brevity of her article on Eliot and Woolf here included, Molly Hoff complains: "There must be an unwritten rule that Woolf criticism must have a political or psychiatric orientation. What ever happened to literary literary criticism?"

**A MOMENT OF BEING:
The Second Annual Virginia Woolf Conference**

As I stood in line at the Employment Development Department (politically correct term for the Unemployment Office) I could not help questioning the relevance of the four days of intense intellectual intercourse I had just spent at the Virginia Woolf Conference to the reality of the endless hours of humiliation and degradation I was undergoing.

Louise De Salvo, I remembered, had expressed a similar concern in her fiery inaugural speech when recounting her (lower-middle-class) students' resistance to Woolf's text because, they said, (the upper-middle-class) Woolf "could not know." It is certainly not hard to see that much of Woolf's writing does not deal directly with the material reality of her characters (and consequently, of her readers). Yet, I knew that irrelevant it was not, for it had enabled me to stand in line. It had moved me to live! Reconnecting with the Woolf community had created a moment that would go into the "secret deposit of exquisite moments" from which one pays back, as Clarissa well knew, for the "darkness," that eternal suffering" that is life.

There were, to be sure, "rumbles and whispers," even sometimes a competitiveness sadly reminiscent of the "patriarchy," so readily summoned as the archetypal villain. Yet, something seemed to have merged. Despite the differences in approach and interpretation there was a sense of common cause, a determination to explore the exciting possibilities offered by Woolf's writing and to make her text relevant to the immediate experiences of our students. For we all knew, or at least I hoped, that Woolf's artistic creations and her bold experiments with conventional literary forms coexist with a deep awareness of the social forces that help shape the individual.

There were insightful readings which make one rethink one's most basic assumptions. Mrs. Dalloway's "evil distrust" of Dr. Bradshaw and of Miss Kilman, for example, was interpreted as obsessive/compulsive behavior. Miss Kilman, on the other hand, was said to be making a political statement with her overweight body. These exciting new ways of looking at Woolf's text gave one—especially the reader who has a resistance to psychoanalysis—much to ponder. Why for example, did Woolf create an unsympathetic character out of a woman—Miss Kilman—who was portrayed as a victim of the patriarchy?

Overall, the mood was one of celebration of the feminine, of Mrs. Ramsay's orchestrated authority. There was much sympathy, even a privileging of Woolf's text. In an excellent paper, "Who Comes First, Joyce or Woolf?" Richard Pearce of Wheaton College argued that Woolf's subversiveness—her reversal of traditional values—comes first because Woolf reconstructs authority while Joyce's rebellion perpetuates the very father of authority. Literary modernism was redefined to include Woolf's social focus. Woolf emerged triumphant, both as artist and as ideological construct.

The greatest moment of this most enriching and inspiritng experience was the closing session where Jane Marcus (whom a younger member of the group described as "the godmother") "gathered us all together in thanks" to the great editor. It was wonderful to see Jane, a self-declared propagandist, come down from her "cocky state" to graciously and generously acknowledge how much she had learned in the course of these few days.

Closure had become an invitation to open up. The desire to transgress all categorical imperatives and to deconstruct binary oppositions reigned supreme. No attempts were made to sum-up with "golden nuggets of truth," or to impose wholeness on an incomplete and fragmented text (and world). The only certainty in the air was an eagerness, an impatience almost, to get back together to create new possibilities.

The Third Annual Virginia Woolf Conference promises to do just that—to "combine, to create," even if the question remains, "To whom?"

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**Rita Tucker Epes**

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(Ed.'s note: Isato's photo elsewhere in this VWM; samples of her work will appear in future issues too.)
INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS TO THE THEME
OF WOOLF’S INFLUENCE

“You are just like your Aunt Trudy...” is the way I was first introduced to the issue of influence (or was it just an analogy?)! Whatever its intent (and it may have been an insult or a warning), I still remember the dismaying sense that I was being stripped of those few tender shoots of individuality that had managed to push through the hard soil of family life. Thus I am viscerally aware of the “anxiety of influence” and aware of the irony in my editing this particular theme issue about Woolf’s influence on writers and other artists.

And yet her influences cannot be denied—I hear traces of Woolf’s style in my own doughy prose, and I am glad of its leavening. Does her influence on my ways of knowing, reading, writing, make me any less myself? Has it gotten in the way of my finding my own voice? Possibly. A scary thought.

Let me quickly, therefore, move on to thinking back through others (sic), and I perk up right away, remembering the paintings we saw at the last Woolf Conference by Isota Tucker Epes. These pieces pay generous and attentive tribute to the influence of reading and teaching Woolf on Isota’s life (see illustration and Isota’s letter in FROM THE READERS), but they are not normally derivative. Isota is entranced by Woolf, and in no way anxious about that connection. There was a sculptor too whom we heard about in a VWM article, deeply influenced by Woolf, and just recently someone sent me an interview with astrophysicist Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar, in which he credited Wool’s “transparent prose” with opening him up to the elegance of certain mathematical formulae.

A much reprinted photograph of Alice Walker shows her dwarfed? dominated? nor? preserved over by a large poster of the young Woolf, apparently an influence Walker does not feel diminishes her own accomplishment. Maxine Hong Kingston acknowledged in an interview that Woolf’s Orlando was an enabling text for her supremely original Woman Warrior.

Orlando, not surprisingly, has spawned some quite unusual progeny. For example: a 1981 film called Freak Orlando, described as an outrageous spectacle, beginning on the outskirts of Freak City and following Orlando (Magdanela Montezuma) as she changes her sex back and forth, becomes a prisoner, joins the circus, falls in love, etc! Rebecca Stephens has another film reference in her new “column” here. Tracy Sedey finds evidence of Orlando in Robert West. We know that Enid Bagnold was much taken by Orlando and A.N. Wilson credits it as a direct influence on Rose Macaulay’s Told by an Idiot. (For an extended and brilliant study of the Woolf/Macaulay connections, may I recommend the critically acclaimed biography of Macaulay done by Woolf scholar Jane (Novak) Emery.)

A Room of One’s Own, especially as delivered by Eileen Atkins on the stage and in a shorter version on public television, is bound to be having seismic effects on its SRO audiences. Here is a brief vignette from M.F.K. Fisher’s last days, recounted for us by her friend, Henrietta Humphreys: “When I saw Eileen Atkins in Room, I longed to have Mary Frances at my side. Determined to share my enthusiasm, I found an audio tape by Claire Bloom to take up to my next visit to her bedside. She seemed pleased at the prospect and indeed, after only a short while, said, ‘Let’s listen to that tape now.’ When we heard passages like ‘a good dinner is of great importance to good talk. One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well,’ she literally squirmed with delight.” And it turned out Fisher knew the text almost by heart, correcting Henrietta’s figures on how much income one needs (which was a good joke, because Henrietta is a financial advisor and supposed to be on top of that sort of data). The late great food writer Fisher actually told Henrietta that when she began writing seriously, she deliberately stopped reading both Colette and Virginia Woolf “because she feared being too heavily influenced by writing styles she so admired. Later, when comfortable with the style she adopted quite on her own, she began making up for lost time by reading everything of these two literary heroines she had purposely set aside.” A good lesson in how to handle anxiety of influence! See also Judy Little’s article here on Pym.

Poets and dramatists also acknowledge Woolf’s influence. For example, Valerie Neiman Colander published in the February 1990 Sojourner her “Variations of a diary entry of Virginia Woolf” and a Canadian poet, Russell Smith published his meditations on Woolf’s letters in Event, the Douglas College Review (summer 1991). A review of Judith Ortiz Coker’s 1990 Silent Dancing memoirs credits Woolf “for the inspiration that fuels her recollections, and for her blend of poetry and prose. The many dramas being written around Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group are dulce et utile, as we have experienced at the Woolf conferences.

More surprising perhaps are the influences in modern music. Wallace Beery “distilled” a dramatic narrative for mezzo-soprano and piano from “The Moment: Summer’s Night.” Dominick Argento’s song cycle on Diary excerpts (including that "last" as printed in A Writer’s Diary about haddock and sausage) was awarded the 1975 Pulitzer. And Mark Hussey mentioned the recent ODC dance performance “Loose the Thread” on the Bloomsbury Group.

So, yes, influences direct and indirect, willed or unconscious, adoring or despising (see Mary Pawlowski’s review of “accuse...” in this issue)! Even this brief dip into the theme shows what an opened topic we have chosen. And we aren’t even considering juju influences such as the Edward Albee title... There are explicit statements of influence by May Sarton, by Eudora Welty, and internal evidence that even Agatha Christie may have been a Woolf reader (from Barney Baley and Elizabeth Smith). Lauren Coode, omnivorous and discriminating reader, sends us a scene from a novel by Jane Rogers, Our Living Image, in which two of the characters disagree over the interpretation of Mrs. Ramsey and Lily Briscoe (as so many of us have). Lauren also found a scene featuring a rather odd version of Woolf herself in Norma Rosen’s John and Anzia, a recent novel about the romance of John Dewey and Anzia Yezierska.

Tillie Olsen was much influenced by Woolf and many of us much influenced by Tillie, and thus continues... Each time scholars turn their attention to an obscure but telling life we show the influence of Woolf’s enduring and exemplary biographical essays. And, latest entry, a play again about Orlando, from Toronto, adapted by Sergio Sant’anna, and “utterly faithful to the experimental style of Woolf’s writing,” “utterly faithful?” not exactly a Bloomsbury concept, but... J.J. Wilson

Sonoma State University
And here are some more interesting items of influence, gathered for us by Rebecca Stephens, who sees this gathering as an intermittent column for VWM. We are grateful.

If you are one of those people who stands in bookstores and checks indexes for "Woolf, Virginia," this column is for you. A collection of brief and often tangential references to Woolf in contemporary literary scholarship, it is intended to keep Woolf scholars updated on what others are saying not only about Woolf herself, but about our efforts as well. As the title suggests, below that of standard bibliographies, collecting items which may go unnoticed, but which may also offer useful insights for new scholarship.

In Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Atoni-Garde (Harvard UP, 1990), Susan Rubin Suleiman writes of Angela Carter's 1977 novel, The Passion of New Eve, as "rewriting of many stories, ranging from Greek mythology and the Bible to Faust, Wuthering Heights, Pilgrim's Progress, and Virginia Woolf's comic novel, Orlando" (136). The Carter and Woolf novels narrate fantastical the impossible Deirdrean dream of getting beyond not only the unity of self or body, but also the force which implies difference or antagonism, and which keeps us desiring, or thinking in, these oppositions. This discussion concludes Suleiman's historical investigation of the politics and poetics of female eroticism, which begins with Kate Millet's Sexual Politics and considers the linguistic alternatives of the new French feminists.

Orlando the character appears in Fredric Jameson's discussion of film in Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Jameson compares film as a medium to Orlando in that it passed through two distinct identities, those of silence and sound (69).

Unlike numerous contemporary theorists, including Jameson, Linda Hutcheon, in A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (Routledge 1988), resists defining postmodernism in simple opposition to modernism. Her brief references to the high modernists consistently include Woolf, and she credits these writers with experimental efforts often attributed to postmodern writers. Her discussion of "Interstextuality, Parody and the Discourses of History" mentions "Audrey Thomas's use and abuse of Virginia Woolf's To The Lighthouse and The Waves in Intertidal Life" (139). And the everlasting marginal perspective articulated in A Room of One's Own empowers Hutcheon's theory of decentered postmodernism. Hutcheon's 1989 book, The Politics of Postmodernism (Routledge) does not mention Woolf.

Albin Kernan, in The Death of Literature (Yale 1990), decry's the demise of older humanistic views like Woolf's about "the integrity of the literary work and its ineradicable meaning, about the creative imagination of the authors of literature and the perfection of the created artifact, about the great tradition of literary masterpieces and the long line of imitation of influence" (80). Although this remark shows a high regard for Woolf, the politics of her after-the-fact admission to the great tradition raise a number of questions. In a later discussion of art as propaganda, Kernan cites "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" for its questioning of the artistic merit of propagandistic "subart" (91).

Woolf's connection of mental charity and individual liberty, articulated in Three Guineas, grounds Robert L. Caserio's discussion in "Celibate Sisters-in-Revolution: Towards Reading Sylvia Townsend Warner" (In Boone and Caldwell, eds. Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism, Routledge 1990). Against Jane Marcus, Caserio contests the origin of Woolf's "pacifism and mysticism" in her Aunt Caroline Emilia Stephen, suggesting that relations between these orientations and patriarchy need to be pursued. In this critical "recovery" of Warner, Caserio not only establishes a male- and female-authored tradition of chaste revolutionary pairs of women; he also investigates patriarchal constrictions as condition of possibility for the feminist ideals which derive from charity. He places The Years in this tradition, but does not discuss the novel specifically.

K. Stephens
Tallahassee State University

I have two announcements for the "Virginia Woolf's Influence" Miscellany. The first is that the Doris Lessing Society is putting on a session at the MLA convention in New York entitled "Virginia Woolf and Doris Lessing: Making it New" organized by Jean Tobin of University of Wisconsin Centers, Sheboygan and Ruth Saxton of Mills College. The four papers are:

1. "Virginia Woolf and Doris Lessing: That Transitive Turn of Mind" Linda Chown, Grand Valley State University
2. "The Outsider Within: Virginia Woolf's Legacy to Doris Lessing as seen in Mrs. Dalloway and The Four-Gated City." Christine W. Sizemore, Spelman College

The second announcement I fear will just miss the deadlines for papers, but if you know of someone working in this area, perhaps you could pass it on. I did mention it at my session at the Virginia Woolf Conference. I am chairing a NEMLA session (Mar. 26-28, 1993 in Philadelphia) on "The Influence of Virginia Woolf on The British Novel." Theologically papers are to be sent by Sept. 1, 1992 to the chairs so that they can get the program copy in by Oct. 1, 1992, but people can call me at (404) 223-7333 to see where I am in the process.

Christine W. Sizemore
Spelman College

VIRGINIA WOOLF AND T.S. ELIOT

When T.S. Eliot explicated his 1930 play The Cocktail Party as a resurrection of Euripidean Alcestis in "Ithaka" he received the criticism of many laborious sitting. Always conscious of being a bearer of tradition, however, he sliced through everything, cutting people up, putting them back together, obscurely distributing the fragments of the Euripidean fantasy among his characters (See Plato, Phaedrus 278e). Eliot did not, however, make explicit the debt owed to Virginia Woolf's Mlle. Dalloway, but like Euripides he juxtaposed in his drama what seemed to be the "two unrelated statements and trusted us to pull them together." Superficially, one notices the party consciousness, the Harley Street psychiatrist Sir Harry Harcourt-Ready, the ringing of doorbells, the Mayor of Oxford accompanied by a serious subplot, the death of the mystic Ceia, and many such "quotations." Oddly, while the Dalloway hypotext is rather clear, the Alcestis hypotext is all but unrecognizable. Similarly, Alcestis in Mrs. Dalloway is very obscure.

Euripides' fantasy concerns incongruous matters of cultural values familiar in time of war when one person is asked to die for others. We always require that soldiers take our place and, please, lay down their lives. Like a good soldier, Alcestis, generously, has volunteered to take the place of her husband King Admetos of Thebes who must otherwise die. She makes a gift of herself for his wellbeing. But why did she do it? The question is never answered, but we can surmise. Although Heracles obligingly brings her back to life, Admetos learns through suffering, in the interim, that life without her is not worth living (the "pathemathen" commonplace of ancient Greek culture). Woolf did not acknowledge Alcestis as a source for her novel like Eliot or "Fielding coming out and addressing the world" (CR 29), but trusted to the common reader.

The Euripidean elements are clear in Clarissa who, like Admetos, is a prominent hostess and zealous for life. "Oh, if she could have her life over again." Others, too, play their classical roles, like Mrs. Hilbery whose words allude to the drunken Heracles: "It is certain that we must die" (267). The empty speech of Admetos reverberates emphatically in the mouths of Rezia and Mrs. Filmer: "They should not separate them against their wills" (224-5, 228). Rezia speaks in the style of Gower's Alcestis (Confessio Amantis VII, 1937): "She could say whatever came into her head" (221). Even Elizabeth Dalloway imagines the consolation of Alcestis' resignation as if
some woman breathed her last...just brought off that act of supreme dignity" (209).

The Common Reader (CR 185) points subtly to Alcestis by alluding to the daisy in Chaucer, "the queene Alcest" in the prologue to The Legend of Good Women, and reminds one of Peter's Daisy: She, like Alcestis, has two children and "would give [Peter] everything, everything he wanted," yet should she be unwilling to die for him after their marriage, "she'd be a widow with a past" (238-9). Thus, Peter's assertion, "he didn't mean to die yet," has an ironic, ambiguous thrust (239). Alcestis, further, clarifies the antipathy Clarissa feels for Peter. "He asked impossible things"; "with Peter, everything had to be shared" including one's soul (93, 10). Thewife he married on his passage to India, evidently now dead, is highly suggestive of his success. His flawed character in this regard is known even to Lady Bruton who says he is "in trouble with some woman...they had all guessed that was at the bottom of it" (183). As a man who is afraid to die he is, like Admetos, "aware of people talking behind his back" (93).

Moreover, Clarissa's "indomitable vitality" ("how unbelievable death was" (185)) indicates her unwillingness for sacrifice on his behalf." [Clarissa] would be frightfully sorry for him; she would think what in the world she could do to give him pleasure (short always of the one thing)...the other thing [life] after all came so much more naturally" (226). Obviously, "it would not have been a success, their marriage" (93); and rather ominously, Peter depletes Clarissa's marriage to Richard who "would stifle her soul" (114). Thus he reproaches, "She is not dead!" (95), a comment which is otherwise severely undermotivated.

Septimus Smith, for whom Evans returns from Thessaly saying that the unseen might survive like Alcestis (105), makes the required voluntary surrender: "I'll give it you," (226), a soldier's delayed act of valor, willingly surrendering his life, but for whom Clarissa asks, "Why had he done it" when it is, rather, she who appears to Peter at the end, mute like Alcestis but with renewed vitality for them both: "It was her gift," as well (185).

Both Woolf and Eliot rough-hew Euripidean characters and themes to fit the narrow Pruecrustian bed of their respective motifs. For Woolf's readers, such an obscure continuum may be onerous, yet it provides the kingpost for the novel, an aspect of "the more bony support" that young Muriel Bradbrook discerned in Ulysses (so clearly labelled) but felt lacking in Mrs. Dalloway. If Eliot saw throughout Mrs. Dalloway what has been heretofore unseen, Alcestis held in colloidial suspension, he did not acknowledge that his play looked to Euripides' as its hypostasis just as Woolf's had, but left to readers the labor of pulling it together from the Dalloway parallels he used both as kin and kind. A decade after Woolf's death it seems that Eliot still felt that the task of criticism and writers is "to bring the poet back to life." Hence, the significance of Alcestis as Eliot's hypostasis as well as the importance in Mrs. Dalloway. By so using the novel as a thematic model, Eliot indirectly paid Woolf his highest compliment. Conscious of being the bearer of a tradition in which a Greek play was his remote source, he clearly saw Virginia Woolf as his immediate predecessor. At least, it's pretty to think so.

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Notes
2 Hypostasis is George Santayana's term for a specific literary source, in his theory of transtextuality which he distinguishes from ordinary intertextuality, in Palimpsests.

INFLUENTIAL ANXieties: WOOLF AND PYM

In public responses to the question of "influence," Barbara Pym was most likely to mention Huxley, Stevie Smith, Compton-Burnett, Beijerman and Larkin ("Finding" 382-3). Yet in her notebooks and letters (some still unpublished and hence my references to scholars who have seen them), and in her speech at the University of Reading at an evening marking the sixtieth anniversary of her graduation at Reading, she quotes Woolf or refers to her formulations of certain issues of feminism or narration.

Born in 1913 and never married (though often in love), Pym grew up with the generation that expected to marry and that faced the Freudian, anti-feminist backlash. Yet Pym copies into an unpublished notebook in 1931 (Malloy 196, 5) the passage from To the Lighthouse where Lily recalls her earlier decision that she "need never marry anybody," Lily experiencing "enormous exultation" at this affirmation (L 262). Reading To the Lighthouse again in August 1942, Pym records in her journal that she is now looking at Woolf's "special technique." Pym writes: "I find it attractive and believe I could do it—and I already have, in a mild way" (Very Private Eye 107). Pym was unpublished at this time, so the "mild way" has to refer to several sketchy fictions or to early drafts of her first novel, Some Tame Gazelle (1950), none of which show Woolf's modernist style. Most likely by "technique" Pym indicates Woolf's very prominent, observant, reflective, and nearly characterized narrators. Pym, like Woolf, locates a strong "reader" within the text, but Woolf's anonymous narrators often voice a free-floating lyrical poem while Pym's narrators are characters with names who speak of work, domestic life, and always of love.

Pym's interest in Woolf's technique may have focussed especially on the designing narrator, as the reflections of Wilmet (first-person narrator) in A Glass of Blessings (1958) suggest. Donating blood, Wilmet notices the aggressive "muttering" of Miss Gaunt who boasts of her own "precious blood" while talking aloud to herself and reminding Wilmet of "a stream of consciousness" novel. Wilmet, not a writer, considers Woolf's response. "Virginia Woolf might have brought something away from the experience, I thought; perhaps writers always do this, from situations that merely shock or embarrass ordinary people" (Glass 78). Wilmet (and Pym) is less interested in the style of Miss Gaunt's verbal meanderings (flowing, "modernistic"? "feminine"? semiotic?) than in the response of a narrator-reader to that "stream of consciousness" as eccentricity of character.

Though Pym refers to Woolf in A Writer's Diary in 1954 (Wyatt-Brown 89, n. 11), she responds less to Woolf's development as a writer than to her feminism and implicit social criticism. In the service during the war (1943), Pym comments on A Room of One's Own: "Most delightful and profound—if I had the time I would write an essay about her in the Wrens" (VPE 159). Pym calls herself "the plainest thing in the navy. A grown up person playing a fantastic game," and she wonders what Woolf "would have made of service life" (VPE 158-9). Surely she knew?

Pym's women characters sometimes find in the "room" metaphor an image of integrity and autonomy, less frequently a critique of an economic and political structure that denies women space for authoring their lives or books. The observant, ironic narrator, Mildred Lathbury of Excellent Women (1952), at last succumbs to marriage—and to typing and proving her anthropologist husband's manuscripts. An early draft of the novel contains the interpretive note, "No Life of Her Own" (Cotsell 47). The youthful anthropology student, Dierdre, of Less Than Angels (1955) reflects that she has failed to write the poetry and give the parties that her room (at home) was meant for; it "had not fulfilled its promise" (42). She wishes she had "a flat of her own" as Catherine Oliphant dreamt (47); Catherine Blain also sometimes shares her flat with anthropologist Tom Mallows (78).

The thematic, that is, ideological anxieties that Woolf defined are most prominent in Pym's Jane and Prudence (1953), a novel that often echoes To the Lighthouse and A Room of One's Own. Jane Cleveland, married and the mother of a daughter, is a match-maker; like Mrs. Ramsay, she feels "responsible for her unmarried friends" (JP 122), especially Prudence Bates. Prudence, however, likes her "nice flat" (10), enjoys "her work; her independence; her life in London" (83),

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WOOLF AND REBECCA WEST’S FICTION-ESSAYS

Entirely independent from the start, Rebecca West’s early essays bore little, if any, resemblance to Virginia Woolf’s journalism. West surely knew Woolf’s reviews prior to her own fiery debut in The Free Woman; but the decorous, “sidelong” quality of Woolf’s essays hardly befitted West’s enterprise. Even as their careers ran increasingly along parallel tracks, the two remained at a polite distance. Apart from occasional social contact, their meetings were largely indirect: in Woolf’s private remarks about West, and West’s published reviews of Woolf’s writing. It was in that relationship of reviewer to writer that West was most deeply influenced by Woolf. In particular, West’s engagement in the Bennett/Woolf quarrel over character in fiction inspired two of West’s remarkable fiction-essays, “Uncle Bennett” and A Letter to a Grandfather.

Prior to Bennett’s attack, West had also criticized Woolf’s characters. But she later joined the escalating quarrel on Woolf’s side, borrowing from her in the process. Woolf had once thanked Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy “for a thousand gifts” (“Modern Novels”), and now West borrowed Woolf’s “gift” metaphor and argumentative method (the creation of a fictional character like Mrs. Brown) to join the fray, in “Uncle Bennett.” In her fiction-essay, West turned the patriarchal triumvirate (and added Shaw) into a metaphorical host of gift-bearing Uncles—familial, but hardly threatening. “All our youth they hung about the houses of our minds like Uncles... They had the generosity, the charm, the loquacity of visiting uncles,” West begins. Having launched her metaphor, West is off and running after it. Uncle Wells arrives, for example, with “the little pot of sweet jelly that is Mr. Polly,” (36) for example (199). Uncle Shaw “brought up the bright and cheerful mind of the children to look at,” and Uncle Galsworthy “was really Uncle Phagocyte,” an antibody who attacked “the infections of materialism... and all the more detestable, decorous, unjailable forms of hoggishness” (202-203). West’s hilarious sketch of these avuncular figures deflates their status as literary forefathers while shrewdly evaluating both their shortcomings and merits. West sustains her affectionate respect especially when describing Bennett, “one of the most unequal writers who ever attained to eminence” (210). Almost echoing Bennett’s critique of Woolf, West’s most damning scathing bluntly concludes, “[hardly] any of his figures remain alive in the memory... [He] gives us no characters” (204). Unlike his creations, Bennett has become a live literary character in West’s hands. And like Mrs. Brown, he has provided a congenial vehicle for argument.

In subsequent criticism, West praised Woolf especially for using such fictional argument. Reviewing A Room of One’s Own, she cited the biography of Shakespeare’s fictional sister as the “climax of [Woolf’s] eloquence” (553) and argument. But it was also one of the most ignited West’s admiration for character-as-argument and inspired her ambitious A Letter to a Grandfather. In her exuberant review of Orlando, West praised Woolf for using words to do more than describe the logical behavior of matter, by letting language... evoke images, convey meanings too subtle and too profound to be formulated in intellectual statements.

They were, instead, formulated in Orlando. Woolf’s “account of human experience” in the modern period is, for West, “an epitome of all of us, it leaves us impaled as we all are, on the mystery of the present moment.” West’s 1933 Essay to a Grandfather seems, if nothing else, her own version of that impaling mystery. The striking similarities between Orlando and West’s essay are many, but a broad outline here will suggest Woolf’s influence on its inception.

Ostensibly written by the contemporary descendant of an ancient family, this letter traces the history of Western thought through the history of the Beauchamps. The family gift of divine vision links the generations and provides the narrator’s continuous experience of history (who lacks Orlando’s loneliness). “C. W.” recalls the family visions, each vision reflecting the “spirit of its age” beginning in 1230, and ending with the present—roughly following Orlando’s trajectory. The first Beauchamp commemorated his vision by building a vast Abbey, emblem of “the paradox and mystery of the great churches,” and visual reminder of “the idea of a man stretched on a cross” (10, 11). Like Orlando’s great house, the Abbey provides the architectural locus of historical remembrance. Successive visions are likewise commemorated in the arts appropriate to their age: a commissioned Renaissance painting; an 18th-century diary; an eye-witness account of the French Revolution; a letter from Harrow complaining that “There is a boy here called Byron, I hate him”; and the scientific inquiry of the Grandfather himself.

Clearly West has borrowed Woolf’s idea of a fictionalized history, history embodied in biography and embedded in generational memory. The search for truth, like Orlando’s quest for Life, is historically constant; the climax of both narratives is a vision of the present marked by mystery and the swell of symbolic import. More theological than Woolf, West’s final vision is of the divine, thoroughly humanized: a negro carnival barker in Paris whose hands imitate the flight of a dove. Doves throughout the Letter have represented the “life of the spirit,” an irreplaceable force which links this unlikely vision with its predecessors. No less “implied on the present moment” than readers of Orlando, the carnival figure’s incarnation of the crucifixion climaxes the narrator’s vision: “I felt time... as a cross on which he and I and the events we took part in were crucified... we were bound to our place in this universe.” Virginia Woolf claims not to have understood West’s enigmatic essay. But this visionary return to beginnings and to her protagonist’s most deeply-
felt mystery is clearly West's homage to Orlando, and to the writer she felt was "so obviously the talent of this generation which is going to survive."

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1 Woolf attributed the "suavity" of her essays to her "testable training," an education West had not endured.

2 I have invented this term for lack of a better. It describes those pieces which blur the fiction/essay boundary, using fiction, detailed hypothesis and extended metaphor for the essayistic purposes of argument.


4 The revision history of "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" traces the escalation of this conflict: for an account of the changes in response to Bennett, see Beth Rigel Daugherty's essay.

5 "A Letter from Abroad."

6 "High Fountain of Genius."

7 "A Letter from Abroad."

Works Cited


THE "CHINESE KATHERINE MANSFIELD": LING SHU-HUA AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

A little-known correspondence between Ling Shu-hua (1900-1990), a Chinese painter and writer, and Virginia Woolf reveals Woolf's generosity to "other Virginias" aspiring to write. Shu-hua gained entrance into Bloomsbury through her affair with Julian Bell who was an instructor of English literature at Wuhan University, near Hankow, 1935-1937, just before he went off to the Spanish Civil War where he died as an ambulance driver in 1937. Shu-hua, a writer among the first published women writers in China in the 1920's and 30's, writing about women and children in confined traditional societies, was the fourth daughter of the Mayor of Hankow, Bao Ying-Ping, and wife of Professor Chen Yuan of Wuhan University. Though the correspondence was brief, initiated by Shu-hua after Julian's death, Woolf shares Shu-hua's "miserable mind feeling" in wartime. Canton lost, the Japanese advancing to Hankow where Shu-hua lives, she writes to Woolf in November, 1938, of her dreams of seeing her "house in the ruin and broken furniture, outside the house the lying corpse, the unburied corpses smelling badly." These images and the question, "Why do we have to fight?" remind us of Woolf's refrain of "ruined houses" and "dead bodies" in Three Guineas. Woolf advises her to "work," sends her English books to read (Gaskell's Life of Charlotte Bronte, Lamb's essays) to improve her English, and encourages her to write her autobiography in English. After receiving a few chapters, Woolf writes to say that she likes it very much: "I feel a charm in the unlikeliness." (from Vol. 6 of The Letters) Shu-hua responds, "will you allow me to call you my teacher or my tutor when I write to you. A teacher to a real Chinese's mind (I mean who have not been changed by Western influence) is equally highly respect (sic) and intimate as well as parents and brothers." Shu-hua's poetic memoir of her early life, Ancient Melodies, published by Hogarth Press in 1935 is dedicated to Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West.

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(Anyone with further information on art and letters by Shu-hua Ling, or anything else on China and Bloomsbury, please contact Pat Laurence who is working on a book on this topic.)

READING A VOICE

I find that I have made a statement on the jacket of my short story collection A Parallel Life and Other Stories (Charcotille Books, 1991) that I am called to account for. I spoke of several male writers who had been influential when I was a young girl in the 50s—Kerouac, Camus and Sartre—and I might have mentioned Hemingway and Faulkner as well. Then I said, "Sometimes later I read Virginia Woolf and discovered a way that women could write."

What I probably should have said is that maybe it was a good thing that I didn't begin to write in the 50s when I was reading all those men, but waited until I was older and women writers were happily beginning to own their unique voices. I first read Virginia Woolf in the 60s when I was a young mother and the wife of a college teacher. I read To the Lighthouse first and then Mrs. Dalloway. I recall loving both books—finding much about Mrs. Ramsey to my liking but not being drawn to her because of her tendency to be a Lady Bountiful figure. I identified then, and still do, with Lily Briscoe—probably because she had so much difficulty finding just exactly what it was that she needed to make the painting right. I remember reading Mrs. Dalloway and marveling at the beauty of the detail but dismissing it, somehow, as a small book because how could the day in the life of a woman—a woman in many ways like my own mother whom I was trying not to emulate—really be important. I was still in thrall of the notion that only books with battlefields and guns and male sexual angst could be significant.

Fortunately, twenty years later, when I had finally begun to write, I re-read both books and was stunned by their brilliance and daring—brilliance and daring without guns and battlefields and male sexual angst. Well, of course, what Woolf had done that was so brilliant was turn inward and illuminate the very process of consciousness. No mean feat.

It was in Mrs. Dalloway particularly that I was struck by the way that she achieved her seamless effects through the use of voice. If a writer teaches you to read her work—and a writer must do this—Woolf engages us instantly with her air of knowing everything—of being the confidante of the world. I trembled as I read. On the very first page the voice engaging us is breathless. There's a need to tell. If the memory of the war is not being covered, then, it's that of course, what Woolf had done that was so significant was turn inward and illuminate the very process of consciousness. No mean feat.

Through this we learn almost everything about Clarissa Dalloway that we need to know—her sex, her ability to observe and delight in the quotidian, her sense of excitement, and the submerged sense of loss—a perplexed nostalgia which will run like an underground river through the book.

We race through paragraphs, slip through on the wings of dashes, we begin new paragraphs with connectives. We must see, know, smell, touch everything at once. We're in the hands of a mimic—authorial but not god-like, we're with a mind-reader or, more uncannily, with someone who knows how to inhabit each character, shifting mercurially. This is a book that is very short on spoken dialogue but long on internal language and it is through these unspoken thoughts, this internal language, that we actually "hear" each character.

Naturally, I wrote my first novel attempting to do all of the things Virginia Woolf did and achieved only the minimal success. Like a dancer or a singer, she has made what she does seem effortless and we lesser mortals try it at our own risk. Nevertheless, because of Virginia Woolf, we now know it is possible for a writer to enter the mind and heart of a character to reveal the most delicate and fleeting of emotions with intimacy and precision. She delivers to the reader not just a feminine sensibility but a voice that is uniquely and powerfully feminine. This is what I should have said.

Robin Beeman
Occidental, California
THE INDIGO GIRLS READ VIRGINIA WOOLF

On the Indigo Girls' recent release, Rites of Passage, Virginia Woolf fans have been elated to find a powerful tribute, entitled "Virginia Woolf." Centrally located, this song begins Side Two on the tape cassette and marks the middle of the compact disc. Virginia Woolf's voice receives not only center stage, but the last word, as well. On the insert, after an entire panel of generous acknowledgments (including, for example, people who fight AIDS, "gun control advocates," and "NOW"), we come upon an ellipses, perhaps our introduction—and a fitting one, at that—to what follows:

Then it was all over till 1999. What remained was a sense of the comfort which we get used to, of plenty light and colour... yet when it became established, one rather missed the sense of its being a relief and a respite, which one had when it came back after the darkness.

This passage from Woolf's diary was written after she experienced the total eclipse of the sun in 1927. Not surprisingly, Woolf is reflecting here upon our assumptions regarding what we come to take for granted and how appreciation arises only at those instances of absence, lack, or the fleeting recognition of deprivation or impermanence; and, even then, it lasts only momentarily.

These issues surface in the song which, tellingly, never mentions Woolf's name, though there could be little doubt as to the subject, even if the title were not supplied. Discovering Virginia Woolf through the publication of her diary ("They published your diary and that's how I got to know you") was a pivotal rite of passage for these artists who thereby entered Woolf's "room of [her] own" and her "mind without end." Significantly, informing the cover concept designed by the Indigo Girls are the "key" which opens the passageway to both that room and mind, as well as "the river [that] eclipsed [Woolf's] life and sent [her] soul like a message in a bottle" to the songwriter.

The persona presents herself as "a young girl on a kind of a telephone line through time," making a timeless connection to a kindred spirit, for not only does the voice come "like a long-lost friend," but it also assumes simultaneously the shape of a "letter to [her] soul." Woolf's desire to connect deeply and variously, as evident in her voluminous body of letters, makes this elegy a perfect reply, for it is as dialogic as her actual correspondences and diary entries were. That is, first the singer is reassured ("still I feel it's alright") and then reassures Woolf, or perhaps projects her own gratitude and confidence onto the distancer ("so you know it's alright").

As was the case for much of Woolf's own writing, the ambiguity here allows for multiple possibilities. One of the most fruitful of these possibilities takes the shape of womb imagery ("the place where you hold me is dark in a pocket of truth"). This is poignantly fitting, first because Woolf's life, if it was only eclipsed, was gone only briefly. Second, that the river that eclipsed her life was the source of the musician's "rebirth."

It is the realization that these women have helped each other to "weather" the "apathy of time," to survive the critics' storms, and to defy "cruel mortality" that enables the central epiphany of this memorial. The eclipse alluded to in the diary signifies to the Indigo Girls an even more cosmic phenomena: that—like the sun and light, "life will come and life will go" and "still it's alright." The "I" of the first refrain has blended with the "you" of the second to create the "we" of joint cognizance. Thus is the balladeer, like so many of us devoted to Woolf's revelations that allow us to live more honestly and fully, "sitting here living proof" of Woolf's immortal wisdom, passion, and grace.

Indeed, like the replenished sun after an eclipse, this song sheds "plenty of light and colour" and offers "a ready and a respite" we may have otherwise missed.

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Alma College

(Ed's note: Thanks to all who helped us think together about the influence of something upon somebody. "Now on to the review of 'J'Accuse,' held over from the crowded issue #37)

REVIEW OF 'J'ACCUSE VIRGINIA WOOLF'

It seem to me that Woolf's current status is entirely undeserved. In my view she's one of the most over-rated literary figures of the 20th century.*

Such a preposterous claim opens a "documentary" on Woolf produced and aired on Channel 4 in Great Britain last spring. One of the main sources used in assembling this video, featuring counting canonical authors, this recent venture by Fulmar Productions attacks Woolf's creativity, scope, and political leanings.

The video is narrated by Paulin, Irish poet and scholar. We could expect that Paulin, author of several books of poetry and critical studies, including one of Hardy's poetry, would extend his scholarly expertise to a serious and carefully balanced examination of Woolf's work. Instead, what we find in this production are wistful, canting attacks that present an appallingly lopsided portrait.

Examples of Paulin's "analysis" called from the post-production script include the following: cries for sympathy from viewers that Woolf's students are offended when he criticizes her work, insistence that the received opinion of Woolf as a major author is a "travesty," and the view that Woolf's personality was utterly reprehensible and representative of the Victorian ruling class.

For Woolf's objectionable, imperialist nature, a commentator in the video provides us with examples from the discourse of characters in Mrs. Dalloway and The Voyage Out, cogent examples in his view, "that Woolf was actually an incorrigible snob who wrote about the upper and upper-middle classes because we regarded them as naturally superior." Angela Carter is even enlisted to bash Orlando, which she calls... um of um to um a [sic] slobbery valentine to a member of the upper classes." It seems incredible that an author's politics could be seriously attacked on the basis of her characters' views.

The proof that Woolf's characters express Woolf's own sentiments rests on the accusation that Woolf voices similar views about the Jews beneath her in class in her diaries. Of a line of imbeciles Woolf writes in 1915, "They should certainly be killed; and of a negro dressed up like a gentleman, she wondered in 1925 what he thought when he saw his own hand "black as a monkey's outside." No attempts are made, however, to balance these entries with others presenting most humane sentiments. Even more disgusting to Paulin is Woolf's anti-semitism, which he maintains survived despite her marriage to a Jew, Leonard Woolf. No mention is made here either of the many diary entries which invoke Woolf's love for Jews. The lines: "... the obvious, the cheap, hard Jewess..." (12) A carefully chiselled portrait of a woman who is also a Jewess is blown out of proportion by the commentator to imply Woolf's support for Nazi death camps. One can only wonder if Paulin, the producers, the commentator, and the writers interviewed have ever read Three Guineas, especially those lines which insist that Englishwomen are fighting Fascist and Nazi dictators at home—their fathers, brothers, and husbands:

And is not the woman who has to breathe that poison and to fight that insect, secretly and without arms, fighting the Fascist or the Nazi as surely as those who fight him with arms in the limelight of publicity?*

The woman who wrote those lines could abide neither under her in class in her diaries. Of a line of imbeciles Woolf writes in 1915, "... the obvious, the cheap, hard Jewess..." (12) A carefully chiselled portrait of a woman who is also a Jewess is blown out of proportion by the commentator to imply Woolf's support for Nazi death camps. One can only wonder if Paulin, the producers, the commentator, and the writers interviewed have ever read Three Guineas, especially those lines which insist that Englishwomen are fighting Fascist and Nazi dictators at home—their fathers, brothers, and husbands:

And is not the woman who has to breathe that poison and to fight that insect, secretly and without arms, fighting the Fascist or the Nazi as surely as those who fight him with arms in the limelight of publicity?*

Paulin's attack on Woolf does not end with repulsion for her personal prejudices, however. His real intent is to demolish her reputation as a great writer, proving that her difference from Joyce, she must be the lesser light. "Nothing could obliterate the sour taste left behind by exposure to Woolf's unwholesome opinions," Paulin claims, "but I for one wouldn't think quite so badly of her if her writing were one tenth as good as her supporters claim. But it isn't." (12)

Paulin's example for this charge comes from the interchapters of The Waves—the word "loveliness" is especially repugnant to Paulin's taste. Of the lyrical passages in "Time Passes" for To The Lighthouse, Paulin argues that they belong in Homes and Gardens... it has all the...
self-conscious glossiness, the atmosphere of wealth, leisure, taste and consumption, with periodicals ask us to identify with... This is dead language" (15). Perhaps such writing is "dead" for Paulin because it is too close for comfort to a feminine language? Terry Eagleton is called upon at this point to offer an interesting insight on the underlying assumptions for Paulin's attack—Woolf's art is not a bodily one... Woolf for all her concern with gender and sexuality, isn't he sure (sic) it isn't bodily art, it's curiously ethereal" (15). If the truth be known, indeed, it is Joyce, Paulin proclaims, who is... immeasurably superior to Woolf, For he is a true modernist... She was too rooted in Victorian values to become a truly modern writer" (16). Condemned for an ideology from which she allegedly could not escape, Woolf should be swept in the ashcan of lost fame. Joyce, who is ideology-free, even making a few his major characters in Ulysses, is promoted to the pinnacle of fame for his values and his writing.

At the end we stand indistinct with Woolf for supporting the ideology she breathed, and the axe Paulin has been grinding comes more sharply into focus. "Stuck up to the upper classes is the name of the game" (20). The name of the game in this production is really politics—and Woolf, in the hidden agenda, stands convicted for her views and her feminism by those who are unable to find any serious ground for attacking her art.

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(Ed.'s note: Richard Sone in the March 30, 1991 Times Saturday Review has also replied to Paulin and other hostile critics.)

1 Tom Paulin, "Post-Shooting Script A." "[Acne: Virginia Woolf], Fulmar Productions (London: 1991). Further quotes from the script of the production are identified by page number and parenthetical note.
2 Diary entries for Saturday, January 9th, 1915, and Wednesday, May 17th, 1925, quoted in "Post-Shooting Script A." 10, by an actress portraying Woolf writing in her diary.

"MRS. RAYLEY IS OUT, SIR": RE-READING THAT HOLE IN MINTA'S STOCKING

By now it is fairly well established that Virginia Woolf makes use of lesbian coding to suggest the sexual orientations of her female characters. As Berenice A. Carroll has noted, Woolf was almost never explicit about her more controversial views in any public forum ("if she was aware of the need to be circumspect... deliberate concealment was openly recommended by Woolf as a policy" [101]). Thus, it is not surprising that in To the Lighthouse the hints that Minta Doyle has lesbian inclinations are subtle and are scattered about through the book rather than grouped together in an obvious fashion...

Early in the novel, Mrs. Ramsay thinks of Minta as an "incongruous daughter," a "tomboy with a hole in her stocking" (58). Mrs. Ramsay's mental notation indicates clearly that Minta is somehow ex/centric to the normative feminine presentation of self and that she deviates toward such masculine-identified traits as untidiness and comparative indifference to her personal appearance. The hole in Minta's stocking is assigned a definite ideological significance. Lily Briscoe (the most blatantly Sapphist woman in the novel) is amused by "that little round hole of pink heel" which seems to "flaunt itself." As she realizes, the hole meant the annihilation of womanhood and the triumph of "dirt and disorder" to William Bankes who "shudder[ed] and spread[ed] his fingers out... to cover the unsightly object" (257). William Bankes is horrified because Minta is straying from proper womanly behavior by failing to mend her stocking. If even such a slight shrivel constitutes a subversion of gender roles, one fully understands Mrs. Ramsay's "mania... for marriage" (261), for marriage can conceal the unruly improprieties of lesbian desire.

Like most of Woolf's novels, To the Lighthouse represents an interplay of gay and lesbian perspectives. It is Andrew, whose relationship to August Carmichael has definite homosocial if not homosexual overtones for Carmichael was "devoted... to Andrew, and would call him into his room, and underhand, 'show him things'" [145], who observes that Minta is "a rather good walker, "wore more sensible clothes than most women" and "would jump straight into a stream and flounder in it". As he observes, "she seemed to be afraid of nothing except bulls" ([1]133). Andrew, however, has definite reservations about her behavior: "he liked her rashness, but he saw that it would not do—she would kill herself in some idiotic way one of these days" (113). His opinion that "it would not do" may well be an oblique comment on the way that Minta's Sapphist orientation would be received.

Again, it is from the Sappho-erotic viewpoint of Nancy Ramsay that the reader glimpses "right behind a rock... oh, heavens! in each other's arms... Paul and Minta kissing probably" (113; emphasis added). Nancy herself has a confusingly sexualized relationship with Minta ("Minta kept on taking her hand. Then she would let it go. Then she would take it again" [112]). And Nancy herself "sport[s] with infidel ideas... of a life... in Paris, perhaps, a wilder life; not always taking care of some man or other," a Paris which—again obliquely—seemingly alludes to the sexually ext/patriotic world of Radclyffe Hall, Dina Barnes, and Gertrude Stein (14).

Minta loses her heirloom brooch at a point which coincides precisely with her ill-fated engagement to Paul Rayley. Her distress over the loss of "the sole ornament she possessed," a "weeping willow... set in pearls" (116) which had belonged to her grandmother, is clearly associated with the loss of virginity but also, potentially, with the loss of sexual autonomy (see Paula Bennett on the significance of "small round objects" like pearls [113]). In a traditional marriage, Minta, like Mrs. Ramsay, would have been expected to exhaust herself in serving her husband's emotional and sexual needs, an implication which is suggested in Mrs. Ramsay's speculation that "a rose- flowered fruit tree tied with leaves and dancing boughs" (60) offering her entire life energy to her demanding husband.

In the third section of the book, Lily reflects on the Rayleys' marriage, creating "a whole structure of imagination" about Minta and Paul. Now, Minta, who had once been scatterbrained and spontaneous is "flamboyant, careless" (257) but "never gave herself away... She was far too conscious, far too wary" (259). The determination of the marriage is epitomized by Lily's speculation that Minta is leading a wilder life, not taking care of some man, for when Paul "rang up the servant at home... she said 'Mrs. Rayley's out, sir'" (258). Lily elaborates for herself an episode "on the staircase at dawn" in which Paul spoke something violent, abusing [Minta], in a mudder so as not to wake the children" (257) and "got the poker in case of burglars [no doubt to frighten her too]" (258). In this imagined episode, "Minta went on eating her sandwich, annoyedly," while he "spoke so bitterly, saying she had ruined his life" (258).

The details of how Minta has ruined Paul's life remain open to speculation in the novel. The question of whether or not to bring the story of their marriage into the open is moot. Minta's sexual orientation is evident to Paul? Is it that he is infuriated or even intimidated by her stoic response to his violence, her studied indifference to male condescension, her rejection of male sexuality? According to Lily, eventually, "they... got through the dangerous stage" (259). Minta, though still within the confines of marriage, has encouraged Paul to find another sexual partner and thereby has created the freedom she needs to pursue her own life choices: "far from breaking up the marriage, [Paul's] alliance had righted it. They were excellent friends, obviously, as he sat on the road and she handed him the tools." Her "business-like" way of passing Paul the wrench and her attitude toward the woman that Paul "had taken up with," a woman whom she "describe[s] gratefully, almost admiringly" (259), suggests that Mrs. Ramsay's model of marriage can be modified successfully to include the option of a companionate rather than a sexual relationship.

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(Ed.'s note: Vera's extensive bibliography has been omitted due to space limitations; anyone interested should write directly to her for it.)

Works Cited

Jane Dunn's work (not a joint biography, she insists) focuses on the "closeness of the bond" between Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf, sisters in conspiracy. By attempting to weave the "tapestry" of their "shared interior life" and to plot a "hidden landscape of impulse and attraction, of prejudice, influence and passion: of what is not quite said" (viii), she arranges what is already known in a slightly different configuration, illuminating some hidden corners and making us see the familiar story afresh. However, I must admit feeling some ambivalence about her achievement.

Dunn's portrayal of the relationship between Vanessa and Virginia as conspiracy continues the work begun by Poole and DeSalvo in that without ever saying it or using specialized vocabulary, she reveals the hidden power of the dysfunctional family. Her discussion of the sisters' bond, whether she intends or not, shows just how harmed they were, how dysfunctional the Stephen family was, and how isolating their roles, created in collusion and self-defense, became. Vanessa and Virginia had to stand together against an abusive family and they each had to have some control. Thus, the dualistic roles and separate worlds: Vanessa, the strong, silent, stoic, sexy, maternal artist; Virginia, the ill, articulate, emotional, frigid, childless writer. The reader sees the Heroine and the Scapegoat: unable to admit her needs, suffering silently and keeping her family together at great cost. Vanessa turns her back on happiness and plays the self-sacrificing mother; unable to admit her strengths, depending on others for care, rebelling in print, and acting out the family's illness, Virginia cannot escape her guilt and commits suicide. Maintained out of fear, reinforced by family and friends, and dropped only in times of great crisis, the roles bind the sisters together but cost them intimacy.

Dunn, on the other hand, refuses to see one sister as strong and the other weak, one as sexual and the other frigid, one as maternal and the other virginal, and thus brings into startling relief the family's vested interest in keeping those roles intact. By letting the complexities and flaws stand, by revealing the frequent gaps between their selves and their roles, by interpreting those roles as conspiracy, and by refusing to buy into them, she helps us understand, in fact, how nearly impossible it would have been for Quentin Bell, a product of the same family dynamics, to portray his mother as anything other than the sensual heroine and his aunt as anything other than the sick virgin. Dunn's attempt to balance the two sisters makes the imbalance in the Bell biography even more apparent and helps redress it.

Dunn's comments are thus full of refreshing common sense, getting into print. I suspect, many private conversations among Woolf scholars. For example, she points out that Virginia was not ready to abridge the sexual side of her marriage when she and Leonard consulted Vanessa. Vanessa, according to Dunn, having internalized her mother's notion that men are more important, consigned Leonard by saying Virginia had always been that way when she could have read to Virginia that sexual compatibility takes time or suggested that Leonard, too, was sexually inexperienced. Leonard's decision to not have children (and not have sex?) may have had more to do with Vanessa's need to be the sensual sister and his own desires in the matter than with Virginia's illness (186-91).

Juxtaposition of the lives also gives us a new angle on Virginia's anger. Virginia's supposed suppression of anger in service to her art cannot hold a candle to the suppression Vanessa achieved in service to her role as earth mother. Vanessa cannot confront either her husband or Virginia about their fluctuation, for example, and it is Virginia who explodes with anger about Bunny Garnett's interest in Vanessa's daughter. In Dunn's portrayal, the "crazy" Virginia gets angry and the "sane" Vanessa compulsively sweats anger under the rug.

If Dunn's work does in fact throw new light "on [the sisters'] individual characters, the extent of their interdependency and the forces that shaped them" (viii), why hesitate to give it a whole-hearted recommendation?

Well, Dunn's aims sometimes work against her. For example, in trying not to favor one sister over the other, Dunn often relies on new dualisms for the old—Virginia's courage and anger vs. Vanessa's suffering and silence is one of many—and thus risks a reversal of positions rather than a true balance. Also, compressing the two decades of Vanessa's life after Virginia's death into three pages seems to deny the power of the conspiracy Dunn has taken her whole book to demonstrate.

Dunn's use of a thematic arrangement of material (after the first four chapters) to keep the "closeness of the bond" in front of us often results in repetition and a "first Vanessa, then Virginia" format. The sexual matters in Chapter 7—Leonard and Virginia's marriage, Vanessa's counseling, and Vanessa's break-up with Roger Fry and subsequent affair with Duncan Grant—coincide in time with the psychological matters in Chapter 10—Virginia's oncoming illness and Vanessa's two-year-long bout with depression, but Dunn's organization means she never discusses the possible connection between them.

Dunn depends on primary materials, especially unpublished letters between Vanessa and Virginia, and the bibliography suggests she did her homework. But her narrative seems heavily informed by past biographies, especially Bell, DeSalvo, and Spalding, without any recognition of those sources in the text or footnotes. Evidence from Woolf's work is sometimes used but not cited. Also, some discussion of what frames her "version of the truth" as she reconstructs these lives (viii) would have been helpful.

We know that Virginia refers to her illnesses as madness. But in anything other than quotations, does Dunn have to perpetuate that terminology? Especially when she calls Virginia's frequent illnesses severe depression? Also, when breaking out of Stephen-designated family roles, couldn't Dunn give Adrian a break and point out that Thoby, the supposedly sane one, also suffered from delirium and tried to commit suicide? (See Stemberick, in Ginsberg and Gottlieb, Virginia Woolf: Centennial Essays.)

Finally, textual problems, such as Dunn's idiosyncratic use of colons and semi-colons, are irritating; and readers may wonder why the less distracting in-text citation wasn't used. Far worse, however, is that although illustrations themselves are labelled with numbers and titles, no list of illustrations appears in the book's front matter and no reference to an illustration number is ever used in the text. Therefore, finding a painting discussed in the text means paging through all the illustrations (and sometimes discovering it is not there).

Dunn's work has reasonable aims, many of which it reaches, and it often makes a great deal of sense. Perhaps its use of unpublished letters and its resulting existence in a place somewhere between popular and scholarly explains my reaction upon finishing it. Warning: reading Jane Dunn's A Very Close Conspiracy creates an overwhelming desire for a scholarly edition of the Bell/Woolf correspondence!

Beth Rigal Daugherty
Otterbein College

THOUGHTS ON TEACHING

We know that the imagery of water and the presence of water were important to the work and life of Virginia Woolf. It so happens that the first items submitted to VWM's new "Thoughts on Teaching" both deal with novels whose very titles affirm this importance. E.S.

To the Lighthouse: Loopwriting with To the Lighthouse
Here are some ideas for using writing in connection with reading To the Lighthouse. You can have students keep journals, writing down impressions as they read. Or you can have them do individual, specified 'bursts' of writing as in-class assignments.

I. Possible products are:
   • a personal narrative, generated by the thinking and writing done in connection with the novel, but about one's own experience;
   • a critical essay about To the Lighthouse that is nourished by 'loopthinking' and 'loopwriting.'
II. Suggestions:

Portrait: Who comes to mind when you think about this novel? Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay, Virginia Woolf? Your mother, father, sister, or a friend? An uncle whom you haven’t seen for a while, a teacher you remember? Sketch them out in words. What clothes do they wear, how do they fix their hair? What words or phrases, gestures, special habits do you associate with them?

Family Story: Think of To the Lighthouse as a ‘family story’ about reconciliation—a tale of tenderness and power, of strength and substance and grace. Make a collection of ‘family stories’ from the novel, from your life: moments of betrayal, loss, exhilaration, disappointment, beauty, longing, love. Reach into your treasure house, and back into the novel, and pull out memories.

Letter: Write a letter to Virginia Woolf—or anyone you want to talk about the novel. Is it a ‘letter to the editor’? A letter of complaint? A love letter or a thank you note? Or just a letter to a friend, to tell him how you feel about it, to tell her what you think?

“Sleeping on It”: Pretend that To the Lighthouse is a bedtime story you are telling to young children, to sing them off to sleep. What is the texture of the tale? Is it a fairy tale, ballad, ghost story, lullaby? Write the story down. Let your pen navigate the currents, as you dream yourself onto the page—you and your vision of the book.

Sharon Flitterman-King
Independent Scholar
Hillsdale, New York 12529

The Waves: I am the instructor for a honors seminar in Modern British Literature. The seminar has anywhere from 14 to 18 students in it— ... and one of the things that I worked with last year had profound effects. We were studying Woolf’s The Waves and I decided that a readers theatre approach to the strangeness of the “speaking” voices might bring that value in the text the vitality it requires.

We worked with four groups of four to five students and their task was to select a portion of the text that could run two to three minutes and to prepare a reading using a variety of reading techniques, some lighting and music effects, and some props. Students were also at liberty to arrange the given text, scripting their own readers theatre text ... they could pull a series of images from a single voice, for example, and work from that: or juxtapose two reunion scenes—the early one, for example, and the one Bernard reconstructs in his head at the close:—or they could set out the interlude voice and bring it into the chapters according to a pattern they designed ... The possibilities were endless and intriguing at every turn. One group chose to select the opening sequence of the first chapter, to seat their audience in chairs scattered throughout the classroom, to turn all the lights out and to attach flashlights to their hand-held scripts so that they could read their portions. And then, by weaving in and out of the seated audience while reading, they brought to life the unique properties of the “communicative” experience Woolf sought to inscribe in the verbal medium through her use of the single quotation mark ... Each of the four presentations taught us a great deal about the reading experience of The Waves. Students were enthralled by the complexity their pieces could show. I asked that each group submit a short written description of the approach they had designed and the values they had hoped that approach would express after they had presented their work, and I allowed lots of discussion after each presentation as well as during the in-class planning and rehearsing that took place. Groups consulted with one another and provided feedback as requested.

I wanted to share with you the joy of this experience: it gave me a way into the text, an experience that was compelling, a sense of the vitality of the classroom community and the actuality of the positive boon of small group collaboration and cooperation.

Deborah Schnitzer
University of Winnipeg

(Eds. note: Elizabeth Steele hopes that readers of VWM will continue to send brief items for her “Thoughts on Teaching” column; her address again: 3219 Cheltenham Rd., Toledo, Ohio 43606.)

MORE ABOUT LIBRARY HOLDINGS OF WOOLF MATERIALS

The Frances Hooper Collection of Virginia Woolf Books and Manuscripts was presented to the Smith College Library Rare Book Room in 1986 by the Estate of Frances Hooper, Smith College Class of 1914. All of Virginia Woolf’s published work and all aspects of her writing and literary concerns are represented in successive editions, English and American, including proof copies and association copies. Over a lifetime of collecting, Frances Hooper developed a special interest in Virginia Woolf’s style as an essayist, and her acquisition of manuscript material reflects that interest. The Collection contains a proof copy of The Common Reader with manuscript revisions in Woolf’s characteristic violet ink, the original manuscript draft for “The Patron” (the essay retitled “The Patron and the Crouse”) in The Common Reader, the draft for an essay with the working title “As to criticism,” and manuscript reading notes for Trollope, Peacock, Balzac, Tolstoi, Richardson, and D. H. Lawrence. Other proof copies—To the Lighthouse and Orlando—and other manuscripts—the first draft of The Searchlight—permit comparison of Woolf’s method of working on novels and stories. Among the autograph letters are letters to Katherine Mansfield and Angus Davidson, discussing points of style. The correspondence of Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey, present in letters and postcards from 1906 to 1931, is accompanied by Strachey’s subscriber’s copy of Jacob’s Room and his copy of the prospectus for Two Stories, the first publication of The Hogarth Press. A selection of Hogarth Press pamphlets begins with Two Stories (1917) and T. S. Eliot’s Poems (1919) hand-set by Virginia and Leonard Woolf. Supplementary material consists of volumes of biography and criticism and clippings and letters relating to the formation of the Collection.

The Collection is open to undergraduates and faculty of the five colleges in the area and to any interested scholars and visitors to the Library. Rare Book Room hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Selected pieces from the Collection are on display and may be seen at any time during Rare Book Room hours. Readers wishing to use the Collection are requested to make an appointment with the Curator, Smith College Library Rare Book Room, Northampton, Massachusetts 01063.

During the New Haven Conference in June, several Woolfians asked me about the VW holdings at the Ransom Humanities Center on the UT campus. As a result of these inquiries, I made arrangements to spend two days there later in June. It was delightful looking through a near-complete collection of Virginia’s novels published at the Hogarth Press. The covers are as brightly colored as an English garden of blue, ochre, maroon, dark peach, and bright purple flowers. The gold lettering and the jackets designed for Trollope, Peacock, Balzac, Tolstoi, Richardson, and D. H. Lawrence. Other proof copies—To the Lighthouse and Orlando—and other manuscripts—the first draft of The Searchlight—permit comparison of Woolf’s method of working on novels and stories. Among the autograph letters are letters to Katherine Mansfield and Angus Davidson, discussing points of style. The correspondence of Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey, present in letters and postcards from 1906 to 1931, is accompanied by Strachey’s subscriber’s copy of Jacob’s Room and his copy of the prospectus for Two Stories, the first publication of The Hogarth Press. A selection of Hogarth Press pamphlets begins with Two Stories (1917) and T. S. Eliot’s Poems (1919) hand-set by Virginia and Leonard Woolf. Supplementary material consists of volumes of biography and criticism and clippings and letters relating to the formation of the Collection.

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Lorraine Hill
University of Dallas
the Virginia Woolf Society

VIRGINIA WOOLF SOCIETY COLUMN
Society sponsored sessions at the MLA are as follows: "Virginia Woolf and the Avant-Garde(s)" Monday, 28 December, 7:15-8:30 p.m. Trianon Ballroom, Hilton. "Virginia Woolf: Constructing Masculinities" Wednesday, December, 1:45-3:00 p.m.

Beth Rosenberg has very kindly offered her apartment for the Society social this year. It is (being in Manhattan) not large but it is in the heart of the Village and surrounded by good restaurants and cafes. The party will be from 7-9 on Tuesday, December 29 at 126 MacDougal Street #2D (between Bleecker & W 3rd). It is a couple of blocks from Washington Square Park and NYU (in case you need to get your bearings). THANK YOU BETH!

Welcome to all our new members, many of whom joined at the very successful 2nd Annual Conference in New Haven. A list of new members will be mailed with the January post-MLA letter. Plans for the 3rd Annual conference on Virginia Woolf are well under way; see Jane Lilienfeld's invitation to participate here included.

So far, we have one proposal for the 1993 MLA meeting in Toronto: Beth Rosenberg and Jeanne Dubino are interested in organizing a panel on "Virginia Woolf and the History of Literary Criticism."

Oak Knoll Books 414 Delaware Street, New Castle DE 19720) are beginning their new series of bibliographies this October with Leonard Woolf... The Bloomsbury Workshop (12 Galen Place, off Bury Place, London WC2A 2JR) is republishing "Walter Sickert: A Conversation" in a limited edition of 1000 to coincide with the Sickert retrospective to be held at the Royal Academy later this year.

Mark Hussey, Secretary/Treasurer
Pace University

It pains me to have to record here the premature death (as VW says, the only real tragedy) of an active young Woolf scholar and Society member, Penny Painter, whom many of you heard read a paper at the Pace Conference, a synopsis of which is published in the proceedings. Anyone interested in knowing more about Penny Painter's research may write J.J. Wilson, Department of English, Sonoma State University.

3RD ANNUAL VIRGINIA WOOLF CONFERENCE, Sponsored by

Plan to attend and participate. Conference organizers are especially encouraging submission of panel proposals but individual papers will be considered. Non-traditional formats for conference sessions are invited (workshops, round-table discussions, videos, performance pieces, question and answer sessions, works in progress, for example). Sessions will be 90 minutes.


Exhibit by Isota Tucker Epes, if funding can be obtained.

Open to proposals, panels, topics on all aspects of Woolf studies, but especially eager to receive proposals on: Woolf and race; Woolf and social class; Woolf and elitism; Woolf and Empire/Colonialism; Approaches to teaching Woolf; Teaching Woolf with special emphasis on race, class, gender, sexual preference; Woolf and lesbian literary aesthetics, politics, theories, practices and pedagogies. Woolf and the -isms (Post-Structuralism, Post-Feminism, French feminism, Socialism, etc.); Beyond Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse; Woolf and her Victorian heritage; Woolf and living writers; Woolf and women writers of color; other proposals welcome.

All proposals must include 3 copies of a 100-200 word abstract for each paper or presentation. Proposals must also include a separate cover sheet listing name, addresses, institutional affiliations (if any), phone numbers of panel organizer and all panelists; session title (for panel proposals); titles of all papers or presentations; description of session format, request for any audio-visual support.

Send proposals to: Dr. Jane Lilienfeld, Department of English, Lincoln University, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0029, (314) 681-5195
(Unfortunately all calls must be returned collect)

Submissions must be postmarked by Feb. 1, 1993. Notification of decisions will be mailed or about March 15, 1993.

Graduate and undergraduate credit available in conjunction with Conference. Publication of a proceedings a probability.