

# Virginia Woolf Miscellany

Number 28

Spring 1987

## TO THE READERS:

Sonya Rudikoff brought to my attention the appearance of the "Bloomsbury Collection" from Laura Ashley, writing "one doesn't know whether to laugh or cry." Since hearing from her, I've become increasingly conscious of the Collection and on the whole I believe it is rather a good thing. Reproductions are always a matter of some debate, but these are not exact, particularly in their color schemes. I've looked at some of the cloths and find them very attractive. I might even cover a chair in one of them, perhaps "Queen Mary." I am also considering a handsome brownish rug, based on a 1931 design by Vanessa Bell.

Laura Ashley is certainly featuring the patterns in the 1987 Home Furnishing Book. Nick Ashley in his Introduction states: "The Bloomsbury Collection is a series of prints that were originally designed in the 1930s which is about as modern as we would like to go at the moment. The designs are loose and informal, eminently suitable for a contemporary room while still retaining an 'arty' English style." Perhaps Bloomsbury has become too respectable, but still. . . . The booklet gives information about visiting Charleston. The patterns available are Charleston Grapes, Emma, West Wind, and Queen Mary. Also there are ceramics, designed by Quentin Bell, of a Fruit Bowl, a Vase and a Fruit Plate.



BLOOMSBURY RUG

On the local level, at the Laura Ashley shop in the Stanford Shopping Center, one of the windows is devoted to the Bloomsbury Collection, and on the table are a pair of glasses, presumably to suggest that



WEST WIND

Virginia Woolf has just left the window, and a notebook with some lines from *A Room of One's Own*. In the *New York* issue of February 2 one finds a photograph and a paragraph in the "best bets" section, including a statement: "the young Evelyn Waugh, whose eye was unerring, owned an Omega screen." *New York* does not go on to point out that Waugh, or at least his character Charles Ryder, turned on Bloomsbury, as recorded in *Brideshead Revisited*. "On my first afternoon [in Oxford] I proudly hung a reproduction of Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers' over the fire and set up a screen, painted by Roger Fry with a Provençal landscape, which I had bought inexpensively when the Omega workshops were sold up. . . . My books were meagre and commonplace — Roger Fry's *Vision and Design*; the Medici Press edition of *A Shropshire Lad*; *Eminent Victorians*; . . . It was not until Sebastian, idly turning the page of Clive Bell's *Art*, read:

"Does anyone feel the same kind of emotion for a butterfly or a flower that he feels for a cathedral or a picture? Yes. I do," that my eyes were opened." In the 1940s, when this was written, Bloomsbury's reputation was very low. Now, it is much more established, and the designs are available from Laura Ashley. Perhaps, as Sonya Rudikoff says, it is a matter for crying or laughing. But, at the least, I hope of interest, as is the March 1986 issue of *LIFE* magazine with its article "Bloomsbury Revisited" which includes some remarkable photographs of descendants and intimates.

Allow me to remind readers that any donations, however small, towards the expenses of VWM would be gratefully received by J. J. Wilson at Sonoma State. Checks should be made out to the SSU Academic Foundation and then are tax deductible. In answer to a number of inquiries, yes, copies of all back issues are now available from Sonoma State at a nominal cost, as is Laura Moss Gottleib's excellent *Index* to issues #1-20. Professor Wilson will be editing the next issue; the deadline for submissions is September 15, though the sooner the better. Remember that our space is limited, so think brief.

I would like to thank Victor Luftig for his considerable work as Assistant Editor for this issue and also Ellen Hawkes for her advice. By delightful chance she happened to be at Stanford this quarter, holding a fellowship at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender. Lucio Ruotolo, in Italy for the Spring Semester, is planning, with the assistance of Bill Handley at Oxford, an international Virginia Woolf Society 1987 Sussex Conference, June 22 & 23. For further information, please see the Society's column in this issue of VWM.

Peter Stansky  
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## FROM THE READERS:

Eight poems by Julian Bell published in 1930, as *Still Life and Other Poems*, have long been out of print. But they are now being reissued by Occasional Works, P.O. Box 620588, Woodside, Ca. 94062. The edition has been hand set in Bembo, printed by letterpress on 100 per cent rag Rives Heavy (a French mouldmade paper), and hand sewn and bound into Stonehenge covers. Bell's poems draw upon the Sussex countryside of his childhood. A notice from Occasional Works points to their "precise observation of nature and almost visionary intensity," and to the "painterly, Constable-like power," quoting,

On moonless nights, when the whole sky is dark  
There comes a sudden rush of intense black,  
Then, terrified, the sheep  
Break hurdles and escape.  
And from the air comes the full cry of hounds. . .  
As from the coast the geese  
Sweep inland, clamorous.

The volume is priced at \$38, postpaid; Californians should add sales tax.

Hugh Lee, editor of *The Charleston Newsletter*, reports a current "meticulous program of repair and restoration" at Charleston, aimed at "recreating the place as it was in its spectacular heyday not very long ago." The Bells' Sussex farmhouse displays the paintings and designs of Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, and other artists throughout its wall paper, doors, fireplaces, panels, furniture, bath tubs, fabrics, screens, lamps, and ceramics. Yet, Lee notes, despite this "accumulation of decoration (some might say an abomination of desolation)," Charleston has retained "the sociable shabbiness of a much lived-in house." The Charleston Trust was established six years ago to purchase the property and complete its restoration before turning it over with contents and grounds to England's National Trust. Charleston was opened to the public last summer and will be open from April to October each year, but much costly work remains to be done. Donations to the endowment fund are still urgently needed. Annual subscription to the Charleston Trust costs £15 for members living outside the United Kingdom. It has held symposia in New York, Texas, and London, and conducts an annual walk to Charleston from Monks House, passing Asham and also Little Talland (where Virginia Stephen lived in 1911). The Trust's quarterly *Newsletter* is distributed without charge to the membership, the Friends of Charleston, and serves as a repository of Bloomsburiana. Further information may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, 85, Elgin Crescent, London W.11 or from Hugh Lee at 83, The Vineyard, Richmond, Surrey. "We hope many *Miscellany* readers will join us," Lee writes.

Ms. R.A. Legg asks the assistance of VWM readers. For her degree in Librarianship and Information Services at the Brighton Polytechnic, she is compiling a listing of manuscripts privately held by Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Maynard Keynes, Saxon Sydney-Turner, Roger Fry, Lytton Strachey, Desmond McCarthy, Duncan Grant, and E.M. Forster. She would be grateful to those who might write to her about material they hold or know of, particularly material that has been sold at auction. Her address is 5, Southcourt Close, Leckhampton, Cheltenham GL53 ODW, Gloucestershire.

Karen L. Levenback, Assistant Professorial Lecturer at George Washington University, "confirms the 'discovery'" of the Berg Collection's typescript of Virginia Woolf's 1906 Greek diary, reported absent in the Fall 1986 VWM.

**Review: THE INTERRUPTED MOMENT. A View of Virginia Woolf's Novels by Lucio P. Ruotolo Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986**

I will briefly dispose of my one negative criticism which bears on Lucio P. Ruotolo's title. In the large majority of cases, the "interrupted moments" dealt with are not the privileged, specifically Woolfian moments endowed with an epiphanic quality that the word irresistibly evokes for anyone familiar with Woolf's writings. Without contesting the critic's right to resort to an appealing title, I wonder if this initial and temporary deception may not disrupt the reader's approach to the book; I say temporary deception for the introduction immediately makes clear Ruotolo's precise purpose. Words or phrases such as "broken sequence", "disjunction", "unending procession of changes", "sudden shocks", "incessant readjustments", "intrusion", "discontinuous lives" and the like definitely point to a study of discontinuity in which the moment is not the climactic achievement the word evokes when used in a Woolfian context, but a flat, common, undistinguished moment sluggishly drifting along, mere continuity, or, even, motionlessness. The informative note 2, p. 240 listing prior discussions on "the theme of narrative interruption" encourages me to surmise my remarks do not misrepresent a book which, this minor semantic problem being set aside, I consider brilliant, closely knit and offering a sensitive as well as accurate and seminal reading of Woolf's novels.

From baffling chaos in *The Voyage Out* to the positive integration of chaos in *Between the Acts*, all along the overall picture is of an ever-present, if sometimes underlying, anarchy, finally fully assumed. We are led chronologically from novel to novel, through the successive ascending stages of a process of simultaneous clarification and assertion. Most suggestive signposts along this route are the chapter titles: "Being Chaotic", "Breaking with Convention", "On the Margins of Consciousness", "The Unguarded Moment", "A Void at the Center", "In Praise of Nothingness". Only "Toward Mutuality" for *The Years* and "The Tyranny of Leadership" for *Between the Acts*, although they point to the masterly conclusion (epigraphed with Gertrude Stein's "All great art is anarchy"), seem to me reductive and too thinly political to be fair to the richer substance of these ending chapters. After all, Antigone and her like are not up against Creon and his laws only, but also against all other obstacles to human self-realization, whatever their nature or origin. As Ruotolo noticed, I fully agree in this respect with the ultimate result of his study; I only wish he had added to its apparently political and aesthetic trend a metaphysical slant.

The exploration of the novels is conducted in terms of organic sequences of moments — of whichever kind — accepted and lived up to or interrupted, with the stress laid on the variety of consequences on the protagonists resulting from these attitudes. All along, appropriate quotations of or references to Woolf's essays, diaries and letters, implement the analysis as they show the critic's leading assumptions closely correspond to the novelist's own vision, philosophy and aesthetics. Focusing the analysis on the interrupted moment as such should have led, it seems to me, to a taking into account of the "purely psychological element" that D.H. Lawrence envisioned as a prospective substitute for a character or hero. Ruotolo clearly sees that the consequent dissolution or blurring of the characters into an indefinite reality, a something without a contour, identifies with Woolf's attempt in *The Waves* — the ultimate stage of a long quest. Thus, the shift of emphasis from character to elemental, nameless, pure psychological manifestation, was open to him. But such a mutation of the object of critical activity is of course easier to suggest than to put into practice. The characters' presence, (even when they are denied by the artist as in *The Waves*) and their very names are a constant temptation, more even, a tangled substance which at each page trips the adventurous critic and lures him back to a more traditional type of approach. But in Chapter 9, he shows how characters in *Between the Acts*, suspended in a specifically Woolfian world in which traditional daily or historical reality has been transmuted into stage setting or trappings, seem of more specifically Woolfian insubstantial substance. The critic's purpose is so felicitously achieved that it reverberates on the whole book, clarifies its aims and, so to speak, makes it whole, as Lily Briscoe's final stroke across her canvas.

As a matter of fact, "between the acts" is a recurrent phrase in Ruotolo's study: "uncurtained windows" are a recurrent objective correlative both in Woolf's fiction and life as *The Interrupted Moment*. These pointers, which we cannot but qualify as symbolic, lifted from the novelist's universe, stress the potentiality of Ruotolo's central theme, the pregnant motionlessness of suspended action between past and prospective achievements, the clear, tantalizing, but inviolate screen between the inside and the outside, the self and the non-self. They imply or encompass all innumerable self-generating and self-destroying antithetic dualities. *The Interrupted Moment* convincingly brings out this elemental and dynamic tension of opposites which is at the core of Woolf's writings and personality. And finally, more original perhaps is the tracing of maturation, or, at least, of a growing consciousness in Woolf of a disrupted or exploded apprehension of the moment, of reality, or life, of people, over a circumscribed whole — the supremacy of the undefined, semi-transparent nebula over the perfect globe. Ruotolo has made a most welcome contribution to the understanding of Woolf's relationship with reality.

Jean Guiguet

**Review: THE ESSAYS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF, VOLUME ONE, 1904-1912**

**Edited by Andrew McNeillie, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987.**

What a pleasure it is to have the first volume of the projected six-volume definitive collection of Virginia Woolf's essays. Some of these pieces are old friends, already published in earlier collections; some are "new," either previously unpublished in book form or until this volume not confirmed as the genuine Woolf article. But with McNeillie's scrupulous scholarship and intelligent editing, his chronological presentation provides a special experience for Woolf readers. In particular, this volume recaptures our sense of Woolf's struggle to define herself and her art in her "formative" years, that decade between first taking herself seriously as a writer and completing *The Voyage Out*.

To call these years "formative" is perhaps too rigid, as if her first novel were an egg waiting to be hatched. Instead, what this collection conveys is Woolf's constant questioning of herself and her ideas about life and art. You find it, of course, in her diaries, letters and reading notes, but here you have it as well in reviews and essays with their rich texture of possibilities and varied thoughts about others' writings. With his extensive and complete cross references, McNeillie wisely indicates just how interconnected all these Woolf writings are; how taken together, we have a deeper understanding of the way in which she was working toward finding her own voice. Beyond enjoying many of the individual essays, I have the overall impression of Woolf personally assessing and re-evaluating herself and her goals as much as she was publicly considering the subjects under review.

At 22, Virginia Woolf took up the suggestion of Violet Dickinson and sent examples of her work to Dickinson's friend Margaret Lyttelton, the editor of the women's pages of the *Guardian*. It was November 1904, less than a year after Leslie Stephen's death, and as McNeillie says in his introduction, Woolf not only wanted to make her entrance into the world of letters, she was intent upon earning money from literary journalism. Not for nothing does Woolf, now launching her "free lance" career, exclaim to Dickinson in a letter quoted here, "I dont in the least want Mrs [Lyttelton]'s candid criticism; I want her cheque!" Never one to forget the economics of literature, and in particular the economics of women's writing, Woolf also wanted her essays and reviews to reflect her perceptions of life and art. No matter that some subjects were assigned, no matter that some books she found irksome and disheartening (as her letters to Dickinson indicate), she made every assignment an occasion for thought — how characters come alive, how plots of novels work or don't, how descriptions of scenery or travel plunge beneath the surface of trivial detail, all questions that would be crucial for her own writing.

Not surprisingly, some of the earliest essays are stiff, as if Woolf were just limbering up. Some, too, find her adopting the stilted voice of a rather stentorian essayist. In the earliest pieces she seems to be watching herself too closely, holding herself to an acceptable, non-controversial stance, perhaps sensing the phantom of Sir Leslie Stephen or one of her editors hovering over her shoulder. But there are also moments when she flares up, when her intensity burns through. One can imagine her throwing her inkwell at the ghosts, much as she later describes the need for the woman writer to banish proscribed ladylike thoughts and phrases. But as you move through the middle and later years of these essays, you feel her taking greater risks and understand her greater annoyance when the *TLS* or the *Times* tampered with a review or as she puts it, "cut it down and tamed it" Just as she criticizes writers (be they "old masters," well-known, or not) when they remain on the surface of things or shrink from telling the truth, she insists on honesty and candor in her own remarks. As she becomes more confident, her earlier pro-forma phrases of praise qualifying a criticism become less frequent. Her letters to Dickinson indicate that she sometimes would have liked to have been harsher, but she always confronts the subjects head on, even when it means disputing received opinion and traditional tastes.

Once more I found myself particularly drawn to the essays in which she discusses women — women in the past like Lady Hester Stanhope or the Duchess of Newcastle-upon-Tyne; women in general, like "Scottish Women" or "The American Woman"; and especially women writers, either famous ones like the Bronte sisters, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Christina Rossetti, or popular writers of her day. She can be terribly disappointed in some of her contemporaries, as if she is asking more of herself when she takes them to task. Still, what she looks for in them as well as in her female forbearers is honesty, vitality and courage, as if they all hold up a mirror to her own aspirations. In her 1904 essay about Hawthorne, her subject is a pilgrimage to the Bronte home but it soon becomes a reflection on the sisters' lives, her ultimate tribute emphasizing their triumph over adversity: "... for however harsh the struggle, Emily and Charlotte above all fought to victory." So, too, while she laments the sometimes feverish quality of Barrett Browning's poetry, she insists in the 1906 review of her letters that, "... it is more easy to understand what was meant by her genius when we study her life. . . . [I]t was hardly possible, as she knew herself, that sane poetry should issue from such conditions." And again with Rossetti, she praises her for taking herself seriously as a poet despite her circumscribed existence.

In her reviews of books about American and Scottish women, she relishes the stories that suggest their vigor and independence, their strength in the face of hardship, their honesty and outspokenness in the midst of convention. And where she despairs of aristocratic women's limitations, their frivolousness or silliness, she also finds reason to praise their attempts, however slight, to break the mold of manners and fashion. At these moments, you hear resonances of the later Virginia Woolf, perhaps not as strong or developed but certainly no less authentic and impassioned. Indeed, when in a 1905 review she criticizes one W.L. Courtney and his book, "The Feminine Note in Fiction," for declaring that because "more and more novels are written by women for women, the novel as a work of art is disappearing," her rebuttal foreshadows *A Room of One's Own* as well as the essay, "Women and Fiction." "The first part of his statement may well be true," she says, since "it means that women having found their voices have something to say which is naturally of supreme interest and meaning to women." But, she continues, more education "will make an artist of her, so that having blurted out her message somewhat formlessly, she will in due time fashion it into a permanent shape."

Woolf readers will welcome this volume and in its diversity find whatever is "naturally of supreme interest and meaning" to them. But above all, this collection shows a young writer finding her voice and using the topics of her essays as sounding boards for her ideas about her life and her art. She wasn't simply defining others but discovering and exploring new paths for herself. What she found important in her subjects, when she highlighted strength and honesty and artistic integrity, confirms what she was seeking in herself and her work.

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**THE VOICE OF VIRGINIA WOOLF IN THE NATIONAL SOUND ARCHIVE**

The National Sound Archive of the British Library, formerly the British Institute of Recorded Sound, has many items of interest to readers of *VWM*. With the B.B.C. as a major source, the N.S.A. holds oral history, documentary material, drama, and music along with other resources amassed through 35 years of collection and donation. These holdings are available to the public by appointment at 29 Exhibition Road near the Royal Albert Hall.

I went there to hear the voice of Virginia Woolf and found another dimension of Bloomsbury. In addition to the brief but vital recording of Woolf's voice, one may also hear the voices of Leonard Woolf, Vita Sackville-West, E.M. Forster, Ethel Smyth, and Ellen Terry. There are also recordings of *The Waves*

abridged for radio by Louis MacNeice in 1955 but broadcast in 1976 with Peggy Ashcroft as Choral Voice and *Between the Acts* dramatized for radio by Liane Austin and broadcast in 1980. Memorial discussions of Leonard Woolf (Feb. 17, 1970 P503 B.B.C. R3) and E.M. Forster (July 12, 1970 T262B.B.C. R3) are lengthy and enlightening. Nor is that all, for the Library of Wildlife Sounds may suggest the soundscape of Woolf's country walks in Sussex.

Virginia Woolf's voice can be heard in a talk entitled "Craftsmanship" in the series "Words Fail Me," broadcast April 29, 1937 when she was 55 (M7060. B.B.C. Archive No. 1328). This is a partial recording — perhaps eleven minutes in length — of the essay published as "Craftsmanship" in *The Listener*, May 5, 1937, 868-9 and reprinted in *The Death of the Moth* (1942).

Quentin Bell warns that "this record is a very poor one. Her voice is deprived of depth and resonance; it seems altogether too fast and flat; it is barely recognizable"<sup>1</sup> Still, even a shadow of Woolf's reality is a gift.

Harold Nicolson, on another tape (AA X/16274), describes Woolf's voice as "carefully modulated and gently toned." It is a full and melodious voice, womanly in pitch and intonation. But since she is reading a text — bear in mind her average of nine revisions — there is little opportunity to hear how she talked. Despite the limitations of the recording, it is clear enough that Woolf had her own style; some words are run together quickly, but not incomprehensibly; others are emphasized, especially monosyllables strategic to her argument, such as "old." From time to time, a rolled "r" emerges.

Virginia Woolf thought she had "read with ease and emotion"<sup>2</sup> — a just assessment, given the paradoxical combination of headlong flow and resolution. What we have in fact is a lecture/chant whose incantatory quality alone might seize one's attention were it not for the counter-attraction of her ideas. Though her voice is restrained, it is also dramatic, without staginess. She uses her voice as an accomplished musician would use her instrument. And, like a professional performer, she exploits the intermittent silences — the rests — making them play their parts in the pattern.

Woolf reads her talk with attention to the architecture of the sentences and paragraphs. To invoke her own words: when she reads one is mindful of "the volumes and masses" as well as "the colonnades and domes." One hears — better than one reads — how Woolf loops back to pick up and weave key words into repeated patterns. That is to say, her text is arranged for aural comprehension — a measure for well wrought writing, though she herself had doubts: [T]here's a certain thrill about writing to read aloud — I expect a vicious one. And it could have been a good article. Its [sic] the talk element that upsets it."<sup>3</sup>

Woolf says of her words that "the truth they try to catch is many-sided." Her voice, far from being monotonous or monochromatic, was a splendid instrument to convey the many-sided truth of what she had to say, not only about words but about life itself. Thanks to the B.B.C. recording, her dispirited thought "that very few people had listened" may be rendered invalid as we listen to her half a century later.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf, A Biography II* (The Hogarth Press, 1972), 200.

2. Ed. Anne Olivier Bell, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, V (The Hogarth Press, 1977-1985), 83.

3. *Diary*, V, 81.

4. *Diary*, V, 83.

My thanks to the staff at the National Sound Archive, especially to Chris Mobbs, Elizabeth Wells and Tony Cull, for their help and to Ruth Wing for her unflinching thoughtfulness in the midst of the expansion of the National Sound Archive's facilities.

A considerably longer version of this material appears as an annotated bibliographical essay in the *Charleston Newsletter*, No. 15 (June, 1986). This brief essay is submitted with the kind permission of Hugh Lee, secretary of the Charleston Trust and editor of the newsletter.

## A POSSIBLE SOURCE FOR NIGHT AND DAY'S CASSANDRA OTWAY

Woolf is generally assumed to have been thinking of Vanessa Bell when she created *Night and Day's* Katherine Hilbery, and perhaps of "Aunt Anny" Ritchie when she invented the charming and seemingly scatter-brained Mrs. Hilbery. Whom was she thinking about when she invented Cassandra Otway?

Cassandra Otway plays the flute and raises silkworms. She is the very type of young woman cultivating many interests and talents, which by their very accumulation result in meaninglessness. As Woolf characterizes these "female accomplishments," they are charming, disconnected, and pursued fitfully: "now it was socialism, now it was silkworms, now it was music."<sup>1</sup> This is the fate Katherine Hilbery, with her interest in mathematics, wants passionately to escape. Woolf had of course been concerned with questions of women's lives and women's work long before the writing of *Night and Day*, and, as her diaries and letters indicate, her preoccupation with this subject was intense.

The raising of silkworms seems an especially unusual and ludicrous example of a "female accomplishment," and it was one that Woolf repeatedly invoked. She appears to have come upon the details of this curious occupation in reading about the life of Lady Dorothy Nevill, the well-known Victorian eccentric, daughter of the Earl of Orford. In 1919, after reviewing *The Life and Letters of Lady Dorothy Nevill*,<sup>2</sup> she commented on this irrepressible aristocrat in a letter to Violet Dickinson:

As for Lady Dorothy Nevill, she made me laugh so with her pigeons, guinea pigs, funguses, and the rest that I couldn't hurt a hair of her head.<sup>3</sup>

Six years later, in a meditation on the class system and the frivolities of the aristocracy, she reworked her thoughts about Lady Dorothy.<sup>4</sup> Significantly, she began by viewing Lady Dorothy from the vantage point of a lady's maid:

Now she illuminated leaves which had been macerated to skeletons; now she interested herself in improving the breed of donkeys; next she took up the cause of silkworms, almost threatened Australia with a plague of them, and "actually succeeded in obtaining enough silk to make a dress"; again she was the first to discover that wood, gone green with decay, can be made, at some expense, into little boxes; she went into the question of funguses and established the virtues of the neglected English truffle; she imported rare fish.<sup>5</sup>

Actually, Woolf's fascination with Lady Dorothy and her silkworms can be found even earlier. In 1908, in the *Cornhill Magazine's* department called "The Book on the Table," Woolf reviewed an unidentified book under the heading, "The Memoirs of Lady Dorothy Nevill."<sup>6</sup> Presumably this was *Leaves from the Notebooks of Lady Dorothy Nevill*, edited by Ralph Nevill, which had been published by Macmillan in the previous year. In it the silkworm adventure was described in some detail along with Lady Dorothy's equally intense pursuit of friends, great men, and other hobbies:

... I had from time to time experimented with the ordinary silkworm which feeds upon mulberry leaves; but my experiences had not been very satisfactory, for, in addition to other inconveniences, my silkworms, which were kept in the house, used occasionally to stray about and get up people's trousers, much to their inconvenience and horror. So I determined to make an altogether new departure, and had a sort of regular silkworm farm laid out in a part of the garden where it could be under constant observation. A certain portion of this ground was entirely devoted to the *Ailanthus glandulosa*, or "Tree of Heaven", which is quite hardy. On its leaves lives the *Ailanthus* silkworm, which I then set about to procure, and wrote to several of my friends asking them to assist me. . . . These silkworms did very well indeed, and I actually obtained enough silk to have a dress made out of it; but in the end I was compelled to give up keeping the *Ailanthus* moth on account of the small birds — tits in particular — which were so taken with what they came to regard as an irresistible

gastronomic treat, with all precautions, such as nets, scarecrows, and the like, proved powerless to save the poor silkworms from destruction.<sup>7</sup>

In that earlier review, the young writer was more concerned with deflating aristocratic pretensions than in discussing women's possibilities and professions, but her perception of Lady Dorothy's irrelevant enthusiasm and intense pursuits provided the foundations of an image which would do thrifty service for many years.

After listing Lady Dorothy's absurd collections of old buttons, watch papers, and "odds and ends of furniture in all styles," Woolf added some of Lady Dorothy's other foolish occupations, such as the breeding of silkworms and the importing of crayfish, the visits to "innumerable picture galleries," and the cultivation of "rare dogs, and strange birds and 'gifted men.'" These were "diversions" that produced "depression" instead of pleasure.<sup>8</sup> The waste and emptiness, the pointlessness of Lady Dorothy's numerous projects — and especially her earnest humorless pursuit of these absurd diversions — could induce despair in a young writer contemplating her destiny.

Lady Dorothy was "accomplished" in many directions, conforming to the accepted views of women's talents and pursuits, but all her accomplishments did not constitute a life-work or profession. The silkworms became for Woolf a compelling and useful image for the futility of women's accomplishments. It could exaggerate and thus challenge the well-grounded ideology of "separate spheres," that familiar late Victorian counsel about women's talents and pursuits, which Woolf resisted. Cassandra Otway, with her flute and her silkworms, was the type of intensely absorbed, talented, but essentially ineffectual young woman whose activities not only did not challenge the ideology of separate spheres but in fact reinforced it. Although Cassandra was not a "portrait" of Lady Dorothy, in creating that character for *Night and Day* Woolf appears to have drawn on the experience of that eccentric aristocrat to strengthen and buttress her larger question about the social meaning of women's lives.

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1. *Night and Day* (George H. Doran, 1920; rept. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), 283.
2. *The Athenaeum*, December 12, 1919, 1331-2.
3. Eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf II* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 402.
4. "Outlines: III, Lady Dorothy Nevill," *The Common Reader, First Series* (Harcourt Brace, 1925), 252-3.
5. But "she was not an extreme case of aristocracy" (250).
6. *The Cornhill Magazine*, N.S. XXIV, 1908, 469-73.
7. *Leaves from the Notebooks of Lady Dorothy Nevill*, 473.

## PUFFS AND PROFITS: THE WOOLF'S MARKETING OF THEIR RUSSIAN TRANSLATIONS

Nothing in his career ever gave Leonard Woolf "more aesthetic pleasure" than his translation (with S.S. Koteliansky) of *Gorky's Reminiscences of Tolstoi*. Its publication, in the summer of 1920, he called "the turning point for the future of the [Hogarth] press."<sup>1</sup> It not only marked the Press's "first commercial venture," yielding a net profit equal to that of the two previously most profitable books combined, but also established the predominant concern of the Press for its tenure at Hogarth House: in 1922 three of the Press's six publications were Russian translations, and the next year there were three more. *Gorky's Reminiscences* was an "immediate success."<sup>2</sup> Having hailed it a week earlier as "the first book of a purely literary character to reach the outside world from Bolshevik Russia," the *Times Literary Supplement* on July 15, 1920 quoted extensive portions expressly to "induce the reader to buy the book." Another anonymous review, in the August 7 *Nation & Athenaeum* declared, "However we had come by our portrait of [Tolstoi] it now appears conventionalised and dead," and went on to explain the book's "fascination":

Gorky's picture comes nearer than the others to completeness, because he makes no attempt to include everything, to explain everything, or to sum up all in one consistent whole. Here there is a very bright light, here darkness and emptiness. And perhaps this is the way we see people in reality.<sup>3</sup>

Virginia Woolf, the author of these latter speculations, had earlier expressed doubts about the Hogarth Press's undertaking the volume. She had written in her diary, "Perhaps this marks some step over a precipice — I don't know." But though the pressures of running a full-fledged business were wearying at first, the Woolfs soon obtained the assistance of Ralph Partridge, and by October, 1920 were, in Virginia Woolf's words, "well launched upon the work of the Press."<sup>4</sup> Its success relieved her of the agony of putting her work in the hands of outside publishers, and accordingly provided her with an unusual degree of artistic freedom. But the marketing of the translations that were to make the Press secure called for — and elicited — a good deal of commercial cleverness.

Virginia Woolf's anonymous review was one example of a well-placed puff. A second was friend Desmond McCarthy's review of *Tolstoi's Love Letters* (translated by Virginia Woolf and Koteliansky<sup>5</sup>) in the May 19, 1923 *New Statesman*. "These letters are remarkable," began McCarthy, and the Woolfs quoted him thus in their subsequent advertisements. The title of the volume itself presented a shrewd marketing decision, for the love letters (of which there were only fourteen) comprised little more than one-third of a 134-page book. Most of it actually consisted of Paul Biryukov's foreword and closing "Study of the Autobiographical Elements in Tolstoi's Work." The Press's ad, which ran several times in *The New Statesman*, read **TOLSTOI'S LOVE LETTERS** in large bold type and "with an essay by Paul Biryukov" in smaller lighter type beneath. McCarthy never mentioned Biryukov's piece, but instead quoted and marvelled at the letters. Edward Garnett's equally laudatory review in the *Nation & Athenaeum* also emphasized their appeal, mentioning only in its last sentence that "a valuable study of the autobiographical elements in Tolstoi's works is appended to the Love Letters."<sup>6</sup>

The Woolfs' Russian translations were not always so well received. The August 9 *TLS* remarked of *Talks with Tolstoi* that "the book as a whole lacked those new and memorably said things that stay in the mind." Neither was there unanimous praise for the quality of the translations. The *TLS* expressed concern over "certain slips." D.H. Lawrence wrote to Koteliansky that some of Woolf's [sic] sentences take a bit of reading;<sup>7</sup> John Middleton Murry, in a letter to Katherine Mansfield, described the translation of Chekov's notebooks as an "icebath."<sup>8</sup>

But the Press could adeptly appropriate even unfavorable comment. Murry's review of the Chekov notebooks (in the June 4, 1921 *Nation & Athenaeum*) had been bitter, but an advertisement in the back of the 1922 *Stavrogin's Confession* (Koteliansky and Virginia Woolf's translation of two additional chapters to Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*) simply quoted Murry's caustic "I regret that they have been published" in the midst of a number of favorable newspaper comments. The Woolfs must have enjoyed these small machinations, which they surely felt forwarded a good cause: the dissemination in England of writings by Russian authors whom they greatly admired. And the successful and clever marketing of these works made a virtue of literature's commercial side, which might otherwise have seemed — particularly for Virginia Woolf — a troubling necessity.

Victor Luftig  
Stanford University

1. *Downhill All the Way, An Autobiography of the Years 1919 to 1939* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967), 67.
2. Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again, An Autobiography of the Years 1911 to 1918*, 253, and *Downhill All the Way*, 67.
3. So attributed by B.J. Kirkpatrick, *A Bibliography of Virginia Woolf* (The Clarendon Press, 1980), 157.
4. Ed. Anne Olivier Bell, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, II* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 34, 72.
5. There is some uncertainty as to the extent and nature of Virginia Woolf's participation in the translations attributed to her. She generally refers to this work as "translating" in letters and diary entries, but her illness in the summer of 1921 seems to have ended her Russian lessons after only a few months. At the end of this time she told Koteliansky, "You will find that I have not learned Russian." Eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, III* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) 516, 521, 476. The editors of her diary describe her contributions to the translations as "nominal" (II, 238n). For Leonard Woolf's account of the translating process see *Beginning Again*, 247.
6. *The Nation & the Athenaeum*, June 2, 1923.
7. *TLS*, July 9, 1923; George Zytaruk, *The Question for Rananim, D.H. Lawrence's Letters to S.S. Koteliansky* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), 251; *The Letters of John Middleton Murry to Katherine Mansfield* (Constable & Co., 1983), 342.

# the Virginia Woolf Society

## NEWS FROM SECRETARY-TREASURER, LAURA MOSS GOTTLIEB

Efforts to democratize the selection of the two Virginia Woolf Society panels at MLA, and the process of nominating officers of the Society are underway. The Board of Trustees of the VWS met during the 1986 Modern Language Association convention and tallied the votes for 1987's MLA panels to be held in San Francisco. The winners: VW's Narrative Strategies, and VW as Critic and Reader. VWS members were notified in January of the panel topics chosen and the deadlines for submitting abstracts.

The officers of the Virginia Woolf Society are scheduled to change this December, since they serve for a three-year term. The VWS's Board of Trustees decided that the most useful and democratic way of soliciting nominations for President and Secretary-Treasurer of the Virginia Woolf Society would be to give everyone in the Society a description of each job and ask them to nominate themselves if they were interested.

The duties of the President are as follows: The President does all the dealing with MLA, making sure the VWS panels are listed in the MLA directory and newsletters, and arranging for the cash bar or VWS party at MLA. The President also serves as a link with the editors of the *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*. Future Presidents are encouraged to initiate VWS meetings, tours, and conferences outside of MLA and to pursue international ties.

The duties of the Secretary-Treasurer are: (1) to maintain an accurate membership list; (2) to collect the annual dues and keep accurate records of where that money goes; (3) to compile, print, and distribute a membership directory (perhaps once every two years); (4) to respond to questions about the VWS by letter or telephone; (5) to distribute the annual bibliography of VW scholarship, various questionnaires, and to keep VWS members informed about VWS activities; and (6) to send the *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* half of the dues money collected by the VWS and to ensure that their mailing list of VWS members is accurate.

Again, VWS members were notified by mail and encouraged to nominate themselves for these positions.

We appreciate your comments and suggestions for improving the Virginia Woolf Society. Please continue to send them — *and* information about your works-in-progress and forthcoming works for the annual bibliography to me at 118 Grandview Road, State College, Pa. 16801.

The Virginia Woolf Society cordially invites all interested to attend the Virginia Woolf Society 1987 Sussex Conference which will be held Monday, June 22 through Tuesday, June 23 at the University of Sussex at Falmouth, near Lewes and Brighton.

At VWS press time, details are sparse but tantalizing. Papers will be presented by Jean Guiguet, Patricia Joplin, Lucio Ruotolo, Kate Flint, and Makiko-Pinkney and Elizabeth Inglis will show people around the Monks House archives. Tours are being arranged for Tuesday, to Monks House, Charleston, and other points of interest to Woolf readers. On Monday night, there will be, in the Society's best tradition, a party.

The registration fee is \$25 or \$15 for students; if paying in pounds, £16 and £10. Please send your checks or letters of inquiry, should you want more details, directly to:

Bill Handley  
St. John's College  
Oxford, OX1 3JP, England

The Fall VWS certainly hopes to feature a report from this first international conference organized by the VW Society. President Lucio Ruotolo and Bill Handley are to be congratulated for their efforts to realize this vision.

## SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

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