Woolf and the Art of Exploration
Helen Southworth
Elisa Kay Sparks

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Woolf and the Art of Exploration

Selected Papers from the
Fifteenth International Conference on Virginia Woolf
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Trespassing

by Rishona Zimring

When it comes to Woolf, I tend to think back through my grandmother, whose collection of hardcover editions of Virginia Woolf gathered dust on the bookshelves of our house until I graduated from college and devoured them whole, starting with A Room of One’s Own (1929) and A Writer’s Diary (1953). For me, the art of exploring the works of Woolf began at home, in a few of the countless hours I spent there drifting through the stuff that had collected over the years. Thus it is with a certain feeling of resonance that I read the memoir of Woolf’s friend Gwen Raverat, née Darwin, exploring her grandfather’s house, as a child, and finding there all manner of passions and wonders. She writes of the mere pebbles:

They were not loose, but stuck down tight in moss and sand, and were black and shiny, as if they had been polished. I adored those pebbles. I mean literally adored; worshipped. . . . This kind of feeling hits you in the stomach, and in the ends of your fingers, and it is probably the most important thing in life. Long after I have forgotten all my human loves, I shall still remember the smell of a gooseberry leaf, or the feel of the wet grass on my bare feet; or the pebbles in the path. (141–42)

The smell of those tobacco-infused hardcover editions and the feel of their smooth, shiny, disintegrating dust jackets provides me with similar feelings. Exploring an old house has its curious surprises and even terrors: Raverat writes of dashing “at full speed” through her grandfather’s study, which was “faintly holy and sinister. . . . There were many mysterious things on the tables and shelves, including a baby in a bottle; or at least something in alcohol, which I took to be a baby” (153). Here, there is a sense of shock, even horror; exploration, even or perhaps especially of the supposedly familiar, entails encounters with the unknown, and here too is resonance: for readers of Woolf will forever be taken on journeys of discovery of the inner life and of the past, territories at times forbidden, forbidding, mysterious, exotic.

Maria DiBattista, in her keynote lecture for the conference, “Woolf’s Sense of Adventure,” reminded us that Rose Pargiter’s adventurous foray on the streets of London was fraught with dangers. If we return to The Years (1937) for a moment, we can recall Rose’s moment of anticipation and imminent discovery:

Here she was galloping across the desert. She began to trot. It was growing dark. The street lamps were being lit. The lamplighter was poking his stick up into the
little trap-door; the trees in the front gardens made a wavering network of shad-
ow on the pavement; the pavement stretched before her broad and dark. (27)
Not to be outdone by the shadows, DiBattista inspiringly calls Rose “the brave ancestress
of Maurice Sendak’s wild things and ravagers of the night kitchen.” While Rose encoun-
ters a brutish, violent world on the street, DiBattista encourages us “not [to] over-estimate
the impact of this defeat,” for Rose’s spirit of adventure will not abandon her in later life
and will come to console and empower her. Rose, after all, is the novel’s political activist,
one who boldly takes on the world and refuses to be its victim.

Did the 15th Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf take on the world? Was it ad-
venturous? Did it explore external and internal territories? It is impossible to summarize,
and the editors of this volume, Elisa Kay Sparks and Helen Southworth, will have more to
say about the papers that were presented. But a quick glance at the conference’s four days
suggests that the invitation to take up themes of risk, daring, and curiosity was accepted
by many. The keynote speakers for the conference sounded the theme of “the art of explo-
reration” time and again: in addition to DiBattista, Diane Gillespie through the figure of
Lady Godiva, Douglas Mao through the appreciation of the aesthetic environment and its
profound effects on the human organism, Jed Esty through the discussion of youthful pro-
tagonists and the colonial thematics of uneven development, and Christine Froula through
the analysis of the brothel as an ambivalent site of “freedom.” Reminding us of the confer-
ence’s lush, wooded setting, a lasting image from Mao’s lecture received a perfect backdrop
through the uncurtained, gigantic windows behind him: the image of falling leaves from
Rebecca West’s “The Strange Necessity” was a metaphor for the leaves of a book, perceived
as wealth; the leaves in the trees beyond the windows literally shook in the wind as if in
hearty agreement and stood for the wealth of the Pacific Northwest: its verdure.

Of course, green depends on water, and indeed it rained, but there were several op-
portunities to stay indoors and appreciate the aesthetic environment within. Inspiring
artists from around the world brought their talents to the conference: the Reed Col-
lege Theater Department’s Kathleen Worley performing her one-woman show as Virginia
Woolf, pianist, dual French/English citizen Emilie Crapoulet performing Impressionist
works, and Australian artist Suzanne Bellamy displaying two- and three-dimensional
works that have delighted many, many conference-goers over the years. In addition, Elisa
Kay Sparks graced the conference with her considerable talent as a printmaker, creating
the beautiful woodcut, based on a photograph of Woolf with walking stick, that became
the conference’s emblem. Artistically, it was a feast.

A conference on “The Art of Exploration” in 2005 cannot help but resonate with
current themes of globalization and transnationalism in literary studies; the editors of
this volume can say more about how the published proceedings reflect the current trend.
However, a brief comment on the international scope of the conference from the point
of view of participation will highlight: conference participants came to Portland from
Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Japan, Norway, the United Kingdom. Sand-
witched between two European conferences on Woolf—the 2004 conference in London,
and the 2006 conference in Birmingham—the Portland conference, from a satellite per-
spective, represents a giddy bouncing back and forth for anyone traveling to all three. But,
of course, globalization in its myriad meanings includes the sense of the collapse of space;
so Portland’s location on the Pacific Rim (and the volcanic ring of fire), may not be so
Woolf should have the final word on the “art of exploration,” so I will end with a favorite quotation, one that reminds us of how Auerbach read Woolf’s form as profoundly democratic and of how DiBattista reads Woolf’s exploration of the inner life as profoundly adventurous. It reminds me a bit of Raverat, the child exploring the old house, with its secrets, mysteries, and aesthetic inspiration. Woolf’s essay “The Leaning Tower” ends with this:

But let us bear in mind a piece of advice that an eminent Victorian who was also an eminent pedestrian once gave to walkers: “Whenever you see a board up with ‘Trespassers will be prosecuted,’ trespass at once.”

Let us trespass at once. Literature is no one’s private ground; literature is common ground. It is not cut up into nations; there are no wars there. Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves. It is thus that English literature will survive this war and cross the gulf—if commoners and outsiders like ourselves make that country our own country, if we teach ourselves how to read and write, how to preserve, and how to create. (181)

Works Cited


Common Ground

by Helen Southworth and Elisa Kay Sparks

In her essay on Woolf and America, included in this volume, Cheryl Mares reminds us of the fun Woolf had imagining elaborate and comical names for American people and places when corresponding with Vita Sackville-West as she toured the United States in the early 1930’s. And it’s fun to imagine Woolf assuming a twangy Southern accent (usually the preferred choice for British people imitating Americans) as she constructed syllable by syllable her vision of the imagined American city she would never ultimately
WOOLF AND THE ART OF EXPLORATION

visit. What might Woolf have made of the place names she would have encountered as she pored over a map of today’s Portland area: Damascus, Happy Valley, Troutdale, McMinville, Lewis and Clark College’s Palatine Hill Road? How would her British tongue have wrapped itself around the “Willamette Valley” and “Oregon,” which frustrated natives assert on bumper stickers should be pronounced “Orygun”?

At Lewis and Clark College in June 2005, scholars spoke back at Woolf in a variety of accents. Presenters trespassed—as Woolf trespassed into American English—as they gave to things Woolflian their own flavor. Japanese, American, Canadian, Israeli, Italian, Greek, Scandinavian, German, French and British voices, and hybrids of all of the above, took Woolf to task on the common ground of Woolf scholarship. This collection represents the diversity of voices heard at the Fifteenth Annual Woolf Conference.

The subject of the conference elicited papers on a variety of expected exploratory themes, papers on travel and on issues associated with empire and colonialism. But there were other less obvious clusters: a number of papers were concerned with Woolf’s relationship to nature, the environment, and the life sciences; other papers showed a continuing interest in “material” Woolf—on the art, interior decoration, statues, and spaces in which Woolf worked and lived. Reflecting recent interests in the history of the social sciences in the field of modernism, several papers considered how Woolf engaged with work in anthropology and ethnography. And of course, there was a sustained interest in how Woolf transformed the trauma in her life to the artistry of her work.

Aside from the five featured lecturers—all of whom are represented in our volume by at least abstracts—and the presentation by Trevor James Bond about the Woolf collection in Washington State University’s Holland Library, (also included herein) there were 44 parallel panels at the conference, including 142 papers. Significantly more than half of these papers were submitted for consideration in this volume, from which we chose twenty-five to publish. Charting a course midway between the plethora of short papers in previous conference proceedings (between 40 and 56 selections) and the selectivity of the Smith volume, we wanted to give authors the chance to develop their ideas more fully, so we were flexible with page limitations, allowing pieces to evolve in revision to the length dictated by content. So paper length may vary from a half-page abstract to the full twenty-five-page expansion of Diane Gillespie’s illustrated plenary speech.

We chose for our colophon logo the image of a Compass Rose: to illustrate both the conference theme—exploration—and the host city—Portland, the City of Roses. The compass rose not only symbolizes the many directions in which Woolf scholarship is heading, it also preserves the unity of common investigations in its design of concentric circles, which became the organizational structure by which we grouped our essays. As we read over the pieces we had selected on the basis of quality and freshness of scholarship and writing, a kind of phenomenological expansion of consciousness in both space and time became apparent. We decided to start with Woolf’s immediate, intimate life and to work outward to encompass ever widening spheres of concern, keeping wherever feasible a chronological order. Thus, after the keynotes, the next section relates specifically to Woolf’s life, then comes a section about her negotiations with the world outside the self, especially in nature. The more socially complex sphere of London follows, succeeded by a section emphasizing travel in foreign lands, especially the United States and the Mideast. The final two sections represent travel in the realm of the mind for they explore ideas
about art and empire and about cultural origins and contexts that undergird all of Woolf’s textual explorations. Within each section, we have largely kept to chronological order, arranging the essays according to the dates of the principal works they discuss.

The keynotes were broad ranging. Diane Gillespie set the pace of the conference, galloping ahead with her image-rich study of Woolf, Lady Godiva, divestiture, and public protest in *Three Guineas*, reproduced in full here. Jed Esty looked at *The Voyage Out* as a “failed *bildungsroman,*” Doug Mao brought Rebecca West’s narrative essay “The Strange Necessity” into conversation with Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own,* and Maria DiBattista sought Woolf’s sense of adventure in a selection of novels. Christine Froula closed the conference with her beautifully illustrated talk about the relationship between early Bloomsbury, specifically Virginia and Vanessa Stephen, and the “emancipatory project of European modernity.” Abstracts of all of these presentations are included with links to the full article where applicable. Trevor Bond, Special Collections Librarian at Washington State University, whose exhibit of items from the Leonard and Virginia Woolf Library at WSU delighted conference attendees and whose presentation put to the test their knowledge of, among other things, Bloomsbury orthography, provided us with a description of the exhibit and an overview of the collection housed in Pullman, Washington. WSU also kindly provided the frontispiece for this volume.

Our first set of conference papers, grouped under the heading “Exploring Woolf’s Life,” looks at the way Woolf’s life informed her art. Gill Lowe takes us into the world of Virginia Stephen’s early childhood with her description of and extracts from the Stephen children’s *Hyde Park Gate News.* Alice D’Amore explores Woolf’s attempt to address and resolve her own traumatic recollections in *The Waves* by examining the conflation of Jinny and Rhoda in the holograph drafts and the subsequent emergence of Rhoda as a separate entity. Suggesting Ottoline Morrell as a potential source for Mrs. Manresa of *Between the Acts,* Sally Jacobsen pursues the implications of this tie.

The section following the one on Woolf’s life was originally entitled “Exploring Woolf and Nature”; however, as the essays gathered under this rubric continued to develop during the revision process, many of them shifted away from their direct concern with the natural world and instead began to focus more on what psychologists might label “self-object differentiation,” discussions of the psychic economies by which Woolf explores her and her characters’ place in the world. We start with Kathryn Simpson’s discussion of the economy of symbolic exchange by which Woolf transforms the natural world into objects of human consumption in “The Orchard,” then move on to Christina Alt’s outlining of Woolf’s ambivalence towards different scientific paradigms for describing the natural world and Kelly Sultzbach’s comparison of Woolf’s creation of an animate natural environment and the ecophenomenological approach of Merleau-Ponty. The section ends with Katie Macnamara’s analysis of the possible influence of the aesthetic theories of Arthur Clutton-Brock on Woolf’s portrayal of subjects and objects in her short story “Solid Objects.”

If the essays in the previous section focus on modes of consciousness, those on London share the recent trend of interest in London’s material spaces. Robert Reginio inaugurates our journey through the urban scene with his examination of how Jacob’s Room and the Cenotaph, the central British war memorial in London, experiment in similar ways with incorporating emptiness into the form of their mourning. Karin de Weille focuses
on the inseparability of public and private space as “a direct response to imperialism and war” in Woolf’s work, specifically Mrs. Dalloway. Benjamin Harvey’s survey of the architectural space of the British Museum Reading Room provides new insight into A Room of One’s Own. And Elizabeth Evans, continuing the political analysis of space, closes this section with an exploration of the relationship between material and psychological space and nation in The Years.

In the section “Exploring Foreign Lands,” we include papers addressing Woolf’s relationship first with the United States and second with the Levant. The essays on America by both Leslie Stephen and Virginia Woolf are the focus of Eleanor McNees’ piece, including a detailed look at Woolf’s controversial engagement with respondents to her essay “On Not Knowing French.” Cheryl Mares next argues for the importance of looking at those writers who supplied Woolf with images of an America that she never visited, arguing for a reading of Woolf’s “America, Which I Have Never Seen” as a send up of British attitudes towards America and Americans. Vita Sackville-West’s travel writings constitute the focus of Joyce Kelley’s and Joanna Grant’s essays, both of which see the influence of Passenger to Teheran and Twelve Days in Woolf’s Orlando, Kelley in terms of form, Grant in terms of content.

Our section on art and empire extends the notion of travel to include the mental voyages of imperial thought processes. The first two essays deal with The Voyage Out: Emily Wittman retraces and extends the scholarship on Rachel Vinrace’s efforts to read Edward Gibbon’s mammoth tome, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, while Ayako Muneuchi elaborates the modernist context of the novel’s setting in a hotel. Mollie Godfrey enters the debate about Woolf’s relationship with Shakespeare via an original reading of Mrs Dalloway, while the section ends with Renee Dickinson’s sketching in the presence of Florence Nightingale, the lady with the lamp, throughout the interludes in The Waves.

In the final section, we have collected essays which illuminate the wider context of Woolf’s cultural heritage. Margaret Albrinck uses references to Bronislaw Malinowski, the father of the modern field of anthropology, to uncover the ethnographer in To the Lighthouse’s Lily Briscoe. In her paper on the photography of Antarctica, Alexandra Neel shows how Woolf uses the language of photography to reveal how different minds work in To the Lighthouse. Next, Randi Koppen uses ideas derived from Walter Benjamin’s analysis of Baudelaire to fashion a discussion of veiled and allegorical figures in Woolf’s work, while Akemi Yaguchi suggests how the work of contemporary psychologist James Sully can be seen as alternative to Freud’s influence. And Stephanie Callan closes out the volume with an essay on Between the Acts that builds on the tradition of critics who have discussed Jane Harrison’s impact on Woolf, not only excavating how Woolf evokes the primeval but also questioning the logic of valuing origins above the present moment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Elisa would particularly like to acknowledge the continual wise and considered support offered by Wayne Chapman. Wayne’s early editing of Diane Gillespie’s long and complex keynote speech, complete with numerous illustrations, as well as his supervision
of Karen Kukil’s edition of the selected papers from the 2003 Smith conference provided us with a professional model and format template that we used in all our subsequent editing. Having an office next door to Wayne meant that Elisa could and often did consult him on innumerable details of editing procedure, from how to get permissions for illustrations to how many spaces to tell authors to put after periods. She is also grateful for his advice on whether to accept certain essays.

Helen would very much like to thank Beth Rigel Daugherty, Suzette Henke, Karen Levenback, Michael Mirabile, Suzanne Raitt and Carey Snyder for their willingness to make comments on individual papers included in this volume. She is also very grateful to Paul Peppis and Suzette Henke for letter writing; to Wayne Chapman, Vara Neverow, Merry Pawlowski, Mark Hussey and Laila Miletic-Vejzovic for information and words of advice; to the Oregon Humanities Center at the University of Oregon for financial support; and to her colleagues at the Honors College and in the English Department at the University of Oregon, especially Henry Alley and Louise Westling, for their good humour and continuing support. Helen also thanks her husband, Caleb Southworth, for his love and support.

We could not have made our deadlines without the very hard work and expertise of the graduate students staffing the CUDP (Clemson University Digital Press), especially our typesetter Allison Kerns, who wins our brick-of-the-year award for her patient, efficient, and good-humored work on all aspects of the volume’s final appearance. We also could not have done without the eagle eye of our copy editor extraordinaire, Helen’s old friend Stacey Shimizu, whose remarkable organized consistency saved us from countless infelicities and outright errors, especially in footnotes and bibliographies. Elisa would also like to thank the College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities at Clemson for giving her a course release to work on this volume and the Women’s Studies program at Clemson for helping to pay for Stacey’s editing and for complimentary copies to contributors.

Thanks also to Matthew Bailey at the National Portrait Gallery and to the institutions and copyright holders acknowledged elsewhere in this volume.

Finally, the editors would like to acknowledge each other. It is a mark of the geniality and shared interests of the Woolf community that the two of us, hailing from different continents and living on opposite coasts—and, as of this writing, never having actually met in person—have been able to work together so happily and efficiently, encouraging, inspiring, sometimes excusing and always supporting each other. We hope the common ground we found will be fertile territory for many voyages ahead.
**Virginia Woolf**  
**Standard Abbreviations**  
(as established by *The Woolf Studies Annual*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAH</td>
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<td>BTA</td>
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<td>CDB</td>
<td><em>The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>CE</td>
<td><em>Collected Essays</em> (ed. Leonard Woolf, 4 vols.: CE1, CE2, CE3, CE4)</td>
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<td>CR1</td>
<td><em>The Common Reader</em></td>
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<td><em>The Common Reader, Second Series</em></td>
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<td>CSF</td>
<td><em>The Complete Shorter Fiction</em> (ed. Susan Dick)</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td><em>The Diary of Virginia Woolf</em> (5 vols.: D1, D2, D3, D4, D5)</td>
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<td><em>The Death of the Moth and Other Essays</em></td>
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<td>WF</td>
<td><em>Women and Fiction: The Manuscript Versions of a Room of One's Own</em> (ed. S. P. Rosenbaum)</td>
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*Note: The abbreviations are as established by *The Woolf Studies Annual*.*
Part One: Exploring Keynotes
GODIVA STILL RIDES: 
VIRGINIA WOOLF, DIVESTITURE, AND THREE GUINEAS

by Diane F. Gillespie

PROLOGUE: THE SPIRIT, NOT THE LETTER

Horrified by the events of recent years, a number of us have gone back to Woolf’s Three Guineas. When I read my tattered copy this time, seemingly unrelated ideas I’d been writing about over the past thirty years suddenly collided, then exploded in new directions. These odd links and changes in perspective are probably symptoms of a certain age and a certain stage in any career, academic or not. Having written on Three Guineas before (“Her Kodak”), I won’t focus now on Woolf’s use of photography to indict the competitive power hierarchies that oppressed women and brought England to the brink of another destructive war. Nor do I plan to detail an application of Woolf’s argument to the global oppression of women and current violence. Equally important is Woolf’s exploration of the nature of public protest. In other words, it isn’t only the letter (or letters) of Three Guineas that can inform us. It is also the spirit. To define that spirit, for a conference focused on “the art of exploration,” I’m going to try something exploratory myself, leaping across centuries, among media, and along the highbrow/lowbrow cultural continuum even more than I usually do.¹

PART I: INTRODUCTION: “A MAGNIFICENTLY CAPARISONED CHARGER”

In her 1938 “Foreword” to the collected edition of Pilgrimage, Dorothy Richardson notes that her “fresh pathway,” her literary “adventure,” has “turned out to be a populous highway.” Among the explorers “who had simultaneously entered it,” she writes, was an unnamed “woman,” assumed to be Virginia Woolf, who is “mounted upon a magnificently caparisoned charger” (10, Richardson’s italics). “Magnificently caparisoned” means richly draped or adorned and suggests (from Richardson’s point of view) Woolf’s upper-middle-class advantages and narrow perspective. Richardson’s way of coping with Woolf’s greater reputation as a woman writer is to use the equestrian image “to reduce” her writing, Gloria Fromm says, “to a stylistic show” (318-19).² This evaluation of Woolf as elegant stylist and privileged elitist was common enough in the 1930s. A caparisoned “charger,” however, also evokes a war horse protected by leather or iron. By placing Woolf atop such a horse, Richardson echoes a related accusation she makes in private letters. Woolf, she concludes, “for all her femininity, is a man’s, almost a male, writer” (Windows 400). Despite her parallel path-finding, Woolf reflects values and combines aesthetic forms in ways, Richardson implies, more attractive than her own to a masculine critical establishment (cf. Gillespie, “Political” 145).

I now see another dimension to Richardson’s odd image. I think she had in mind some version, or perversion, of the medievalism that represents Lady Godiva exposed on a horse—one variously, but always “magnificently[,] caparisoned.” I make this leap
because I notice now that the edition with Richardson’s “Foreword” also includes, for the first time, the portion of Pilgrimage called Dimple Hill with a striking Godiva reference. Richardson’s character Miriam, living with a Quaker family in 1907, listens as one of the brothers describes something he saw in London: “She rode down the middle of the street,” he says, “with this great mass of hair falling nearly to the saddle.” Miriam, who recognizes this “apparition,” as she calls it, realizes that the man’s “outward eye behold[s] an engaging picture, his inward, Godiva” (IV 440). The “apparition,” George Thomson notes, is a marketing ploy for Edwards’ “Harlene” hair products (113-14, 252) whose advertisements suggest not only the abundant hair of Pre-Raphaelite women, but also the unbound hair that obscures Godiva’s naked body. In the context of this passage, I think Richardson, when she mounts Woolf on a “magnificently caparisoned charger,” ignores the challenge to an oppressive patriarchy in the Godiva legend and alludes only to its inherent voyeurism. In one sentence, Richardson creates “Lady Virginia” and implies a kind of femininity complicit with masculine reductions of women to bodies, or of works by women writers to attractive aesthetic displays.

Yet display in Three Guineas, as Amy Lilly recognizes in a different context, can be political (29). The Godiva legend, if read as public, partly disguised self-exposure for the purpose of social protest, helps to define the spirit of Woolf’s book. Unlike Antigone or Lysistrata, both mentioned in the text, the Godiva of medievalist legend could very well have been the first English member of Woolf’s “Outsiders’ Society”—the fore-mother of all subsequent outsiders, including Woolf herself. For one thing, Woolf frequently refers to writing, Three Guineas particularly, as horseback riding. For another, she is uncomfortable with the very kind of “narrowing and restricting,” “damned egotistical self” that she, in turn, attributes to Richardson (D2 14). This kind of autobiographical self-exposure she elsewhere equates with nakedness and reconsiders, especially in connection with Three Guineas. In 1930, when Vanessa Bell publicly exhibits a painting of nude women, Woolf wonders if her sister’s paintings somehow expose the painter, as she violates traditional restrictions on women artists’ subject matter. The “Foreword” Woolf writes for this exhibition, as much as its better-known counterpart, “Professions for Women,” launches Three Guineas and informs the spirit of Woolf’s work.

By the time she publishes Three Guineas in 1938, Woolf is ready to explore, as does the Godiva legend, boundaries between what is suitable for private and what for public scrutiny (a borderline of recent interest to scholars like Anna Snaith and Melba Cuddy-Keane). The Godiva legend and Three Guineas both reflect and challenge traditional gender norms in ways that shock conventional people. Both the legendary Godiva and Virginia Woolf risk personal, public divestiture—actual or metaphorical—on behalf of social reform, yet both maintain physical or mental chastity. Both thus use mediums that may distract from their social messages. In both cases, too, individual women scrutinize, publicly expose, and challenge oppressive social hierarchies.

Accepting divestiture in Three Guineas as both authorial condition and topic, Woolf is more ready than usual to face public scrutiny with defiance and humor. Whether or not readers miss, dismiss, or seriously consider the radical nature of her motivation and argument, writing Three Guineas empowers and relieves her.
PART II: “AND SHOWERED THE RIPPLED RINGLETS TO HER KNEE”

Medieval historians recount what little we know about the eleventh-century woman whose Anglo-Saxon name was Godgifu. Briefly, she was a landowner; a wife to Leofric, the influential earl of Mercia; a benefactor, with her husband, to monasteries; and a devotee of the Virgin Mary. More relevant here is the “medievalism” of later centuries, the development of a legend that has little or no basis in reality. Unless “Anon” initially helped to transmit the story of Godiva’s legendary ride, and, as Woolf thinks, “Anon” was “sometimes woman” (“Anon” 382), most of the narrators and visual artists perpetuating the legend reshaped it according to whatever masculine perspectives were characteristic of their times and places.

When the narrative of Godiva’s ride appears 150 years after the actual woman’s death, the essential details are all there: the servitude of the people of Coventry; Godiva’s sympathy for the oppressed; her persistent negotiating with her husband on behalf of the suffering poor; his exasperated dare—if she rides naked through the public marketplace he will free the people; and her courage to accept his challenge. She mounts her horse, lets down the long hair that veils all but her legs, and rides, by some miracle, unobserved. From the beginning, the story positions chroniclers and readers as viewers of what the townspeople cannot see. That Leofric in the legend has power to lift whatever the “servitude” entails is an anachronism introduced after the Norman Conquest since records show that Godiva, not Leofric, owned the lands that included Coventry.

Renaissance and eighteenth-century writers add a public proclamation, made either by Leofric or Godiva, to keep the townspeople from looking. A related addition is a tailor named Tom who violates the taboo and is miraculously punished with blindness, sometimes even death. “Peeping Tom,” as he is called by 1837, becomes a surrogate as well as a scapegoat for voyeuristic writers and readers. Finally, Godiva does not ride astride, as she would have done in the eleventh century. Instead, according to a fashion introduced in the fourteenth century, she most frequently rides side-saddle, a less authoritative perch that emphasizes her feminine grace and chastity (see Figure 1).

So pervasive was Godiva’s story in literature, the visual arts, and popular culture during the nineteenth century and later, that it seems strange to find no direct references, positive or negative, in Woolf’s published work or in letters and diaries. Even the Dictionary of National Biography volumes edited by her father Leslie Stephen, which contain very few women, devote a full four and a half columns to Godiva or Godgifu. Although the Godiva subtext I read into Woolf’s concern with public divestiture as social protest is not dependent on her familiarity with the legend, circumstantial evidence indicates that she knew some of the most recent versions. In 1919, for instance, she reviewed A Day-Book of Walter Savage Landor and cites examples of Landor’s ability to “say beautiful things beautifully.” Among them is an excerpt from “Leofric and Godiva,” the first of Landor’s “Imaginary Conversations” (E3 111). The Day-Book, along with volume 4 of Landor’s works containing all of the “Conversations,” are among the Woolfs’ books now at Washington State University. If Virginia did read more than the day-book excerpts, she would have found Leofric cast as an insensitive egomaniac and Godiva as a conventionally modest and flattering wife. Melted with maternal “tenderness and love,” she begs her husband to relieve starving mothers and children (3). Leofric responds with his dare, and Landor
Woolf disliked Tennyson’s sentimentality (cf. Gillespie, Sisters’ 66-7), but young Virginia Stephen very likely knew his poem “Godiva,” written after a visit to Coventry in 1840. It appears in a volume of his works that still bears her bookplate, “AVS 1905.” The poem was immensely popular among Victorians. Like Landor, Tennyson describes Godiva’s sympathy with mothers and children, their starvation resonating with that of exploited industrial workers in nineteenth-century England (Donoghue 84). William Holman Hunt, in Moxon’s edition of Tennyson’s poems (1859)—not the one Woolf owned—merely shows a solitary Godiva unclasping, as Tennyson says, “the wedded eagles of her belt, / The grim Earl’s gift” (104). Unlike Landor and Hunt, however, Tennyson verbally relishes what follows:

. . . anon she shook her head,
And showered the rippled ringlets to her knee;
Unclad herself in haste; adown the stair
Stole on; and, like a creeping sunbeam, slid
From pillar unto pillar, until she reach’d
The gateway; there she found her palfrey trapt
In purple blazon’d with armorial gold. (104)

Godiva’s saddle horse is magnificently caparisoned, but she rides forth timidly, dressed only, Tennyson says, in her chastity. Ironically, given the way his own eyes linger on the
scene, Tennyson describes the punishment of the “one low churl” who peeped, how “his eyes, before they had their will, / Were shrivell’d into darkness in his head, / And dropt before him” (104). Unscathed himself, the poet hurries over Godiva’s return. She has removed the tax, he concludes, and “built herself an everlasting name” (104).

Tennyson’s poem, popular not only in Britain but internationally, inspired many paintings, woodcuts, lithographs, and sculptures. Nineteenth-century painters and printers, for instance, depicted, exhibited, and reproduced Godiva with Leofric, Godiva undressing, Godiva preparing to ride, and Godiva on her horse. Rarely covered by her hair as in written versions of the legend, Godiva provides “a variation of the Victorian gentlemen’s ‘pin-up’” (Clarke and Day 14) and also replaces nude classical goddesses as subjects for Victorian sculpture (Donoghue 96).

Joan Lancaster attributes the popularity of Godiva’s story, not so much to her nakedness, but to the depiction of “a great person temporarily divested of dignity and yet winning through in the end because of innate goodness and courage” (72). She points out, as do others, that “the discovery of oneself in public inadequately clad or naked” is a common anxiety “dream motif” (72), as I’m sure some of us know. This vulnerability was very real to a number of nineteenth-century women of letters, who struggled to balance private domestic life with public realms of publication, philanthropy, and social activism. Dorothy Mermin, in her study of women reformers and writers like Anna Jameson, Harriet Martineau, and Elizabeth Barrett, writes that Godiva’s “story miraculously unites display and modesty, courage and safety, political engagement and family life” (xvii). Identification with Godiva empowered such women to endure charges of unladylike knowledge or unfeminine behavior, including immodest self-exposure and presumptuous challenges to the status quo.

In *Three Guineas*, as scholars like Vara Neverow have noted, Woolf draws on a number of such “activist, dedicated, visionary” foremothers (14). Woolf cites Josephine Butler, for instance, but not her *New Godiva: A Dialogue* (1888). Butler’s epigraph is two lines from Tennyson’s well-known poem. “You would not let your little finger ache / For such as these?” scoffs Leofric. “But I would die,” counters Godiva. In Butler’s dialogue, an enlightened husband defends his wife to a traditional male friend. The “new Godiva,” he says, is one who leaves her comfortable home, exposes herself to agonizing “misconception,” and risks her reputation to work, in this case, among prostitutes (27-8).

Victoria, that “queen of paradox” (Mermin xvii), espoused a traditional feminine role as submissive wife and mother, but had more public duties and stature than any other woman of her time. Appropriate to this contradiction, she commissioned, as a birthday gift to Albert in 1857, “a gilded silver statuette of a nude Lady Godiva, sidesaddle on her horse” (Weintraub 239). Victoria also admired Edwin Landseer’s *Lady Godiva’s Prayer* (c. 1865, see Figure 2), seen in his studio before he exhibited it at the Royal Academy in 1866. Did the queen’s visit prompt Landseer to caparison Godiva’s mount in a magnificent ermine cape? Landseer’s Godiva is more likely a tribute to an actress and painters’ model called “Madame Warton,” known, mid-century, for her parts in the *tableaux vivants* at the Savile House in Leicester Square. One of her most famous, done in collaboration with Landseer, was a preview of *Lady Godiva’s Prayer* (Smith, *Exposed* 68). Landseer’s painting was much criticized for Godiva’s insufficiently idealized figure, and for the anachronistic
Figure 2: Lady Godiva’s Prayer by Edwin Landseer, c. 1865; by permission of the Bridgeman Art Library, New York.
costuming of the nun, whose closed eyes emphasize the painter’s and viewers’ gazing ones (Smith, *Victorian* 109).

Landseer was dead before Virginia and Vanessa Stephen were born, but both knew his paintings and considered them old-fashioned (cf. Gillespie, *Sisters’* 212-14). Whether or not they saw this uncharacteristic and controversial nude, I don’t know. They had more contact with another painter of the legend, George Frederick Watts, who, like Tennyson, was a friend of the family. Watts first exhibited his rendition of the Godiva legend in 1885 and again, possibly reworked, at the Royal Academy in 1900. (See Figure 3: *Lady Godiva* by George Frederick Watts, c. 1880-90.) Although Virginia and Vanessa Stephen later visited Watts’ studio, went to some of his exhibitions, and expressed their disdain for his moralizing and sentimentality (cf. Gillespie, *Sisters’* 64-66), they don’t mention particular paintings. In Watts’ unusual rendition, Godiva returns from her ordeal. Fainting and weak, she has to be lifted from her horse. The composition echoes Raphael’s 1507 *Deposition* (of Christ after the crucifixion). Sentimentalizing Godiva’s feminine weakness and saintliness, Watts painted a moral protest against the use of her name as a title for what were little more than female nude studies (Clarke and Day 14).

In spite of the identification of some nineteenth-century women writers and reformers with Godiva’s courage facing public exposure, the suffrage women did not embrace her. Although Martha Vicinus says that pageants honoring famous women included Godiva among “popular heroines” (266), she doesn’t appear in Lisa Tickner’s thorough study of suffrage iconography.

Figure 3: *Lady Godiva* by George Frederick Watts, c. 1880-90; reproduced with permission of the Trustees of the Watts Gallery.
Favored instead were warriors like Boadicea and, especially, Joan of Arc (Tickner 126-27). Like Godiva, the Joan of suffrage posters is on horseback, but she rides astride like a man. Unlike women discreetly costumed to suggest undressed Godivas riding side-saddle in traditional Coventry processions, we have women, fully dressed to suggest Joan of Arc’s armor, riding astride as participants in suffrage spectacles.

In the 1920s, interpretations of Godiva continue to ignore her radical social motives in favor of the voyeuristic aspects of the legend. Freud, for instance, assumes knowledge of what he calls merely “the beautiful legend of Lady Godiva” when he uses the Peeping Tom portion in a discussion of neurotic blindness as a response to voyeurism or scopophilia (qtd. in Donoghue 105). D. H. Lawrence, in Women in Love (1920), satirizes the decadent sculptor Loerke’s helpless Godiva figure, a brutalized child-woman on an oversize horse (Hyde 179). Woolf would have encountered that image when she read the novel in 1921 (L2 474). In 1926, a Belgian Chocolatier also chose the image it still uses to market, not self-exposure, but self-indulgence—an idealized Godiva whose slender beauty perhaps “appeals as much to women as men” (Donoghue 109). A well-known, 1898 painting by John Collier becomes in 1927 a tableau vivant upon which turns the plot of a Swedish film shown in England as Matrimony. Medievalist Daniel Donoghue calls Collier’s Godiva, on her magnificently caparisoned horse, “relaxed,” “meditative, even coy” (113). Although she sits astride in both painting and film tableau (Donohue, pl. 8, 115)—or perhaps because she does, to me she seems eroticized from a masculine perspective—head bowed, submissive, and enervated. Leslie Hankins has found a reference to another film, entitled Lady Godiva, that appeared in 1928. Although there is no evidence that Woolf saw either film, clearly the legend was widely known well into the twentieth century.

A few women in the 1930s and afterwards began to look again at the personal and socially transformative powers of the legend and to reshape it for a new century. In 1937, for instance, Olive Popplewell published a play called The Ride Through Coventry. Another “forgotten radical,” she was popular mostly among amateur theatre groups in the 1930s. Among a number of additions to the legend in Popplewell’s feminist/pacifist recreation, two are important here. First, a peasant woman redefines a social problem that goes beyond suffering women and children to include workingmen sacrificed to a war-like patriarchy: “Out there in Coventry,” she tells Godiva, women’s sons are merely “beasts of burden.” They are willing to “give their due to the Earl, […] but he has dragged them from their ploughs and made them pay […] till men who once were free are slaves, broken on the soil—and for what? To build a race of fighting men […] who live on us, like lords at ease” (12). Second, when Leofric refuses to relieve Coventry’s poor, this Godiva speaks for herself. She realizes what none of the male-created wives do: “Oh, God! I am less free than any serf! […] I will possess myself,” she vows, “I will be free!” (18-19). When Godiva begs Leofric to help the down-trodden, however, he issues the famous challenge, then sits back smugly. “That draws the teeth of little vixens,” he concludes; “that will bring my falcon feeding from my hand” (20).

Discouraging voyeurism, Popplewell emphasizes Godiva’s return. “I’ve known some men half kill their wives for less than this,” Leofric chides Godiva. “Did they fear them so much?” she asks. “I have learned that men are often driven to hurt and kill because they fear” (26). Although Leofric, still assuming dominance, forgives Godiva, she counters
that he has killed her love. Just as Godiva grows in the play into a socially responsible 
woman, however, so Leofric, like men converted to the cause in turn-of-the-century suf-
frage drama, begins to understand what Godiva says. He admits he admires her courage, 
realizes he prefers love to submission, and tries to earn her respect.

In Popplewell’s rendition, then, Godiva’s ride signals one woman’s courage to protest 
against private and public tyranny, to benefit the oppressed and reform their oppressors. 
Whether or not Woolf read or saw The Ride Through Coventry, it still anticipates her real-
ization in Three Guineas, published a year later, that, as a woman, she is outside the power 
structure leading the nation into war. The play also anticipates Woolf’s assertions that 
private tyrannies reflect public ones; and that individual women must educate, expose, 
and empower themselves if they wish to act on behalf of entire communities mired in op-
pressive social hierarchies, military buildup, and war.

PART III: “NAKEDNESS AS THE BACKBONE OF MY EXISTENCE”

When Woolf imagines women’s publication as nakedness, no divine or social power 
prohibits or punishes reading, or, for that matter, reviewing. Having had “3 outside 
opinions” already, Woolf writes as she awaits reactions to The Waves in 1931, she is “slightly 
less naked than usual” (D4 46). When she reads Vera Britain’s The Testament of Youth 
in 1933, though, she wonders, “What urgency is there on [....the young] to stand bare 
in public?” She answers her own question. In the unacknowledged tradition of the Godi-
va legend, Woolf links nakedness with humanitarian motives. Brittain badly wants to 
expose certain facts—to help both herself and others. She has, Woolf writes, “the social 
conscience.” Although she says she could never write such a “hard anguished” book (D4 
177), Woolf is, at the same time, baring her mind in “The Pargiters” amidst snide remarks 
in the press about Bloomsbury. “Oh what a grind it is,” she writes, “having perpetually to 
expose my mind, opened & intensified as it is by the heat of creation to the blasts of the 
outer world” (D4 289). Similarly, with Three Guineas, she’s “uneasy at taking this role in 
the public eye—afraid of autobiography in public” (D5 141).

In contrast to Woolf’s use of the bare body as an image of self-exposure in print, 
she also uses it as a positive metaphor for immunity from public scrutiny and judgment. 
Already in 1923 when she is writing Mrs Dalloway, she determines to write, even if she 
gets criticism, as Duncan Grant says he paints, “for the love of it,” without “the motive 
of praise.” Vowing that, she immediately adds, ”I feel as if I slipped off all my ball dresses 
& stood naked—which as I remember was a very pleasant thing to do” (D2 248). Woolf 
here associates feminine costumes with public approval, and nakedness with writing for its 
own sake. She’s getting a reputation, she realizes, “but many people are saying that I shant 
last, & perhaps I shant. So I return to my old feeling of nakedness as the backbone of my 
existence, which indeed it is” (D2 249).

As for Woolf’s fears of autobiographical or intellectual self-exposure in Three Guineas, 
she decides they “are entirely outbalanced [...] by the immense relief & peace I have gained 
[....] I am an outsider. I can [...] experiment with my own imagination in my own way” 
(D5 141). She may be pleased with responses to the book one day (D5 149) and “de-
jected” the next. But, overall, she feels “light & free,” and, she repeats, “an outsider” (D5 
169, 189). To be an outsider is to “have nakedness as the backbone of [...] her “existence,”
to be as free as possible of conventional concerns with appearances and approval, and thus able to speak her mind.

**Part IV: “To Look Upon Nakedness with the Eye of an Artist”**

In the contexts of the Godiva legend and of nakedness as a metaphor for publication, the “Foreword” Woolf wrote for her sister Vanessa Bell’s 1930 one-artist exhibition, *Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell*, now seems as important to the genesis of *Three Guineas* as is “Professions for Women,” written in the same year. Women writers and reformers, as we’ve seen, identified with the Godiva legend to help them deal with public self-exposure when they challenged the status quo, and Popplewell wrote, for Godiva, a protesting voice. In the visual arts, women also challenged conventional gender hierarchies and perspectives when they identified with, and painted that immensely popular theme of Victorian and Modern art, the female nude. Traditionally, as with the Victorian Godiva “pin-ups,” men painted the unclothed female form “in passive and erotic poses as the objects of male sexual desire” (Perry, *Gender* 205). In modernism, however, they often divested female nakedness of conventional historic, exotic, or mythological “trappings.” They also used “non-naturalistic styles” (Perry, *Women* 119) and placed their models in contemporary settings. Griselda Pollock notes, however, the continuance in modernist painting of “masculine sexuality and its sign, the bodies of women—[...] the nude, the brothel, the bar” (54).

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf sympathetically cites the autobiography of Margaret Collyer to document the difficulties women painters traditionally faced when they wanted access to live, unclothed models (*TG* 183 n. 39). Woolf also notes Laura Knight’s similar frustration with having to draw from plaster casts while men “worked from the living figure” (*Reading* 2: 41). By the late nineteenth century, however, still in the midst of fierce opposition, and accusations of corrupting their own sex, women did find ways to paint at least from female models, sometimes by hiring their own, sometimes by studying abroad.

Socialized to define themselves in “the ‘feminine position’” as passive and decorative “object[s] of the look,” Mary Kelly asks, did women assume in front of their easels, “the ‘masculine position’ as subject[s] of the look” (98)? Picasso, even late in his career, as Karen Kleinfelder shows, continued to satirize women artists who presumed to take the masculine position by portraying them as unsexed, unattractive frumps, in contrast to their voluptuous nude models (142–8). More likely, Kelly says, women painters learned to occupy a dual-gendered position (98). Whitney Chadwick shows how some European women artists of the period, like Paula Modersohn-Becker and Suzanne Valadon, both “collude with and challenge” traditional identifications of women with nature and reductions to “emotions, sexual instincts, and biology” (*Women, Art* 282, 290). When women artists paint from nude female models, then, as when women reformers and writers identify with the Godiva legend, they obviously must go beyond simple voyeurism—men gazing, or peeping, at women. What of women artists’ scrutiny of their own bodies, of other women’s, of men’s, or of painted nudes? Not to mention gazes of gays and lesbians, and mutual gazes between social classes, ethnic majorities and minorities, colonizers and colonized (Olin 213, 215, 217).
Not surprisingly, several women of the period self-reflexively paint pictures about painting female models. Marie Laurencin, in Woman Painter and Her Model (1921, see Figure 4), paints an unabashedly feminine artist (not one of Picasso’s frumps). Although her brush may retain—or parody—some traditional phallic associations, woman painter and equally feminine model, or perhaps painted model, stand side by side in mirror-like identification and intimacy, their black eyes equally penetrating, gazes triangulating with what is off the canvas.

Figure 4: Woman Painter and Her Model by Marie Laurencin, 1921; © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.
In Laura Knight’s large *Self-Portrait with Nude* (1913, see Figure 5), we have a woman painter and her model who, according to the blurb on the wall in the National Portrait Gallery (London), is Ella Naper, also an artist. “This double portrait of artist and model,” the blurb continues, “is a bravura statement about the ability of women to paint hitherto taboo subjects on a scale and with an intensity that heralds change.” Knight ironically paints herself, fully and stylishly *over*-dressed in fitted red sweater and broad-brimmed black hat. Her model, who seems less object than alter ego, raises her arms over her head, not just revealing but also liberating her body from all such fashionable feminine clothing—like Virginia Woolf happily slipping out of her ball dresses.

Figure 5: *Self-Portrait with Nude* by Dame Laura Knight, 1913; © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / DACS, London.
Woolf’s wry “Foreword” anticipates recent discussion of these issues among feminist art historians. “That a woman should hold a show of pictures in Bond Street,” Woolf writes, “is not usual, nor, perhaps altogether to be commended. For it implies, I fancy, some study of the nude” (170). To be accepted by reputable London galleries, in other words, a woman artist must defy lingering prohibitions and show that she also can paint and exhibit the unclothed human figure. Woolf’s tone is ironic, but her emphasis seems disproportionate since only three of the twenty-seven exhibited paintings are in this genre.

She is as concerned, I think, with the implications of divestiture as a topic for her own medium and, ultimately, with its challenge to gender hierarchies.

The only nude painting I can locate from Bell’s 1930 exhibition is #7 Study for a Composition (see Figure 6). Woolf refers to it as “naked girls couched on crimson cushions” (171), but, as the title suggests, Bell thinks of it as a “composition.” Four relaxed women, whose gazes meet neither each others’ nor ours, form an open circle in a comfortable domestic setting. Bell wrote to Grant, “I am going to paint my large nudes all over again[…] as I came to the conclusion I could never get the composition right with the old poses” (349). Already she was describing “a new composition” with three female nudes (350).

Woolf reveals more interest in her “Foreword” in women painting from unclothed models than Vanessa Bell does in her paintings. She paints others, and herself, at work. On occasion, she even poses for nude paintings by Roger Fry and Duncan Grant. The closest she comes to a painting about identifying with an unclothed model, however, is Interior with Two Women (1932, see Figure 7). As with Laurencin’s painting, there is a comfortable equality between the two figures. Like Knight, Bell contrasts an unclothed woman—one arm, this time, above her head and partially turned towards the viewer—with a fully clothed, and again a well-dressed one. Frances Spalding thinks they are model and painter (250). There is no painting within a painting, however, as in Knight’s work. If the clothed woman is an artist, perhaps giving herself and her model a break, she contemplates, not the model, but a plate of fruit on a table in a domestic setting. Is Bell amusingly contrasting the woman artist’s genre options? Is Bell, as Spalding suggests, representing two sides of herself, the sensual, uninhibited woman and the more contemplative professional (251)? Or have professional and moral hierarchies between painter and model dissolved? Should we ignore unresolved questions like these and emphasize, as Bell herself does, a painting’s composition?

Woolf tries in her “Foreword” to have it both ways. As a lay viewer and as a woman who looks upon nakedness with the eye of a writer, she can’t escape so easily into “composition.” She uses the painters’ word, “nude,” only once. Instead, she chooses eight variations of “naked,” a word that connotes “some […] embarrassment,” and usually is reserved for an unclothed body that an artist has not reshaped into a “nude.” Or so Kenneth Clark says (3). Sensitive to differences between the two words, Woolf uses “naked” in part to underscore the hypocrisy characteristic of viewers more puritanical than herself.

[…] and while for many ages it has been admitted that women are naked and bring nakedness to birth, it was held, until sixty years ago that for a woman to look upon nakedness with the eye of an artist, and not simply with the eye of mother, wife or mistress was corruptive of her innocence and destructive of her
Figure 6: *Study for a Composition* by Vanessa Bell, 1930; © 1961 Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett.

Figure 7: *Interior with Two Women* by Vanessa Bell, 1932; © 1961 Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett.
domesticity. Hence the extreme activity of women in philanthropy, society, religion and all pursuits requiring clothing (“Foreword” 170, my italics).

Woolf indicates, in her “Foreword,” however, that the greatest objection is to women artists gazing upon and painting naked men. “Every Victorian family,” Woolf continues, “has in its cupboard the skeleton of an aunt who was driven to convert the native because her father would have died rather than let her look upon a naked man” in a studio (170). When she writes in her “Foreword,” Mrs. Bell “is a woman, it is said, yet she has looked on nakedness with a brush in her hand” (170), Woolf defies, on her own behalf, and that of her sister and those Victorian aunts, what she calls in “Professions for Women” (published in the same year) “the extreme conventionality of the other sex” (240).

Still feeling those “puritans of the nineteenth century” looking over her shoulder, however, Woolf’s best defense is formalism. She dismisses her own literary preferences, for the time being, and also denies that Bell reveals anything about herself. She even dubs irrelevant the fact she has emphasized: “One says, Anyhow Mrs. Bell is a woman; and then half way round the room one says, But she may be a man.” Why? Because children are no more important to her than rocks, and clothing no more than “stark nakedness” (“Foreword”171).

Woolf knows what she is supposed to say. She also admires her sister’s silence and impersonality. In the deleted draft ending, however, Virginia joked about what Vanessa’s straight-laced grandfather would have thought of the exhibition (Lee 536). Her final question in the published “Foreword” returns us, less directly, to the issue of women painting nakedness with which she began: “one could become an inmate of this strange painters’ world, in which mortality does not enter, and psychology is held at bay, and there are no words. But is mortality to be found there? That was the very question I was asking myself as I came in” (173, my italics).

Woolf’s “Foreword” infuriated one reader—“He says I am indecent, and must be suppressed,” she writes (L4 142). Not surprisingly, in “Professions for Women,” Woolf emphasizes the writer’s even greater difficulties in avoiding “morality” or “human relations” (238), a point she echoes in The Pargiters (xxxii). This is especially true when she writes “about the body, about the passions which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say” lest men “be shocked” (“Professions” 240).

In 1932, Virginia bought one of Vanessa’s nudes. It is a three-part screen decorated for a Music Room she and Duncan Grant designed and exhibited. Here Bell depicts the nakedness of artists, two female nudes holding stringed instruments and one, on the central panel, with what may be a musical score (Shone 242, fig. 145). For Woolf who says, “I always think of my books as music before I write them” (L6 426), the screen must have reminded her continually of the self-exposure she risks in the verbal compositions that are her own reshapings of nakedness into “nudes.” Curiously, a year later, she wrote to Vita Sackville-West, “I am going to be painted, stark naked, by a woman called Ethel Walker who says I am the image of Lilith” (L5 174). I read this as a tease. Yet Walker was a serious painter, and the editors of the letters straightforwardly identify Lilith and note that “The portrait was never painted” (L5 174 n.3). The least we can conclude is that women painters’ treatments of female nakedness for public display were on Woolf’s mind, and so was her own.
PART V: “ASTRIDE MY SADDLE THE WHOLE WORLD FALLS INTO SHAPE”

The legendary Godiva is exposed on a horse, and Woolf’s interest in nakedness and in reshaping it into nudes for public exhibition or, metaphorically, for publication is related to her comparison of writing to horseback riding. Since the story of Hippolytus in Greek mythology, the horse has stood for sexual passion, one reason, Donoghue thinks, why so many writers and painters are attracted to the Godiva legend (30). Several contemporary women scholars, however, expand the image of a woman on horseback to include both female empowerment and claims to masculine prerogatives (e.g., Cunningham 65, Wintle 66-7).

Long before Dorothy Richardson used an equestrian image to describe her rival, Woolf repeatedly compared life to a horse that must be ridden with courage (e.g., D2 236, 239, 241, 285; D3 225). She also compares her work as a writer with the actions of a rider (cf. Gillespie, Sisters’ 1-2), a metaphor that communicates, not the timid endurance of Tennyson’s Godiva, but confidence and control, power and speed. There are many possible sources for the metaphor, from the Elgin marble friezes in the British Museum to polo games (e.g., D2 42). What is striking, though, is that, by 1923, Woolf describes her professional life as “the root & source & origin of all health & happiness, provided [...] one rides work as a man rides a great horse, in a spirited & independent way; not a drudge, but a man with spurs in his heels” (D2 259 cf. 305, 323). The conventional gender-inclusive noun “man” is appropriate, since work gives her, not so much a man’s perspective, as Richardson implies, as the freedom and controlled strength traditionally dubbed masculine. Whatever she’s writing, she notes in 1930, “having got astride my saddle the whole world falls into shape” (D3 343, my italics).

Since, as the Godiva renditions show, the side saddle was the fashion for women and remained so until World War II (Wintle 68), Woolf purposely writes “astride.” True, so-called “new women” rode bicycles astride. Yet would getting “astride my [bicycle]” have the same impact as Woolf’s claim to a powerful traditional symbol like the horse? By 1932, in “Middlebrow,” Woolf’s equestrian becomes “the man or woman of thoroughbred intelligence,” and the horse becomes a metaphor for the intellect, as she claims another masculine territory. Here Woolf embraces the label “highbrow,” and defines it as one “who rides his mind at a gallop [...] in pursuit of an idea” (177, my italics).

Woolf worries in Three Guineas that “there will be no more horses” and that art will become mulish propaganda (TG 170), as Jane Marcus points out (283). When accumulating facts for the notes becomes tedious, Woolf calls Three Guineas “a good piece of donkeywork” (D5 127). Yet there is, on the whole, an exhilarating sense of power in Woolf’s description of riding her intellect through that book. She is sure that once she “get[s] into the canter over Three Gs.,” she will “pound along to the goal” (D5 62). Soon she is having what she calls “a good gallop” (D5 65). When she writes the last page, she records, “Oh how violently I have been galloping through these mornings!” (D5 112). She has “deserved this gallop,” she concludes, after her struggles with The Years (D5 112).

PART VI: GODIVA STILL RIDES

Knowing she risks “autobiography in public” (D5 141) as she publishes the gallop she titles Three Guineas, Woolf both displays intellectual nakedness and edits it into nu-
dity, a crafted work of epistolary prose. Naomi Black may say that “attention to women’s bodies” has “virtually disappeared” from the book (54), and this may be true so far as women’s sexuality is concerned. On a metaphorical level, however, bodies of all kinds are central to Three Guineas. In the unacknowledged tradition of the Godiva legend, Woolf’s candid, ironic narrator strips herself of the false wings and fluttering draperies of that flatterer, “The Angel in the House” (“Professions” 236). She even challenges the veil St. Paul requires of a woman “who prays or prophesies” (TG 166), ultimately becoming the “un/veiled woman” of Christine Froula’s astute analysis (282). Woolf’s narrator in Three Guineas, however, is not just concerned with individual women baring their minds in public. She is equally interested in exposing the “public bodies […] of educated men,” like “Parliaments and Senates.” Wanting to get into their records, she wants to get down to, as well as “beneath the[ir] skin[s]” (TG 26), to the hierarchy-shattering nakedness and equalizing mortality groups of robed and uniformed professional men try to disguise from everyone, including themselves. As Bernard in The Waves concludes, “our bodies are in truth naked. We are only lightly covered with buttoned cloth; and beneath these pavements are shells, bones and silence” (113). To conventional public bodies dominated by masculine values, Woolf’s narrator juxtaposes another kind of “body”—a nonhierarchical “Society of Outsiders,” one far more difficult to describe. In line with her interest in female nudes by women painters, she borrows the image of “furtively” trying to paint a “model,” one who “dodges and disappears” but still exists (TG 115).

Like Godiva’s, part of Woolf’s motivation is human suffer ing and its causes. Her parallels to the starving women and children of Coventry include “photographs from Spain” of “dead children, killed by bombs” and of “ruined houses” (L6 85; TG 10-11), evidence of public bodies destroying those of the private, domestic realm. Close to home, Woolf’s private sufferers include Vanessa Bell when her son Julian dies in the Spanish Civil War. Behind these are all the thwarted foremothers, with whom Woolf identifies, whose biological or social patriarchs denied their bids for financial independence, university degrees, and professional or artistic training. Their momentum, Woolf suggests, can build towards a constructive leavening of the public realm, factions of which are feeling what women have felt: “shut up” and “shut out,” now by patriarchal dictators threatening England from the continent (TG 102-03).

But how can change occur when the educated man’s daughter has had no formal education, public voice, or money of her own (TG 12)? Women, say the anti-suffragists whom Woolf’s narrator quotes, need no public platforms, because they can influence powerful men. But influence of that sort, she says, “is either beyond our reach […] or beneath our contempt” (TG 15). The lengths to which Godiva in the legend must go indicate just how little traditional influence, even at the top of the social hierarchy, is worth. Woolf writes in Three Guineas, however, that “the word ‘influence’ […] has changed,” and a woman can now publicly “declare her genuine likes and dislikes” and “criticize” (TG 17). Yet Godiva’s story, and Woolf’s own repetition of the words “courage” (e.g., TG 116, 128) and “fear” (e.g., TG 128-9), remind us of what it takes to do so, especially in ways that draw serious attention to a cause, rather than responses that trivialize its advocate, her methods, or her advice.

In Three Guineas, Woolf gallops forth in part to respond, in terms of the Godiva legend, to a dare. As others have observed (e.g., Black 81-4), Woolf’s notes for Three Guineas
contain several appeals of the kinds she fictionalizes in the book. One peace manifesto stresses, not literal serfdom, as in Godiva’s Coventry, but, rather, intellectual and creative slavery. Writers, it reads,

will be constantly subjected, on the plea of military expediency, to militaristic propaganda, to censorship, to repression. Everything will be done to train them to accept without criticism all ideas presented to them with official sanction….

They will long to dress up not only their bodies but also their minds in uniform … (Reading 2: 28)

This manifesto calls for writers to “help men to know themselves, to be aware of their own motives, to feel and think sincerely” (Reading 2: 28). On her own terms, Woolf accepts this challenge.

After the book appeared, Woolf wrote to Margaret Llewelyn Davies, “I felt it great impertinence to come out with my views on such a subject; but to sit silent and acquiesce in all this idiotic letter signing and vocal pacifism when there’s such an obvious horror in our midst—such tyranny, such Pecksniffism—finally made my blood boil into the usual ink-spray” (L6 250). As in the Godiva legend, the alternative to silence, or petitions to those in the established hierarchy, is a bold intellectual riding into the marketplace, this time on a mount caparisoned with enough evidence to identify and challenge what Woolf defines as masculine infantile fixation and traditional scapegoating of women. Alternatives to uniformed minds are ones stripped of “possessiveness,” “jealousy,” “pugnacity,” and “greed” (TG 83). Naked minds prefer “ridicule, obscurity and censure,” are wary of “unreal loyalties,” refuse to sell their brains for money, and desire just “enough […] to live on” (TG 80).

It takes different perspectives to define and expose uniformed minds for what they are. What happens when individual women scrutinize, and express their opinions of, powerful individuals and public bodies? Among Woolf’s notes is an account from Elizabeth Haldane’s From One Century to Another of a party in Cambridge in 1907….

Various persons received degrees […] and it was amusing to listen through a peephole in the room of Mrs. Butler (the Master’s wife) to the speeches taking place at the Feast which was held in Trinity College…. The whole surroundings seemed medieval. (Reading 3: 52 my italics).

This dual gender perspective and turnabout voyeurism includes peeping and laughing at men immersed in their traditional ceremonies. Haldane is among the women Woolf mentions in Three Guineas who gain knowledge of professional life, she writes, by “peeping through doors, taking notes, and asking questions discreetly,” taking the subject position, in other words, and scrutinizing what is forbidden (TG 49, my italics). Tom, the tailor in the Godiva legend, is punished for peeping, and thus becomes a scapegoat for voyeuristic narrators, readers, painters, and viewers. To peep at Godiva also insults the powerful man who possesses her, and violates the class hierarchy. For an educated man’s daughter not only to peep, but to encroach with irony and wit, not to mention pages of evidence and endnotes, on the masculine preserves of research and argumentation, to accuse the patriarchy of the tyranny it condemns only in others, and worse, to publish the five now-
familiar photographs that make uniformed bodies representing public bodies look absurd is a similar violation and cause for outrage.

Since women, as Woolf’s narrator says, are already scapegoats, and since no miraculous blinding seems likely in the twentieth century, those offended by Three Guineas exercise other options. Some reviewers damn her with faint praise, as in a cartoon from Time and Tide (Hummel 157; cf. Lee 698). In it men doff their hats to honor Woolf’s reputation and skill as a writer, even as they stamp on her book to denounce her ideas. Like Godiva, Woolf is protected to some degree by her status. Still, just as Godiva’s long hair only partly veils her nakedness, so Woolf’s persona only partly deflects public scrutiny of author and argument. Woolf’s usually voluble male friends silently ignore the book as a public embarrassment, closing or covering their eyes like the nun in Landseer’s Godiva painting. Others rage in print, like the reader who calls the book “indecent, almost obscene!” (L6 251 n. 1). Or they pull rank, as Q. D. Leavis does, by dismissing Woolf as an ignorant amateur (409-10). But that is merely another way of defining the outsider status Woolf embraces, as do many readers who, like the oppressed in Godiva’s Coventry, express gratitude for her courage (Snaith, Virginia 123-4).

Whatever the reactions, neither Godiva nor Woolf loses her domestic base because of her public ride. Unlike Leofric in the Godiva legend, however, no one mentioned in, or connected with, Three Guineas promises reform if Woolf gallops into the marketplace. Leonard, the more politically active of the Woolfs—at least in conventional ways—does see the book into print, however unenthusiastic he is about it. As with recuperative readings of the Godiva legend, Three Guineas asks for social transformations that will, if not render society’s hierarchical public bodies obsolete, at least expose their skins, a prerequisite for self-examination and reform. Like the Godiva legend, Three Guineas is, in itself, a dare. The unspoken challenge in both is this: If you think what I do is extreme or what I ask is impractical, then what would you suggest? The horse is in your stable.

**EPILOGUE: “SHE DIDN’T CARE IF THE WHOLE WORLD LOOKED”**

In decades since the 1930s, the humanitarian side of the Godiva legend still struggles against popular culture renditions of her naked ride in ads for chocolate, lingerie, and bath products; Halloween costumes and soft porn; pop songs and cartoons. At least the theme song for Norman Lear’s 1970s TV series, “Maude” links Godiva and Joan of Arc as social activists: “Lady Godiva was a freedom rider, / She didn’t care if the whole world looked. / Joan of Arc with the Lord to guide her, / She was a sister who really cooked” (qtd. in Donoghue 108). On a more serious level, there is a new entry on “Godgifu [Godiva]” in the recently published Oxford DNB. Its author, Ann Williams, notes that, in the 1990s, “the Godiva International Award has […] been instituted, to be bestowed on a woman of international reputation in the field of social welfare” (576).

In the visual arts, Jo Hockenhull’s Godiva (see Figure 8: Ride Free! 1993), astride a vigorous, male horse, gallops free of the city altogether and takes back the night. Peeping eyes don’t intimidate, but swirl round her shoulders like a transparent cape. Her hair streams out behind, blending with individual and communal imperatives and declarations: “Ride to a new self; Ride for a new world; I will be free.”

As for Virginia Woolf’s Three Guineas, serious editorial work and discussion now
dominate treatment of her book. Practical applications of her ideas are emerging in response to the policies of national and international bodies, still as mentally uniformed as in Woolf’s day. Eileen Barrett, for instance, recently updates the “facts of education, property, and war to shed light on the status of women today” (25). She concludes with a list of organizations to which we can send “our guinea, worth today about $75” (27).

Syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman of the Boston Globe quotes Woolf in a recent editorial: “I look upon disregard or abuse as part of my bargain. I’m to write what I like and they’re to say what they like.” Goodman’s topic is “the dearth of women on the op[inion]-ed[itorial] pages …. Yes,” she says, “there are more women on op-ed pages than in tenured science positions at Harvard. But […] the number of syndicated columns written by women is less than one in four and holding.” Goodman doesn’t want to conclude that “fewer women jump into the pool because they fear the sharks.” Her advice? Grant

Figure 8: Ride Free! by Jo Hockenhull, 1993; by permission of Jo Huckenhull and the Washington State University Press.
“only a few people the right to make you feel rotten” and develop a tough skin about the others (4A)—her version of Woolf’s nakedness as the backbone of existence.

So what is the spirit of *Three Guineas*? It is a risky gallop into the public marketplace to protest past and ongoing oppression. It is “A Portrait of the Writer/Rider as an Educated Man’s Daughter” that, at the same time, is a Godiva-like baring of its author’s point of view. Violating certain feminine values and valorizing others, *Three Guineas* demonstrates the courage to speak up for communal self-examination and for the reformation of public bodies by stripping away mental uniforms that foster oppression and conflict. *Three Guineas* channels desperation into research, exposure into exposition, and anger into irony. Woolf was in her fifties when she wrote the book. By then, she didn’t care if the whole world looked.

**Notes**

1. I illustrated this featured presentation with about fifty visual images, most of which I have had to eliminate from this published version. For preliminary information about Godiva images, I am grateful to Ronald Aquilla Clarke of the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry. For information about Vanessa Bell nudes, Tony Bradshaw of the Bloomsbury Workshop, London, was very helpful. Claire Harries, PA to the Domus Bursur at Kings College, Cambridge, initially helped me obtain a slide of Bell’s Study for a Composition. For assistance and for permission to reproduce the eight images I have chosen, I would like to thank David Savage of the Bridgeman Art Library, New York; Richard Jeffries, Curator of the Watts Gallery, Guildford; Cristin O’Keefe Aptomowicz of the Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Henrietta Garnett; Jo Hockenhull; and Marc Lindsey of the Washington State University Press.

2. Woolf’s view of Richardson was similarly ambivalent (cf. Gillespie, “Political” 138-9, 142-4).

3. This ability to detect a man’s inward eye may be an instance of what Jane Garrity calls Miriam’s “self-masculinization,” her own attraction to women “as she oscillates between the two genders” (103).

4. Woolf’s *Three Guineas* appeared five months before the collected edition of *Pilgrimage*. Although Richardson had her own views on dictators and pacifism (*Windows* 384), I find no evidence that she expressed them in response to *Three Guineas*. Had she read it, she probably would have isolated more evidence of Woolf’s supposedly sheltered experience among “the daughters of educated men” (*TG* 4).

5. It is true, so far as English history and literature go, that the Elizabethans interested Woolf more than the Anglo-Saxons or their Norman conquerors. Those who find medievalism in her work find it primarily in Arthurian associations with Percival in *The Waves* (e.g., Garrity 245, 272, 288).

6. Others have written, in different ways, on Woolf and the body. See, for instance, Doyle and Kitsi-Mitakou.

7. The verb “to divest” literally means to strip not only of clothing, but also of arms, rank, rights, or titles. Metaphorically, to divest can mean to strip oneself, or others, of all sorts of disguises, conventions, or hypocrisies. The motives can range from beneficent to malign, but the implications are almost always radical.

8. A number of sources provide historical facts as well as follow the development of the legend, among them Gordon, Lancaster, Clarke and Day, Williams, and most recently, Donoghue.

9. Gordon notes, however, that “Her fame as a religious foundress has been eclipsed by the story of her Coventry ride, around which legend has freely grown” (*DNB* 36). Black writes that “up to 1985 only 4 percent of the cumulated [*DNB*] entries recounted women’s lives.” In 1993, a “Missing Persons” volume brought that number up to “only 12 percent” (163-4).


11. Woolf knew Michael Drayton’s poems, since two books of selections, one a present to her, remain among the Woolfs’ books at Washington State University. The portion of Drayton’s *Polyolbion* narrating the Godiva legend, however, is not among the selections. Leigh Hunt’s autobiography also is among the Woolfs’ books at WSU but not his *Tales* (1891) containing his prose “Godiva.”


13. Many of these are reproduced and/or described in Clarke and Day as well as in Lancaster and elsewhere.

14. Eliza Crowe (a.k.a. Madam Wharton) also impersonated Godiva in 1848 at the Coventry Grand Show.
Fair. The Coventry processions go back to 1678, but, in the middle of the nineteenth century, moralists reduced them to every third year. The processions were popular because there was always the tourist-attracting rumor that this time the Godiva figure would actually be naked. In fact, she wore “fleshings, a skirt and veil” (Smith, Exposed 68; see also Clarke and Day 27-8).

15. Woolf spoofs both painter and poet in her 1935 play Freshwater.

16. Donoghue reproduces Collier’s wilted Godiva on the cover of his book; it appears on several Godiva web sites; and the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry, sells it as a postcard and poster. The film, directed by Gustaf Molander and produced by Oscar Hemberg, was titled, in Swedish, Hans Engelksa Fru and was shown in England as Matrimony and in the U.S. as Discord (Donoghue 141 n. 25).

17. This film, included in the Ghosts of Yesterday Series on the British Film Institute list, was directed by George J. Banfield and Leslie Eveleish. Two Godiva films appeared in the fifties, Lady Godiva Rides Again (1951) and Lady Godiva (1955) starring Maureen O’Hara (Donoghue 121, 141 n. 20).

18. Not much is known about Popplewell. I know of two other full-length plays, The Pacifist: A Play for Women in One Act (London: H. F. W. Deane, 1934) and This Bondage, in Five New Full-Length Plays for All-Women Casts, ed. John Bourne (London: Lovat Dickson and Thompson, 1935). She also wrote several one-act plays in the 1930s, some for all-women casts. The Loft Theatre, a nonprofit group performing in Leamington Spa since 1922, lists on its web site Olive Popplewell’s They Fed the Fire as part of its 1935/36 season. It is clear that Popplewell had a strong political orientation and that her plays were sufficiently well received to merit publication.

19. See Ingram and Patai on other such women of the period 1889-1939.

20. Woolf also images artistic creativity as nakedness. For instance, Lily Briscoe in To the Lighthouse always experiences “a few moments of nakedness when she seemed [...] exposed [...] to all the blasts of doubt” before she can concentrate on painting (158). W. H. Auden, on the other hand, embraces nakedness, this time defined by Woolf as “being honest, simple, naked, taking off literary clothes” (D5 108).

21. There is perhaps a link between these comments while writing Mrs. Dalloway and Woolf’s characterization of young Sally Seton, who is a potential Godiva—both daring in her actions and socially conscious in her statements. But Sally grows into, rather than away from, a conventional feminine role. Septimus Smith also anticipates the theme of divestiture as protest when he draws pictures of the self-important people in his office “naked at their antics” (MD 90).

22. In contrast, Spalding dismisses Woolf’s “Foreword” as formal and uncritical high praise—as merely “a short encomium” (235). More recently, Lee agrees that Woolf “brazenly puff ed” Bell’s exhibition and notes that the “Foreword” is another instance of “family business” in Woolf’s career (536). Bell had some concerns, but thought Virginia’s comments would promote the exhibition effectively (cf. Gillespie, Sisters 68).

23. Woolf herself, when she was still Virginia Stephen and thinking of becoming “an artist to the public, and keep[ing . . . ] my writing to myself” (L 170), already knew, since Vanessa had begun her work at the Slade, that drawing the unclothed human body was important. Among Virginia’s surviving drawings are two copies of nude figures from Blake’s work and one of a classical female figure (signed AVS) that is a bookplate, now partially defaced, in a volume of Euripides (1902) still among the Woolfs’ books at Washington State University (cf. Gillespie, Sisters 27-8, 321 n. 11).

24. Paintings like The Female Life Class by Alice Barber Stephens, 1879, indicate as much. Models, however, were scorned as little better than, if not actually, prostitutes. On the other side were a few who claimed such work encouraged “a healthy respect for the body” and “exposed the double standard” in the training of male and female artists (Smith, Victorian 220-22, 228, 232 ).

25. Renoir, known for his paintings of fleshy female nudes, agreed that “The woman artist is merely ridiculous” (qtd. in Chadwick, Women Art 234).

26. Among Chadwick’s examples are Modersohn-Becker’s earthy but powerful nude Self-Portrait with Amber Necklace (1906) and Valadon’s unidealized Reclining Nude (1928) (289). Looking at less well-known painters, Perry argues that Emilie Charmy, for instance, “has appropriated and reworked a ‘male gaze,’ removing some of the erotic pleasure” (Gender 207-13).

27. Compared to Duncan Grant’s frequent, often whimsical treatments of both male and female nudes throughout his career, Bell’s paintings of nudes are relatively few in number. Examples preceding the 1930s include The Bedroom, Gordon Square (1912), The Tub (1917), a woodcut version (1918), all in domestic settings, and Nude (1922-3). Bell rarely painted male nudes. Exceptions include a painting of David Garnett, visible only to the waist (1915), a seated male figure in an early painting of bathers (1911?), and nude male children in a few paintings and decorative murals.

28. Because in her “Foreword” Woolf refers to “naked boys ankle deep in the pale green sea,” one of the nude
paintings in the exhibition must be #15 Wading. Perhaps this is the painting Bell refers to in a letter to Grant as “Quentin at sea” (351). Another is an unidentified Nude (#16), about which Bell writes in a letter to Duncan Grant, “I defy anyone to look at her without thinking of volumes” (351). Bell thought Maynard Keynes’s purchase of Study for a Composition “very odd” (351). (It is listed among the seven Bell paintings that Keynes owned; Scrase 64.) Bell’s and Grant’s relations with Keynes were strained at this time, and they did not have a high opinion of him as an art collector or exhibition organizer (Spalding 245).

29. Keynes also bought this painting (Scrase 14).

30. When painter Henrietta Ray had two nude paintings accepted for a Royal Academy Exhibition in the 1880s, she was advised not to “pervert her artistic gifts by exhibiting such works.” She was urged to reply “that she had recently given birth to a son ‘who came into the world entirely naked,’ thus proving that there was no impropriety in representing the human form as it was created” (Smith, *Victorian* 232).

31. As Smith notes, “a man posing for a woman” during the Victorian period, “was so awful to contemplate that all purists could do was maintain a discreet silence” (*Victorian* 222).

32. Does the fact that her sister paints what Woolf calls “boys” and “girls” rather than “men” and “women,” help to deflect puritanical criticism? Is this also why Woolf repeatedly refers to her sister with conventional formality as “Mrs. Bell”? Just as the Victorian censors back off when Orlando marries, however unconventionally, so “Mrs.” probably helps to legitimate Bell’s paintings of naked bodies (Lee 536).

33. A few years later, Woolf was to dub Walter Sickert’s work literary and thus “all that painting ought to be” (L5 254).

34. Woolf’s question about morality recalls Lytton Strachey’s talk, “Art and Indecency” (1921). Although he thinks “art for art’s sake” is “a reasonable proposition,” he still maintains that “the effects produced by a work of art may be of an ethical nature” (254). “We are considering,” Strachey concludes, “a state of mind [. . . ] not a state of body” (257). In Woolf’s “Foreword,” then, traditional disapproving gazes are at issue, not Bell’s nudes *per se*.

35. In *The Waves*, a year later, Woolf tries to “look upon nakedness” with the eye of a *writer*, to create characters conscious of their physicality, of thoughts and feelings about their bodies, and of seeing and being seen. Although the word “nude” doesn’t appear in Woolf’s “play-poem,” “naked” appears fifteen times (Haule and Smith). Jinny, the character perhaps most influenced by Vanessa Bell’s nudes, enjoys and flaunts the physicality she knows Victorian puritans, like those Woolf mocks in her “Foreword,” would denounce. As Jinny watches her body shrink and age, however, Woolf gives us much more than the young female models her older sister painted.

36. Bell continued to paint a few nudes after the 1930 exhibition. Some surviving examples include *Standing Nude* (1930s), *Nude* (1930s), *The Green Necklace* (1930s), and *Two Nudes Bathing* (1931-2).

37. In *The Voyage Out*, *Night and Day*, and *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf uses images of women on horseback to signal fantasies of escape from conventional feminine demands or to evoke a woman’s courage to face life. By the decade of *Three Guineas*, however, young Rose’s fantasy of being “Pargiter of Pargiter’s Horse [. . . ] riding to the rescue of a besieged garrison” in *The Years* is shattered by an exhibitionist (27-9). The adult Rose, more a Joan of Arc than a Godiva, becomes a militant suffragette.


39. Woolf’s “epistolary persona” wears the veil, Froula says, but adds to its meaning a “quasi-anthropological vantage on the civilization men have created” and on the masculine scapegoating of women (261).

40. They may, Woolf says, send her “to Coventry over it” (*D5* 188-89), a phrase that suggests public ostracism but not (so far as the *OED* is concerned) the Godiva legend. The most likely explanations for the phrase, are that 1) in the 17th century, supporters of the king were killed or taken prisoner and sent to Coventry, a stronghold of parliament, or 2) that a religious faction was forced out of a neighboring town and came to Coventry.

41. Snaith introduces and edits the *Three Guineas* letters as well (see Snaith, “*Three Guineas* Letters”).

42. In the post-WWII, feminist-backlash fifties, a then well-known novelist and playwright, Clemence Dane (Winifred Ashton), wrote a radio play called *Scandal at Coventry* (1958). True to the times, Leofric says, “Stick to your household chores and leave me to govern the Midlands!” (22). Godiva also materializes as the “I” of Sylvia Plath’s poem “Ariel” (1962). We can read her lines either as self-destructive, or as liberating, a divestiture of an over-socialized, feminine self (cf. Donoghue 125-26). Donoghue summarizes several literary versions of the legend, all written by later twentieth-century men. None of them emphasizes Godiva’s humanitarian motives.
43. Hockenhull originally created this print as an illustration for my earlier article “The Ride. . . .” We were both members of an interdisciplinary, collaborative group, begun in 1987 with support from the Washington State University Graduate School. We discussed and wrote about women and travel and ultimately published an essay collection.

44. Goodman quotes from an entry Woolf made in her diary already in 1922 (D2 168).

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WOOLF’S SENSE OF ADVENTURE

by Maria DiBattista

In *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), Woolf turns her critical gaze from the epic age of women’s writing to the literature of her own time and selects, apparently at random, a novel bearing the somewhat generic title *Life’s Adventure*. That book, which dares to proclaim that Chloe likes Olivia and, in doing so, to break the sequence—of desire, of narrative—that the traditional novel relentlessly if imaginatively pursued, inspired Woolf’s deepest reflections on the relation of women, writing, and modernity. This talk explores how these reflections are related to, and indeed originate in, Woolf’s sense of adventure.

In analyzing that new and not yet stable relation, Woolf notes, first of all, that *Life’s Adventure* is representative of a recent outcrop of fiction written by women that treats subjects and dramatizes relationships which a generation ago very few, if any, women would have dared touch. Still, as Woolf quickly realizes, the modern sense of adventure is only partly excited and characterized by its bold subject matter or its unprecedented frankness in declaring that women like women, that many women have and enjoy a life and work outside of the home, that love need not be the sole interpreter of women’s existence. An adventure encompasses more than an experience marked by risk and latent either with death or self-transfiguration. Adventure is not experienced or even recognizable as an adventure unless and until the mind acknowledges the possibilities of extinction or exaltation that the adventure fortuitously but fatefully presents. There is no adventure but thinking makes it so. Women have been traditionally debarred from adventure because their consciousness has been similarly insulated, not by temperament, but by social and narrative custom. Heroines of the traditional novel rarely take to the open road or the high seas; they are characterized and venerated as indwelling spirits of the shore. Traditionally,
they have been assigned the task of creating and providing shelter—the shelter of a home, of a marriage, of a civilized enclave like the Ramsay household set on an island surrounded by choppy seas.

Women thus come rather late to the tradition of adventure in which life takes the form of an astonishing narrative. The summons to adventure accordingly issues from different sources in the world and from within the self, not just because they are women, but also because they are moderns, for whom there are fewer dark places of the earth, if more and more dark places of the mind, will, and spirit to explore. Mary Carmichael’s *Life’s Adventure*, Woolf proposes, exemplifies this new sense of adventure and the new female writing that it inspires, writing that is so untethered from the docks of traditional femininity that it induces in her a kind of readerly vertigo. To read this writing, she writes,

> was like being out at sea in an open boat. Up one went, down one sank. This terseness, this short-windedness, might mean that she was afraid of something; afraid of being called “sentimental,” perhaps; or she remembers that women’s writing has been called flowery and so provides a superfluity of thorns; but until I have read a scene with some care, I cannot be sure whether is being herself or some one else. (*AROO* 81)

These observations on narrative style and authorial attitude are not unconnected to the book’s title and to the expectations aroused by its open declaration that life is an adventure. Yet how are we to read that declaration? Is there something deliberately, even mischievously formulaic and possibly banal that the title is trying at once to evoke and denigrate? Is Woolf’s psychologizing of adventure a feminist attempt to undermine masculinist bravado and the cult of daring physical exploration? Or is she genuinely attracted to the rough seas, the extravagant motions of adventure that can carry her beyond the limits of her own experience into unbounded, possibly dangerous, realms of thought and feeling?

*Life’s Adventure* prompts me to wonder what adventure itself might mean to a novelist whose first book announced her urge, never abandoned nor fully satisfied, to voyage out, to ally herself, as Lily Briscoe unaccountably does in a rather bizarre moment in the *To the Lighthouse* (1927), with the “sailors and adventurers” of the world in her own artistic discoveries of modern life and form. Adventure may also indicate the *form* given to a life rather than a pattern discovered within it. Woolf investigates this possibility, as is her wont, first within the comic registers of *Orlando* (1928), her satiric romp in defiance of history, sexual custom, and narrative convention, then more naturalistically in *The Years* (1937), where, as an adventurer of the spirit, she must temporarily yield to the discouraging regime of social and sexual facts uncompromising.
UNSEASONABLE YOUTH, OR WOOLF’S ALTERNATIVE MODERNITY

by Jed Esty

Several of the most influential British novels of the modernist era—including key works by Olive Schreiner, Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, and Jean Rhys—present stories of stunted youth or frozen adolescence. These texts revise the generic dictates of the classic *bildungsroman* by dilating and compressing narrative time while refusing the plot of social adjustment. What is less often noted is how many of these same texts block or defer their protagonists’ attainment of a mature social role through plots of colonial migration. Thus, for example, Conrad’s *Lord Jim*, Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist*, and Woolf’s *The Voyage Out* (1915) are all, in a sense, antidevelopmental fictions set in unevenly developed zones. Taking *The Voyage Out* as a test case, I argue that a geography of nonstandard and jagged temporalities (or, in a more mediated version of the case, a pervasive colonial metaphor of endless youth) frames the modernist novel’s most decisive early experiments with narrative form in the British sphere.

The specific interpretation of *The Voyage Out* focuses on the relation between temporal figures, especially those used to capture the uneasy maturation of Rachel Vinrace, and geographical images, especially those used to describe the novel’s South American coastal enclave, Santa Marina. Woolf persistently links Rachel and Santa Marina as subjects of arrested or uneven development whose central feature is a shared lack of self-possession. While inverting the Goethean ideal of male destiny in ways that resonate with the longer history of the female *bildungsroman* in English, the novel assimilates a certain uneven—and markedly colonial—temporality into its narrative and characterological language. Here, we add a new and specific form of historical explanation to the common observation that the failed *bildungsroman* of Rachel Vinrace in this early novel is a precondition for the ultimately successful artistic development of Virginia Woolf. This approach aims to bring together Woolf’s emergent aversion to linear plots with her idiosyncratic representation of an ersatz Amazonian landscape in order to propose a deep structural link between the fiction of adolescence and the politics of colonialism—between, that is, modernist aesthetics and colonial modernity.

Looking at Woolf’s *The Voyage Out* alongside the work of Conrad, Joyce, and other modernists who experimented with the *bildungsroman*, it becomes possible to read a colonial thematics of backwardness, anachronism, and uneven development as the figurative basis for an antiteleological model of subject formation that now seems like a hallmark of modernist style. Separating adolescence from the dictates of *Bildung*, modernists create an autonomous value for youth while registering the temporal and political contradictions of colonialism as a discourse of progress. This specific discussion of period style, generic history, and colonial geography opens out into a somewhat broader two-pronged claim: that the fiction of unseasonable youth and uneven development can (1) help us refine moralizing, politically Manichean, or merely thematic readings of “modernism and imperialism”; and (2) offer a useful resource for modifying humanistic and social-scienc-
tific methods that have, in the wake of colonial discourse studies, eschewed the narrative category of development itself, however uneven, in deference to a detemporalized map of alternative modernity.

Note


ON FRENCH AND BRITISH FREEDOMS
EARLY BLOOMSBURY AND THE BROTHELS OF MODERNISM

by Christine Froula

In his 1923 pamphlet On British Freedom, Clive Bell distinguishes British political freedom from French personal, social, and public freedoms and argues that, in respect to the latter, Britain is one of Europe’s “least free countries.” For Bell as for Robert Scholes, who describes a modernism epitomized by Picasso’s and Joyce’s depictions of brothels, the subject of freedom is male. Challenging certain assumptions made by Bell and Scholes, Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell—sister adventurers and revolutionaries who escaped the “slavery” of the Edwardian sex/gender system—made women the subject of freedom. After fleeing what certain documents of and reflections on their early lives reveal to be the unacknowledged brothels of Kensington for the autonomy and freedom of Bloomsbury, the sisters engaged in a critical and creative dialogue with French and British freedoms that shaped their lives, their modern arts, and early Bloomsbury. This understanding of early Bloomsbury not only casts new light on a controversial aspect of the Stephen sisters’ biographies, but highlights a different and, arguably, more important understanding of modernism, one that links its tremendous explosion of creativity with the richly historical, still unfinished, now global emancipatory project of European modernity.

Note

1. The lecture was illustrated by color images of paintings from Roger Fry’s famous “Manet and the Post-Impressionists’ exhibition at the Grafton Gallery (Nov. 1910–Jan. 1911); Picasso’s 1907 Les Demoiselles d’Avignon (sketch and painting); a photograph of Clive Bell and Picasso; early photographic portraits of Vanessa Bell and George Duckworth; etchings from Picasso’s Minotauroromachy period (1935–1936); and paintings by Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant from 1909–1918. It appears, with black-and-white illustrations, in Modernism/Modernity 12 (2005): 553–80. The journal is available online through libraries that subscribe to Project Muse.
The central argument of this talk is that Virginia Woolf borrowed the organizing principle of *A Room of One’s Own* (1929)—a dramatizing of its ideas as reflections prompted in the mind of a peripatetic narrator by a series of places and books—from another text published shortly before. That text was “The Strange Necessity,” a two-hundred-page essay-narrative by Rebecca West that first appeared in a volume of the same name in 1928. Even scholars who have noted certain similarities between Woolf’s text and West’s have stopped short of arguing for direct influence, and with some reason: Woolf never mentioned any debt to West on this score, nor did West suggest one when she reviewed *A Room of One’s Own* for *The Bookman*. Yet it seems likely that Woolf would have read at least some of West’s essay while *A Room of One’s Own* was taking form, and there are extremely suggestive convergences of style and theme between the two.

Among the books in Virginia and Leonard Woolf’s library, according to the Holleyman catalogue, was a first edition of *The Strange Necessity*, the front endpaper of which carries a hand-written inscription, dated 1928, in which West explains that her reference to Woolf (within) is highly complimentary. Since *The Strange Necessity* was published in the summer of 1928, Woolf would likely have had the book by the time she began to draft the Cambridge lectures that laid the ground for *A Room of One’s Own*, and it would almost certainly have been in her possession by the first months of 1929, when she seems to have developed the fuller version of *A Room of One’s Own* that includes a persona walking through Cambridge and other English places. Given the voracity of her reading, her admiration for West, and the allusion to herself to which West’s inscription calls attention, it’s extremely hard to imagine that Woolf hadn’t at least skimmed “The Strange Necessity” by the time she decided to build her own essay around this framework of meditation and perambulation.

The most striking similarity between West’s essay and *A Room of One’s Own* lies, precisely, in this shared framing device: in both, a narrating persona works out certain theories about the relations of life and literature while sitting, walking, and reading in various evocative settings. In *A Room of One’s Own*, the key locations are a fictionalized Cambridge, a London townhouse, the British Library, and a nearby restaurant; in *The Strange Necessity*, they include Sylvia Beach’s bookstore, several Parisian thoroughfares, and a restaurant on the Île Saint Louis. In addition, the essays share several prominent opinions, among them that writers go astray when they seek to please specific audiences instead of allowing their fictions to evolve organically. One might also remark how close the voices of the two personae are—how similar in rhythm their sentences, how much of a piece their wieldings of irony.

Perhaps the most intriguing common property of the two essays, however, is a recurring encounter with falling golden leaves, which in both cases leads the reflecting narrator to intimations of a harmony or rhythmical order in life. When West reviewed *A Room of One’s Own*, notably, she devoted a long section of her article to a fancy of Woolf herself...
standing amid falling leaves, as if consciously or unconsciously marking Woolf’s adaptation of her own autumnal image.

There are several reasons why these connections might be of interest to us. One reason has to do with West’s later comment that she had borrowed the fictionalizing frame of “The Strange Necessity” from Rémy de Gourmont. Because this writer was famously important to other modernists, such as Eliot and Pound, bringing Woolf into the web enhances our sense of the dense intertextuality of British and French modernism. Because Gourmont was the author of some outrageous antifeminist pronouncements, the point also adds to the complex history of feminist rhetorical redeployments. A second reason is that key contrasts between the essays—for example, the way Woolf recurs to limitations on women’s mobility where West’s narrator assumes her wide perambulation as undisputed right—might lead to further consideration of the alternative feminist strategies these writers pursued. Yet a third reason is that *A Room of One’s Own* and “The Strange Necessity” seem to conduct a kind of dialogue about prose fiction: offering intriguing assessments of some of the same writers, including Jane Austen and Rudyard Kipling, they also share a strong interest in the novelist’s ability to live in the presence of “reality”—a matter that for Woolf touched closely on her very sanity.

We might adduce one final benefit of reading these texts together: that doing so helps us to see how *A Room of One’s Own* is connected to a set of issues, a background of intellectual debate, that critics have long neglected. At the core of both essays is an effort to place art strongly within a material world where the human organism is profoundly affected by its environment, for West uses the work of Ivan Petrovich Pavlov to argue that art helps us survive in a world hostile to our thriving, while Woolf insists that intellectual freedom depends upon material things and that to write well one may require certain comforts of body and purse. In so doing, both essayists open themselves to the charge that they’ve made the genesis and reason of art too deterministic—that they’ve evacuated it of spirit, even adopted some version of the behaviorism touted as the cutting edge of psychological investigation in the late 1920s. The device of the narrator, however, serves to rebut this charge in advance. Channeling their arguments through lively, idiosyncratic intelligences responding in complex, witty, and deeply felt ways to their *milieux*, West and Woolf assure their readers that art is not being subordinated to the basest functions of the organism. If Woolf indeed drew on “The Strange Necessity” as she prepared *A Room of One’s Own*, then, she may have done so partly out of a sense that she, like West, was helping her reader to come to terms with necessity—in the sense of environment, in the sense of circumstances, in the sense of the body’s inescapable demands and the pressure of forces far larger in scope, if not in meaning, than the individual.
LOVES, LANGUAGES, AND LIVES: AN EXHIBIT FROM THE LIBRARY OF LEONARD AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

by Trevor James Bond

Part of what I wanted to convey with the exhibit of items from the Library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Fifteenth Annual International Virginia Woolf Conference is that, when working with the library, one feels a certain intimacy with the Woolfs and their friends and family. We can no longer rummage through Leonard and Virginia’s closets, but we can browse their bookshelves (albeit thousands of miles away). And inside those books are the ephemera of daily life: inserted letters, notes, review slips, and road maps. The Woolf library is a large collection with 9,912 volumes. We also have an extensive collection of Hogarth Press books comprising 710 titles. Therefore, the purpose of this exhibit was to highlight a few of these treasures located in Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) at Washington State University (WSU). A secondary aim of the exhibit, and this essay, is to inspire Woolf scholars to explore these underutilized collections.

One thing to remember is that the Woolf library is not a single collection, but a series of layers, including Virginia Stephen’s books, her father Leslie Stephen’s massive collection, Leonard’s school books and his volumes on Ceylon, Thoby Stephen’s university books, gifts from friends, gifts Leonard and Virginia gave each other, books the Woolfs produced at the Hogarth Press, review volumes, and much, much more.

It is strange that this fantastic collection is in America and not where one might suspect—say the East Coast or Texas (well actually, some of the books did go to the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin)—but in eastern Washington State. Laila Miletic-Vejzovic in her foreword and Diane Gillespie in her introduction eloquently describe the story of WSU’s purchase of the Woolf Library in the recently published The Library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf: A Short-Title Catalog (2003), so I will not repeat it in detail. The basic outline of the story is that in 1967, John Elwood, former chair of the WSU Department of English, and his wife Karen met Leonard Woolf and the proprietors of the Bow Windows Book Shop in Lewes, East Sussex. After Leonard Woolf’s death in 1969, the Elwoods learned via the Bow Windows Books Shop that the library in Leonard’s London house and Monks House would soon be available for sale. WSU purchased, in several deals, the great bulk of the Woolf’s personal, working library. Additional purchases of Woolf library books were made by the university from a 1972 sale of books located in Leonard’s Victoria Square house and in 1979 from Cecil Woolf. We continue to buy items from the Woolf library as they become available. Unfortunately, WSU did not buy the entire library. In 1970, 325 notable books from the Woolf library were sold in two separate lots. Most of the books in the first lot of 250 volumes, primarily signed twentieth-century presentation copies, were bought by the University of Texas at Austin.

In the introduction to the Catalogue of Books from the Library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf, G. A. Holleyman noted that by the late 1920s penciled numbers on the front end papers and title pages suggested that the Woolfs owned over 15,000 volumes. They did
not keep all of their books, however. Evidence of Leonard selling books from the library can be found in the WSU collection. A signed, type-written postcard by Leonard Woolf was found in his copy of Stresemann His Diaries Letters and Papers: “I left some papers and some books for sale at the garage will you please get them. Among the books is one Gustav Stresemann, which I want to keep. All the others can be sold.”

**FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

One interesting aspect of the Woolf library is the range of languages represented. Both Leonard and Virginia Woolf had an impressive command of languages. For the exhibit, I selected four examples of Russian books to highlight their interest in Russian culture. Leonard and Virginia published twenty-nine translations of Russian works between the two World Wars, including seven translations in which Leonard or Virginia collaborated with S. S. Koteliansky. “Kot,” as he was known, would prepare a rough translation and then collaborate with a co-translator to turn the translation into clear English. Leonard and Virginia Woolf studied Russian with Kot so that they could more readily refine his prose into English. Included in the exhibit were Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Stavrogin’s Confession and the Plan of The Life of a Great Sinner*, Notes Translated by S. S. Koteliansky and Virginia Woolf (1922); *The Autobiography of Countess Sophie Tolstoi*, translated by S. S. Koteliansky and Leonard Woolf (1922); and the dictionary and Russian grammar that Leonard and Virginia consulted.¹

Apart from English, French is the most frequently represented language in the Woolf library. The poor-quality bindings of many of the inexpensive paperback French volumes in the Woolf collection indicate that Virginia repaired or rebound them. The exhibit included an edition of Marcel Proust’s *Le Temps Retrouvé* (1927) that has a binding by Virginia Woolf. This book is one of more than one hundred such examples in the Woolf library at WSU. Virginia would often select a colorful, patterned piece of contact paper, slap it on over the book’s original boards, and then attach a manuscript label on the spine.

Virginia Woolf did not generally annotate her books. However, her Greek texts are a major exception. These books often contain copious notes, usually English translations of the text. Virginia’s copies of *Antigone* and *The Odyssey* contain her annotations. Her copy of *The Odyssey* is also noteworthy in that it was owned by her brother Thoby and includes his annotations and drawings. This volume and the rest of Thoby’s books inherited by Virginia, in 1906, must have been a reminder of Thoby’s premature death.

**INSCRIBED BOOKS**

The Woolf Library contains a rich assortment of inscribed volumes, a sampling of which was displayed for the conference. For a present to Virginia at age 13, Thoby and Vanessa inscribed a copy of Johnson’s *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*: “To Goat from Nessa and Thoby Jan 17th 1895.” Thoby also inscribed another gift for Virginia, a beautifully bound folio of *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* (1776). A gift of a different sort, this time from Virginia to Leonard, was Dostoyevsky’s *The Insulted and Injured* (1915), with the note, “For Leonard, a memory of the Grand Treat. Brighton—Oct. 19th 1915. Asheham.V. W.” Several of Vita Sackville-West’s books were also displayed, including an inscribed gift to Virginia of *Country Notes* (1939) and a signed first edition of *The Edwardians* (1930).
TRAVEL BOOKS

The Woolfs owned, and printed through their Hogarth Press, a number of travel books. For the exhibit, I selected a few items relating to travel within London, Greece, and France. In 1896, George Herbert Duckworth gave Virginia an edition of Augustus Hare’s *Walks in London* (1894). Another travel book of sorts that Virginia Woolf must have valued (she went to the trouble of repairing the spine with a new leather backing and manuscript label) was her copy of William Kent’s *Encyclopaedia of London* (1937).

When the Woolf library arrived at WSU, stuffed among their books were forty-nine maps. One map displayed in the conference exhibit was their copy of the *Bus Map Central Area* (1937) for London. Leonard and Virginia’s copy of Baedeker’s *Greece Handbook for Travellers* (1909) still contains three ticket stubs and a card from their museum visits. Their journeys to France were represented in the exhibit by several French Michelin road maps and Virginia Woolf’s copy of Jean Desbordes’ *J’Adore* (1928), purchased in 1928 while she visited Paris with Vita Sackville-West.

HOGARTH PRESS

The Woolf Library includes Sir Walter Scott’s *The Abbot* (1820), which Leonard gave to Virginia on her thirty-third birthday—the day that they decided to start a press. About that momentous day, Virginia wrote in her diary, “Sitting at tea we decide three things: in the first place to take Hogarth, if we can get it: in the second, to buy a Printing press; in the third to buy a Bull dog, probably called John” (D1: 28).

Since the arrival of the Woolf library in the early 1970s, WSU has assembled the world’s finest collection of Hogarth Press publications, the core of which came from a 1974 purchase of Trekkie Parsons’ collection of Hogarth Press first editions. What makes the collection so special is that many of the Hogarth Press volumes have their original dust jackets, all possible variant editions are collected, and a number of the books were once owned by the Woolfs themselves. Among the highlights of the Hogarth Press collection are three copies (including both binding variants) of Leonard and Virginia’s *Two Stories* (1917), the very first volume published by the Hogarth Press. The book was limited to 150 copies and was hand-set and hand-printed by Leonard and Virginia Woolf in their living room. There is also a copy of the extremely rare (only five copies are recorded) second book published at the Hogarth Press but never commercially sold: a small volume of poems by Cecil N. Woolf, who was killed in World War I.

The third book published by the Hogarth Press was Katherine Mansfield’s *Prelude* (1918). The exhibit included two copies of this book: one with plain covers, and the other with a cover illustration by J. D. Fergusson. Katherine Mansfield selected the Fergusson illustration, but Virginia detested it (Woolmer 10). Virginia Woolf wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrel that the design “makes our gorges rise, to such an extent that we can hardly bring ourselves to print it” (L2: 244). Only a few copies with the objectionable Fergusson plate, including the one displayed, were printed for Mansfield.

OTHER ASSORTED ITEMS NOT IN THE WOOLF LIBRARY OR HOGARTH PRESS COLLECTIONS

In addition to the Woolf Library and the Hogarth Press Collection, the WSU holds other related collections including, but not limited to, a small collection (thirty-five items) of Leonard Woolf’s papers; fifteen proofs of Duncan Grant’s art work for Allen Lane’s 1945 edition of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*; and a small collection of Julia Duck-
worth Stephen’s papers, edited by Diane Gillespie and Elizabeth Steele. There is also a manuscript account book kept by Virginia Woolf in which she itemized her earnings over a nine-year period between 1928 and 1937. The forty-nine maps and 70 seventy-odd insert papers once stuffed in the Woolf library have been catalogued as individual collections. Information on all of these collections, and more, may be found on the WSU Web site (http://www.wsulibs.wsu.edu/holland/masc/masc.htm).

**WORKING WITH THE WOOLF LIBRARY AND OTHER COLLECTIONS**


The Library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf is also fully cataloged in WSU’s online catalog GRIFFIN (http://griffin.wsu.edu/search/). Selecting an “Author” search and typing “Library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf” will retrieve for browsing all 4,937 titles in the Woolf library. A similar author search with the phrase “Hogarth Press Collection” will result in 710 titles. MASC in Terrell Library on the WSU campus is open all year, Monday though Friday, from 8:30 to 4:30 (excepting major holidays). Though Pullman, Washington, is a small, relatively isolated community, it has its charms, including inexpensive hotels and a large lentil festival.

**Note**


**Works Cited**


Part Two:
Exploring Woolf’s Life
Between 1891 and 1895, Vanessa, Thoby, and Virginia Stephen undertook to publish a collaborative weekly newspaper “in house” about their family’s lives, for a family readership. *Hyde Park Gate News* remained a restricted manuscript in the British Library, London, until November 2005, when Hesperus Press in London brought out my edition in the United Kingdom and the United States with a foreword by Hermione Lee. This paper is intended to offer an overview of these extraordinary documents. The journals were written in a spirit of exploration and curiosity. The Stephen children were calling attention to themselves in a very loud and clear manner, enjoying the transgressive nature of this new experience. The immediacy of the journal privileges us to witness at first hand the childhood compulsively revisited by Woolf in her adult works; the form rehearses techniques used later in her diaries and letters.

Volume I begins on Monday, 6 April 1891, and there is a gap until 30 November, then there are five issues in sequence until the end of that year. Volume II includes issues for forty-eight weeks of the year 1892. There are no surviving copies of the newspaper from 1893 or 1894. Extant from Volume V are thirteen issues for the first three months of 1895. Most of the editions are in Vanessa’s handwriting; she was “The Editor” (*HGN* 14 Dec. 1891; Lowe 12) and may have acted as an amanuensis. Virginia, however, was the author of most of the family newspaper (Bell 64). The twelve-year-old Vanessa’s script is elegant, neat, and fluid. Virginia—nine and a half when these journals begin—has a tense, often blotched, confined, italicised style of handwriting. In Volume V—when she would have been thirteen—her writing can be difficult to read; she cramps her words, creating dense, tight text. Thoby—ten and a half when the journals start—has a bold, free, untidy style. Little care is taken with accuracy; the ink is thick and dark, and he crosses out some phrases. Although the children seem to have made neat “fair copies” of their work, many slips remain and are retained in this edition. Until I turned off the function, Microsoft Word kept telling me that it was quite unable to correct or even display the many spelling and grammatical errors I was transcribing from the manuscript!

The youngest Stephen, Adrian, is excluded from this enterprise. When he planned to produce a rival newspaper, his siblings’ comment reveals much about the family dynamics: “It will not be underrated by Mrs. Stephen nor overrated by Mr. Stephen” (*HGN* 21 Nov. 1892; Lowe 145). Adrian was indulged by Julia Stephen, but had a more difficult relationship with his jealous father. There is glee from his siblings when Adrian fails to produce “The Talland Gazette.” He is advised to give up and “join with this respectable journal” (*HGN* 27 June 1892; Lowe 75). Next, he tries to set up “The Corkscrew Gazette” (*HGN* 21 Nov. 1892; Lowe 145), but, a week later, he has not delivered. They dismiss his “little ‘squitty’ paper,” announcing, with sarcastic triumph, that he “is now suffering from overwork” and “pretty liberal” “vomitations” (*HGN* 19 Dec. 1892; Lowe 163).
Vanessa, Thoby, and Virginia, living as they did with ostentatiously literary adults, chose a popular form for their apprenticeship. They were familiar with similar newspapers and bought *Tit-Bits* weekly. Virginia recalls how they “read the jokes—I liked the Correspondence best—sitting on the grass” whilst eating Fry’s chocolate (Woolf, “A Sketch” 90). *Tit-Bits* included “Original Jokes,” stories, serials, advertisements, and “Answers to Correspondents.” The children imitate these features and attempt others. There are sketches based on true and fictional events; a “Story not needing word”; essays; notes on astronomy; diaries; hints for acceptable gifts; “Sundry Interesting Jotings”; “True Anecdotes”; poems and love letters from both male and female perspectives. The children offer random bits of advice—“many people do not know that when you have wrung a chikens neck it runs along without its head” (*HPGN* 21 Dec. 1891; Lowe 16); “Music-mistresses are in one way related to bull-dogs” (*HPGN* 25 Jan. 1892; Lowe 27). A series of riddles include “What is the difference between a spider and a dead horse? One has fly bites and the other bites flies” (*HPGN* 6 April 1891; Lowe 4). Advice is offered anonymously: “REDSKIN. Use PEAR’S SOAP every day” and “UNEMPLOYED. ‘Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy heart’” (*HPGN* 7 Dec. 1891; Lowe 11).

In some respects, daring to write at all as junior members of this distinguished family could be seen as impertinent. In “Notes on Virginia’s Childhood,” Vanessa illustrates the effrontery of their enterprise. She writes that Virginia “was very sensitive to criticism and the good opinion of the grown-ups” (64). The constant wish to criticise, subvert, and undermine seems to have been the Stephen family’s habitual way of looking at life. The children deliberately left an issue of *Hyde Park Gate News* for their parents to find. Virginia is described as “trembling with excitement” as they wait to hear their reaction. Vanessa writes,

> We could see my mother’s lamplit figure quietly sitting near the fire, my father on the other side with his lamp, both reading. Then she noticed the paper, picked it up, began to read. We looked and listened hard for some comment. “Rather clever, I think,” said my mother, putting the paper down without apparent excitement. (64–65)

Julia’s detached, undemonstrative reaction says much about her attitude to her girls. Yet her four words are enough to “thrill her daughter; she had approval and had been called clever, and our eavesdropping was rewarded” (Bell 64–65).

The adult Virginia recalls experiencing an “extremity of pleasure . . . like being a violin and being played upon” when her mother appreciated something her daughter had written (Woolf, “A Sketch” 105). Virginia suffered agonies of uncertainty when revising her work, preferring the spontaneity and exhilaration of creation to the drudgery of correcting dull detail. Her perfectionist unease about how her work would be regarded contributed to post-publication depression.

Reading these journals, a vivid late-nineteenth-century upper-middle-class “soap opera” emerges. Major characters are Julia, Leslie, and Laura Stephen (Leslie’s daughter from his marriage to Minny Thackeray); George, Stella, and Gerald Duckworth (Julia’s children from her first marriage to Herbert Duckworth); and Vanessa, Thoby, Virginia, and Adrian. Minor characters include relations: other Stephens, the Fishers, the Vaughans,
and the Prinseps. There are also friends: Philip Burne-Jones, son of the painter Edward Burne-Jones; Arthur and Sylvia Llewelyn-Davies, close friends with J. M. Barrie, who featured their sons in his play Peter Pan and adopted them after the Llewelyn-Davies’ deaths. There are also the Holman Hunts, the Chamberlains, the Symonds, the Lushingtons, the Maitlands, and American friends, Charles Eliot Norton’s family and the Stillmans.

There is very little gravity in these pages. As in Greek tragedy, the difficult events happen “off stage.” Perhaps the children, usually so readily subversive, realized that they had to be sensitive in censoring difficult material. The daily events they cover are not dramatic, but rather mundane and inconsequential. Ob scene was cousin Jem Stephen, who had suffered a blow to the head and behaved violently, pursuing Stella in an irrational manner. After a severe manic episode, he was institutionalised, and in 1892, he starved himself to death. We are told that Julia’s invalid mother, Mrs. Jackson, has had “a most severe attack of a sort of mongrel disease” (HPGN 7 March 1892; Lowe 41), but her death, three weeks later, on 2 April 1892, is left unrecorded. The extremity of Laura’s situation is also glossed over, although it must have been a frequent topic of conversation. There’s a retrospective poignancy about the account of Julia’s influenza in Volume V. Adrian is ill at school, but Julia’s weaknesses and the stormy March weather prevent her visiting him. The children write, “In our next issue we hope to be able to report her being well or at any rate very nearly so” (HPGN 11 March 1895; Lowe 189). Adrian returns home, but no mention is made of their mother’s condition. Hyde Park Gate News stops after Monday, 8 April 1895. A month later, Julia Stephen is dead.

The relationship of children to parents and of youth to age is given parodic treatment in Hyde Park Gate News. The children affect a smugly moral, “grown-up” tone: “As one gets older one appreciates more the value of being young” (HPGN 11 April 1892; Lowe 53). When Adrian has his ninth birthday, Julia, frequently nostalgic for youth and innocence, wishes it were only his fifth because “one is much nicer when one is young” (HPGN 31 Oct. 1892; Lowe 132). We can imagine how this sentiment may have struck the other children who were all older than her cherished “joy.” Adrian’s ill health is an obsession in these journals—Julia nurses him tenderly, spoon-feeding him malt, “the uplifted and eager face of the little one whose pretty cherub lips are parted ready to receive [sic] the tit-bits from the fond Mother. Oh how like the old bird feeding its young” (HPGN 14 March 1892; Lowe 42). The inaccuracies in this passage undermine the pretence of satirical sophistication.

Several sections describe the return of precious sons to their ecstatic family. Perhaps the girls wrote these playfully provocative passages? In July 1892, Gerald arrives at St. Ives. “Our correspondent” theatrically records a “triumphal entry”; his mother leaning on him, “admiring brothers and sisters surrounding him,” followed by Stella, Leslie, and “faithful Shag bringing up the rear. Old and young stopped to admire the touching spectacle and many laughed out of pure sympathy for the joy that was depicted on the face of the good matron” (HPGN 18 July 1892; Lowe 83). In August, the “glorious event” of Thoby’s return is told with thinly concealed irritation: “We will draw the grey veil of silence over the joyous scene that ensued as it is too tender to be described” (HPGN 1 Aug. 1892; Lowe 88). One week later, Laura’s belated arrival receives, however, a brief, more muted account. In the next edition, the children go out in a boat to see the St. Ives regatta, but “Miss Laura Stephen and Shag were left on the shore gazing at the aquatic party” (HPGN 15 Aug. 1892; Lowe 94).
The most joyous times were at St. Ives, where the family spent summers from 1882 to 1894. It was a pastoral retreat from the city. Talland House, in contrast to 22 Hyde Park Gate, is “a heavenly prospect,” full of light and warmth (HPGN 16 May 1892; Lowe 63). There are games and activities: cricket, rounders, croquet, football, cat and mouse, hide and seek, “Tom Tiddler’s ground,” charades, “tableaux,” draughts, “Up Jenkins,” collecting shells, fishing, boating, walking, swimming. Jack Hills, Stella’s fiancé, teaches them to collect and label insects. Adrian was not allowed to go on the trip to the lighthouse where “Miss Virginia Stephen saw a small and dilapidated bird standing on one leg” with its eyes “picked out.” On their return journey, Master Basil Smith “spued like fury” (HPGN 12 Sep. 1892; Lowe 109). In the same issue, Gerald puts on a grand display of fireworks for Thoby’s twelfth birthday; the children are “super-exuberant,” and next day the garden is a scene of “ruin & destruction. The gate was entirely broken off its hinges” (HPGN 12 Sept. 1892; Lowe 108).

Food is greatly appreciated. They eat cherries, cream, bread and jam, grapes, peaches, oranges, cake, and chocolates. Leonard Woolf minutely recorded Virginia’s weight, which varied dramatically depending on her mental state. In these happy journals, her own healthy appetite is mocked: “The luncheon was perhaps the most interesting part to our author as it was pie and strawberry ice” and “to Miss Virginia’s delight there were cherries for tea the first she had tasted this season” (HPGN 6 June 1892; Lowe 69, 70). She takes an intense, even greedy, pleasure in food. At Evelyn’s School, the Headmaster’s wife, “on passing by remarked that Miss Virginia had taken in a good supply” of refreshment but, as soon as she gets home, Virginia eats more cake (HPGN 30 May 1892; Lowe 67).

The London editions document trips to glass blowing, a ventriloquist, the pantomime, Kensington Park, the zoo, birthday parties, plays, musicals, gondola rides, skating, and an ice carnival in Regent’s Park. Dogs feature regularly.1 There’s a story about Julia’s “fear of the dog who resides at 16 H.P.G.” (HPGN 14 Dec. 1891; Lowe 12). She attends police court where the dog’s owners are fined. In January 1892, Virginia, not quite ten, has to bear testimony “that the dog had flown at her . . . knocking her up against the wall” and biting her cloak (HPGN 18 Jan. 1892; Lowe 24).

On Sundays, often when Leslie was out with his walking group, the “Tramps,” Julia would entertain visitors, but the children were not always as welcoming as their mother. In the first volume, they leave a jokey space under the heading SUNDAY VISITORS, perhaps relieved that, unusually, there had been none that week. Those with “walk on” parts are caricatured. Dr. Creighton is “unceremoniously observed by a most precocious little girl to greatly resemble a bull-frog!” (HPGN 7 Dec. 1891; Lowe 9). Their music teacher, Madame Meo, is the “Old Pig” (HPGN 14 Nov. 1892; Lowe 141). Mrs. Wordsworth, their dancing teacher, is small, “rather like a bit of quicksilver,” with a glass eye (HPGN 21 Dec. 1891; Lowe 15). When their singing teacher, Miss Mills, is “plunged in the depths of illness,” they are not as “sorry as they ought to have been” (HPGN 12 Dec. 1892; Lowe 156). Physical appearance is often harshly mocked: Miss Parenti is “a lump of shapeless fat”; Conor O’Brien a “Liliputian” (HPGN 28 Nov. 1892; Lowe 149) and “diseased” (HPGN 14 Nov. 1892; Lowe 141); train passengers are “unwashed, uncombed, painted, dyed, frizzed, wigged” (HPGN 1 April 1895; Lowe 195). The new maid’s special manner of walking is criticised, her dress “makes the noise like that of a carpet being vio-
ently swept” (HPGN 12 Dec. 1892; Lowe 156). Virginia’s concrete “scene-making” can be seen in embryo.

The children have a precocious mastery of diverse techniques: pastiche, slapstick, comedy, satire, euphemism, hyperbole, whimsy, and suspense. Elaborate language is often used to debunk pomposity and social pretension: “The esteemed owner of the venerable mansion 22 Hyde Park Gate” (HPGN 29 Feb. 14 March 1892; Lowe 38); a “palatial residence” (HPGN 26 Sept. 1892; Lowe 114); “Here ended the Generals visit” (HPGN 21 March 1892; Lowe 46). There is an acute awareness of audience: “We have to announce to the public. . . . We hope that our gentle readers will pardon us” (HPGN 31 Oct. 1892; Lowe 135). The children are both writers and characters in the narrative; they refer to themselves using the third person as “the juveniles of 22 H.P.G.” (HPGN 15 Feb. 1892; Lowe 34). There is a sharp, witty, often malicious, quality to their observations.

Volume V includes some fascinating longer pieces considering abstract questions about morality, existence, and religion. The style is more experimental and literary. One invented letter takes as its focus the question, “What is a gentleman?” (HPGN 4 March 1895; Lowe 187). We know that same question, with an answer, was pinned in the hall of 22 Hyde Park Gate: “What is it to be a gentleman? It is to be tender to women, chivalrous to servants.” The writing uses personae to allow greater freedom of point of view. Authorship for these pieces is not claimed, but it is tempting to read these anonymous articles as Virginia’s.2

The final, tragicomic sketch begins with a stage direction: “Scene—a bare room, and on a box sits a lank female, her fingers clutch her pen, which she dips from time to time in her ink pot and then absently rubs on her dress” (HPGN 8 April 1895; Lowe 199). The anonymous “Author” looks out of an open window to a view like that from 22 Hyde Park Gate—chimney pots are wreathed in smoke, the “church in the distance” may be St. Mary Abbots to the north-west; towards Kensington Gardens, “the gloomy outlines of bleak Park trees rise.” The woman may be thinking of her childhood, “a most disagreeable expression crosses her face” (Lowe 200). Her Editor demands that she should write poetry, but her paper is blank. Time is running out and the calendar tells her that the sun will set at 6:42. The Author is under pressure to perform, to create for commercial publication. The “cheery” middle-aged Editor—who “knew her Author very well”—enters and asks, “Is it finished?” The Author, motivated by the incentive of a shilling a stanza, eventually manages to produce a hundred hack verses with the aid of a rhyming dictionary. Writing in this grim room of her own is seen as hard labour, not liberation. The editor is surely a projection of Vanessa; the anonymous apprentice author an avatar of an older Virginia.

We can read these journals as autobiography and as biography: both forms fascinated Virginia Woolf. In her essay “I Am Christina Rossetti” (1930), Virginia sums up the experience of reading biography:

Here is the past and all its inhabitants miraculously sealed as in a magic tank; all we have to do is to look and to listen and to listen and to look and soon the little figures—for they are rather under life-size—will begin to move and to speak, and as they move we shall arrange them in all sorts of patterns of which they were ignorant . . . and as they speak we shall read into their sayings all kinds of meanings which never struck them. (CE4: 54)
No doubt, now that the new edition of *Hyde Park Gate News* is in the public arena, readers will start to peer at all “the little figures,” to mark their words and consider the implications of their actions. The hermeneutic imperative will ascribe all sorts of surprising meanings to this once private family newspaper.

**Notes**

1. See *HPGN* 22 February 1892 (Lowe 36–37) for a lost dog and an “Essay on Dogs in General”; see also “Beauty” (*HPGN* 29 Feb. 1892, 7 Mar. 1892; Lowe 38, 39), “Pepper” (*HPGN* 28 Mar. 1892, 4 Apr. 1892; Lowe 49, 50), and “Tatters,” the pantomime dog (*HPGN* 14 Jan. 1895; Lowe 167). “Shag” is mentioned several times in Volume II, from 4 July through 5 December 1892 (Lowe 79, 82, 83, 89, 91, 94, 138, 152–53). A small lost dog is saved by Stella, who returned by cab, “poorer in money but richer in virtue” (*HPGN* 7 Nov. 1892; Lowe 136–37); Mrs. Cooke’s “homing” poodle is mentioned in the same issue.

2. In this context it may be pertinent to remember Woolf’s comment in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) that “Anon” was often a woman.

**Works Cited**


In Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, Alice speaks with the White Queen regarding the trouble with memory, how it works “both ways”—forwards and backwards. The scene depicts the queen’s discovery of her bleeding finger, despite the fact that she has yet to prick it on the shawl’s brooch. When Alice finally witnesses the actual injury, she asks, “But why don’t you scream now?” The queen responds, “Why, I’ve done all the screaming already. . . . What would be the good of having it all over again?” (249–50). A trauma also experiences memory “both ways”: the past as consistently relived in both present and future, an insight Woolf recognized in her analysis of Carroll’s work. As she writes in “Lewis Carroll,” collected in *The Moment and Other Essays* (1948):

> Childhood normally fades slowly. Wisps of childhood persist when the boy or girl is a grown man or woman. Childhood returns sometimes by day, more often by night. . . . Down, down, down we fall into that terrifying, wildly inconsequent, yet perfectly logical world where time races, then stands still; where space stretches, then contracts. It is the world of sleep; it is also the world of dreams. (81–82)

In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman alleges that psychically traumatized children experience “dissociative virtuosity,” where they “may learn to ignore severe pain, to hide their memories in complex amnesias, to alter their sense of time, place, or person, and to induce hallucinations or possession states” (102). Rhoda, volleyed through time, repeatedly reliving flashes of her childhood in a perpetually traumatic present, appears to create such an armor against reality. Woolf’s representation of Rhoda, one of the narrating fluid identities in her germinal text *The Waves* (1931), is at best illusory, dreamlike, a depiction of a traumatized female—one grounded in a perpetually traumatic present. She is a figure that, I contest, is representative not only of Woolf’s experimentation with trauma in her fiction, but also of an attempt to address and resolve her own traumatic recollections, which surface in journal entries and in *Moments of Being* (1976), as well as in her fiction, including *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *The Pargiters* (1931), and *The Years* (1937).

Current feminist criticism has largely ignored the importance of Rhoda and her trauma to the text. Andrea Harris cites Rhoda’s endurance of a “textual violence in being written out of the novel as a suicide,” but claims this violence is “tempered by the fact that this displacement is followed by . . . the incorporation of a feminine subject position by the novel’s central main character” (60). Promoting the fallacy of Rhoda as an ineffectual, devoured character, Harris alleges that, in the text, “Woolf sketches the contours of a new state of being in which difference no longer represents an obstacle or battlefield but instead a fertile ground of exchange” (62). However, Harris’s use of the term “exchange” contradicts her central argument; the only beneficiary in her analysis is Bernard. Similarly,
readings that allege Rhoda serves as a defeated lesbian character, as Annette Oxindine suggests, or as a figure subsumed by Bernard to emphasize Woolf’s “androgynous vision,” as argued by Harris, fail to grasp what I see as the vitality of Rhoda’s voices as well as her silences. Both Oxindine and Ariela Freedman dismiss the readings of Woolf’s use of the traumatized character as spiritual and artistic reinforcement for the “survivor”; citing Mrs. Dalloway, Freedman rejects the reading of “female subjectivity as predicated on the gift of a male death” (86), that of Clarissa’s counterpart Septimus Smith, a reading in which, she notes, he becomes “the scapegoat of the novel. He dies so that she can live” (96). Similar are readings of The Waves assessing Rhoda’s role as a sacrifice for Bernard’s self-identification, where critics, as Oxindine suggests, “lay down the body of the ‘incandescent’ Rhoda, also a victim of suicide, and create in her male counterpart, Bernard, a figure many critics have come to revere as the ideal androgynous artist” (203).

All these devaluations of Rhoda neglect a crucial textual remnant—Woolf’s literal transplantation of Jinny’s nonsurvivable conflict onto Rhoda. As evidenced by Rhoda’s dominance in the first holograph draft, Woolf seems to become infatuated with the idea of a figure who desires to live outside of the competing selves, outside of the proper flow of time. Woolf initiated The Waves with a central female narrator in mind; in Alice to the Lighthouse, Juliet Dusinberre discusses the early sketch of the novel, asking, “Who is the lady? It is never said. Yet she is, unmistakably, Virginia Woolf herself, and the children in the book recognize both their separateness from her, and a mysterious tie between them” (171). In the first holograph draft, the narrator of the piece, whom Woolf merely designates as a “She” (The Waves: The Holograph Draft [TWHD] 16), claims,

I am telling myself the story of the world from the beginning. I am not concerned with the single life, but with lives together. I have set myself the task of finding a complete perfect vessel. (TWHD 9)

This narrator, a dissociated “perfect vessel”—in Dusinberre’s words, the master of a “shared consciousness” (85)—contains six “fragments,” each experiencing intertwining memory in a perpetual, timeless present. The only member to abandon the collective, unable to survive among the competing, fluid identities, is the ethereal Rhoda, Woolf’s traumatized figure whose unnamed experience excludes her from the physical world of her “companions. As Woolf writes in Rhoda’s voice in The Waves,

Look, the loop of the figure is beginning to fill with time; it holds the world in it. I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop; which I now join—so—and seal up, and make entire. The world is entire, and I am outside of it, crying, “Oh, save me, from being blown for ever outside the loop of time!” (21–22)

Woolf portrays Rhoda as existing outside of logical time, like the White Queen, where the displaced memory of some unrecognized pain is forever surfacing; here, Rhoda is doubly dissociated from both the female narrator and her sundered psyche.
Because the source of Rhoda’s trauma remains a mystery to the reader, occluded by Woolf, locked forever in an inaccessible past, hidden from any conscious confrontation by Rhoda and thus by the reader, Woolf draws the reader directly into a series of relived traumatic experiences while simultaneously referencing her own autobiographical experiences with trauma. As a means of working through her own trauma, Woolf appears to create Rhoda as an effort to separate her own traumatic past, one of sexual abuse and incest, from Jinny, a physical manifestation of survival.

Woolf interweaves the shared traits of Jinny and Rhoda in the first holograph draft. In the draft, Rhoda initially appears as a concrete being often interchanged with the bodily substantial Jinny, a figure for whom Mark Hussey sees Woolf as a possible basis (131), but in the final publication, the characters become antithetical to one another.

In the first holograph draft, Woolf draws a comparison between Jinny and her father, a potential autobiographical reference to the mutual affinity between Woolf and her father:

> her mouth [was pink] was wide & her she had a great nose like her fathers. (TWHD 31)

Rejecting a reading of Rhoda’s subjugation to Bernard and assuming that Woolf invests such autobiographical moments in the character of Jinny, we can also reaffirm the importance of Rhoda, the psychically damaged being severed from the physical, sensual Jinny.

In the initial pages of the first holograph draft, Jinny undergoes a psychical transformation. Unlike the confident, sensual child of the final draft of The Waves, in the holograph text, Jinny initially appears to possess the self-defeating qualities of Rhoda. As a student in The Waves, Rhoda “stares at the chalk figures, her mind lodges in those white circles; it steps through those white loops into emptiness, alone. They have no meaning for her. She has no answer for them” (TW 22). Similarly, in the first holograph draft, Woolf introduces Jinny as a “moody fitful little girl” who “swayed” over her work, “as if she despaired of ever getting it done” (TWHD 3). Again, “It was Jinny who had such a difficulty with her lessons. / so that she sat at the long table swaying her head from side to side” (TWHD 5). Woolf’s transference of what she initially presents as Jinny’s traits to Rhoda continues as the text progresses:

> The intolerable length of the morning, & its devastating dulness, pervaded the schoolroom, with its long desks, & its yellow walls, & where Rhoda sat doing sums, her trying to make the come right out sum work. Everybody had gone out & left her alone, everything in the world had receded. (TWHD 83)

Evidence from this draft suggests that Rhoda, who of the six characters occupies most of the interior monologues at forty-five pages, emerged from Jinny, being gradually polarized against Jinny’s physicality. In the holograph draft, Jinny not only experiences terror in the schoolroom, but dissociation of her self refracted in the looking glass(es) at the school, moments Rhoda directly lives in The Waves:
There were two looking glasses on the way upstairs; one showed the head, the other the whole body. And if she saw her head only, she was she felt I am the quicksilver in the leaf blanched & hardened; into despair . . . but when she saw her body melted in the other glass the quicksilver became molten again, & the leaf was veins in the leaf began to quicken & its & she felt green to be limp & soft (TWHD 31).

It is also at this point where Rhoda emerges, turning from the looking glass, thinking like Louis, that she had no face. Like Louis she had no not among you lodgement. I am only a passenger. And if you insist upon drawing me into your life (my unfitness will be discovered &) you will destroy me. (TWHD 32)

A direct interchange of names later in the holograph draft suggests that Woolf was working from a single character, which split into two opposing factions, one tangible and one not:

However, one day there was a great affair in Upper Rhoda Conklin street where Jinny, the flyaway child moody child, lived with her mother & grandmother for her father was dead. (TWHD 58)

Thrust into the world with no protector, the fatherless Rhoda springs not from the forehead of Zeus, but from the body of Jinny, the sensual self Woolf is incapable of recognizing in the mirror that haunts her in Moments of Being.

Reflecting on the sexual abuse she experienced as a child, where she was molested by her half-brother before the hall mirror, Woolf writes in Moments of Being,

Yet this did not prevent me from feeling ecstasies and raptures spontaneously and intensely and without any shame or the least sense of guilt, so long as they were disconnected with my own body. I thus detect another element in the shame which I had in being caught looking at myself in the glass in the hall. I must have been ashamed or afraid of my own body. (67–68, emphasis added.)

I argue that Woolf passes this characterization, where the physical cannot meld with the psychical, onto Rhoda.

The repeated use the mirror as symbolic of imprisonment, where the young girl’s image is refracted and splintered, is juxtaposed with open window imagery as a form of
escapism throughout *The Waves*. Woolf creates metaphors to describe Rhoda’s separateness from the other identities and from her ability to “escape” her traumatic imprisonment: “the birds sang in chorus first,” said Rhoda; “Now the scullery door is unbarred. Off they fly. Off they fly like a fling of seed. But one sings by the bedroom window alone” (10–11). Alone at the mirror, she is forced to face the fractured image that stares back at her; in contrast, Woolf poses Rhoda before many open windows, not merely because the window becomes a potential vector of escape for Rhoda, a break in the solidity of the walls to which she clings, but also because, as Quentin Bell notes in *Virginia Woolf: a Biography*, in 1904, Woolf tried to commit suicide by throwing herself from a window (90). Rhoda is positioned by windows throughout the text—not only in her narrative, but in the narratives of the other identities as well. The escape from the window is an escape from the confining structure, from the body, from the physical; Rhoda, exorcised from Jinny in the opening pages of the first holograph draft, can only find freedom through death. We may argue that Rhoda’s lack of a physical body *em/bodies* Woolf’s implementation of a traumatized identity within the text.

In contrast to the final edition of *The Waves*, in the holograph draft, Woolf envisions Rhoda as an imaginative child, not dissimilar to her description of her sister Vanessa and herself as “tomboys” who “played cricket, scrambled over rocks, climbed trees, were said not to care for clothes and so on” (MOB 68). The child Rhoda rises as a force of creativity, not dissimilar to the imperial imagination of the child Rose in the opening chapter of *The Years*. In the holograph draft, Woolf describes Rhoda as

\[\ldots\text{the avenger; she was somehow the woman who saved the was extremely valiant & adventurous; had her tragedy; was often given up for dead; woke the most extreme sympathy; felt even as she was making mistakes in German grammar that she was \textit{writing her} being observed with the highest interest by people whose \textit{life she} admiration & sympathy were never for a moment turned from her. (TWHD, 36–7)}\]

Similarly, in *The Years*, Rose is the self-ordained brave messenger to the “General,” “riding to the rescuel” (27). However, like Woolf’s crippling childhood sexual abuse, it is Rose’s confrontation with an apparent sexual predator that reduces her to the “little girl who had disobeyed her sister, in her house shoes, flying for safety to Lamley’s shop” (28).

Rhoda of the first draft, who claims herself leader of “the Russian people,” hardly seems the individual destined to be consumed, as Andrea Harris suggests, by the gluttonous John/Bernard of the holograph draft, the boy who

\[\text{would talk, with his bread \& paste thickly smearing his bread with anchovy paste. He ate in great mouthfuls; often absent mindedly. (TWHD 30)}\]

However, also like the vibrant Rose in *The Years*, who finds herself unable to reveal her traumatic experience with the predatory “horrid face; white, peeled, pock-marked” to
her rigidly Victorian family members and thus attempts suicide (27–28), Rhoda and her strong childhood force lose substance later in the first draft, in her adolescence.

Rhoda’s antireality, her imaginary realm of power, is, of course, ineffectual. Consigned to a subsocietal role by her trauma, she can only enact her desire in solitude, where she controls the petals within her brown basin: “some will founder. Some will dash themselves against the cliffs. One sails alone. That is my ship” (18–19). Her moment of solitude, of complete control, is stolen by Neville with his interruption, indicating Rhoda’s inability to maintain a sense of control while in the society of others. That she must imitate Susan and Jinny because she is ill equipped to compete socially, furthers the involuntary shattering of her already fractured consciousness.

A reading of Rhoda as representative of Woolf’s use of the personal and autobiographical offers an alternate understanding of the text; Woolf experiments with Rhoda’s trauma, a reflection of her own, as a rupture in the six-figured identity, a floating white petal that cannot survive the paralysis of identity, the failure to assume a complete self due to trauma, and the unsaid traumatic memory of abuse that has dominated her. Rhoda emerges as an emotionally paralyzed being whose trauma surfaces, like Woolf’s, through the scarred and dissociated refractions.

Works Cited


In her biography of Lady Ottoline Morrell, Miranda Seymour indicts Bloomsbury for spreading cruel gossip about Ottoline which they knew to be untrue. Joanne Trautmann Banks has observed that Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, and Vanessa Bell, in their satirical remarks in their letters (at each other’s as well as at Lady Ottoline’s expense), were motivated not by viciousness but by the desire to entertain and outdo each other in the outrageousness of their wit. Whatever Bloomsbury’s intentions, Woolf’s Times obituary for Ottoline on 28 April 1938, suggests that Woolf felt Ottoline was owed recompense for her treatment. The obituary mentions that the “great lady” did not “escape the ridicule of those whom she befriended” (D5 Appendix II, 365). That Woolf in Between the Acts may in a sense pay tribute to Ottoline in her portrayal of Mrs. Manresa is suggested by a record in her diary that she conceived Between the Acts the same day as she received news of Ottoline’s death, by her mention in Ottoline’s obituary that Bloomsbury had been unfair to her, by comments throughout the Diary of liking Ottoline despite Bloomsbury’s ridicule (particularly Vanessa Bell’s and Lytton Strachey’s) of her, and by Mrs. Manresa’s similarities to Ottoline. Woolf’s close conjunction of Ottoline’s death and her conception of Between the Acts appears in her diary entry for 26 April 1938:

Ottoline is dead. . . . The horrid little pellet screwed my brain. . . . Yet in spite of that here I am sketching out a new book. . . . Why not Poyntzet Hall: . . . all lit. discussed in connection with real little incongruous living humour. . . . We all life, all art, all waifs & strays—a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole. . . . And English country; & a scenic old house—& a terrace where nursemaid’s walk. (D5 135)

Mrs. Manresa’s traits, which Lady Ottoline may have inspired, include her pride in being a free “new woman” devoted to pleasure; her sexual appeal; her plummy intonation, flamboyant dress, hats, and jewels; her taste and knowledge about art and sponsorship of young artists, including homosexual ones such as William Dodge; her belief in a democratic mingling of classes; and her love of nature.¹ The number and depth of these similarities override others’ suggestions that Mrs. Manresa is inspired by Katherine Mansfield or Vita Sackville-West.² It may be true, as Evelyn Haller points out, that Manresa’s name comes from a street on which Mansfield lived (qtd. in Hussey, Virginia 154), but aside from external details like that and Manresa’s foreignness, it is difficult to imagine the nervy, intensely artistic Mansfield as a model for the extroverted, sexy, and extravagant Manresa. Similarly, Mitchell Leaska’s idea that Manresa is modeled on Sackville-West (12–13) is outweighed by Ottoline’s parallels with Manresa in sponsorship of homosexual young artists and heterosexual flirtatiousness, despite Sackville-West and Ottoline sharing Manresa’s flamboyance and aristocratic connections. Manresa’s tone seems wrong for Sackville-West;
Woolf does not think Sackville-West quite so foolish as Ottoline or Mrs. Manresa. She had already parodied Sackville-West much more lovingly and extensively in *Orlando*.

Woolf's liking for Ottoline is consistent throughout her diary, and it is possible that their mutual love of walking in nature was their initial bond. In November 1917, Woolf and Ottoline escape the crush of guests at Garsington to go for a walk, and Woolf concludes, “On the whole I liked Ottoline better than her friends have prepared one for liking her. Her vitality seemed to me a credit to her. . . . To the outsider the obvious view is that O. & P. & Garsington House provide a good deal, which isn’t accepted very graciously” (*D1* 79). Even in the passage in Woolf’s diary most critical of Ottoline, when Woolf tries hard to fall in with Strachey’s and Vanessa Bell’s rationalization of their scorn for Ottoline and spreading gossip about her—that Ottoline was generous to artists because she wanted fame and glory for her good works—Woolf cannot help liking Ottoline. At Garsington again in June 1923, Woolf at first concurs with Strachey and Bell, then changes her mind about Ottoline’s “ulterior motives”:

> A loathing overcomes me of human beings—their insincerity. their vanity—a wearisome & rather defiling talk with Ott. last night is the foundation of this complaint. . . . Her egotism is so great. “I am much more sensitive than most people,” . . . the first words she said that she meant. . . . Yet on Saturday night I liked her. (*D2* 243)

Then Woolf changes her mind again, privately, in her diary, steeling herself to be critical and ungenerous:

> I want to bring in the despicableness of people like Ott: . . . I have been too tolerant often. . . . She’s always being kind in order to say [so] to herself at night. . . . Ottoline invites the poor little embroideress to her party, . . . to round off her own picture of herself. (*D2* 244–45)

As Miranda Seymour suggests, Bloomsbury’s criticism of Ottoline was widespread in society. After Ottoline’s memorial service, Lady Oxford innocently asks Woolf, “Tell me, though, why did her friends quarrel with her?” (*D5* 136), echoing Woolf’s remarks in Ottoline’s obituary about the unkindness of Ottoline’s friends. An awkward pause follows, in which Woolf is silent. Duncan Grant finally answers the question about Bloomsbury’s dislike somewhat ambiguously—“She was exigeante”—deflecting Lady Oxford (*D5* 136).

In 1919, Woolf attempted to summarize Ottoline’s character:

> She struck her unmistakable note upon entering the room . . . magnificently upright & held together; her blue blood giving her the carriage of assurance & self-respect which is rare among the intellectuals. . . . She was . . . as I believe, genuinely, kindly, & well wishing, though . . . bewailing as usual her disasters in friendship, . . . though anxious for reconciliations. . . . L’s verdict was that she was “very nice”; the first time he has ever said that. (*D1* 272)

Isa Oliver’s wondering whether Mrs. Manresa is “genuine” echoes Woolf’s ambivalence about Ottoline (*BTA* 42). Woolf’s summing up of Ottoline’s character could have led to the gentle parody in Mrs. Manresa as a “wild child of nature” (50). In 1919, Woolf
wrote that Ottoline’s “intuitions are more penetrating than many of the profoundly reasonable remarks of our intellectuals; & to me she always has the pathos of a creature vaguely afloat in some wide open space, without support or clear knowledge of its direction” (D1 272). In *Between the Acts*, the first thing Mrs. Manresa says she does when she comes down to the country is to “take off [her] stays . . . and roll in the grass.’ . . . ‘That’s genuine,’ Isa [thinks]. Quite genuine. And her love of the country too” (42). Mrs. Manresa often “wore an old garden hat; taught the village women not how to pickle and preserve; but how to weave frivolous baskets out of coloured straw. Pleasure’s what they want, she said” (42–43).

Woolf writes of Ottoline even more affectionately from 1927 on, after the Morrells have been forced to give up Garsington and remove to an apartment in Gower Street (comparatively humble after the magnificence of Bedford Square) and after any pretense of greatness has been removed. In 1927, Woolf “had a shabby easy intimate talk” with Ottoline (D3 152). When Woolf calls on her in 1932, Ottoline is out—selling off her “Lawrence first editions (how I’d like to tell that to Lytton!)” thinks Woolf (D4 73). In November 1932, she writes that it’s “a queer thing that Ott shd. come, after all these years, old shabby tender to my sofa; & I liked her” (D4 130).

Woolf’s most frequent passing sketches of Ottoline note her outlandishly sumptuous dress and over-made-up appearance; for example, at a 1917 exhibition of modern art organized by Roger Fry at the Mansard Gallery, Ottoline is “in black velvet, hat like a parasol, satin collar, pearls, tinted eyelids, and red gold hair” (D1 61; see Figure 1). Mrs. Manresa’s extravagance in appearance includes her gloves, bright red lipstick, and curvaceousness: “Her hat, her rings, her finger nails red as roses, smooth as shells, were there for all to see,” thinks Isa (BTA 39). That Mrs. Manresa is a “New Woman” devoted to pleasure is indicated not just in freedom from practicality and insistence that the village women focus on pleasure in their crafts, but also in her strolling “the garden at midnight in silk pyjamas,” her “loud speaker playing jazz,” and her “cocktail bar” (39). Her flamboyance mirrors Ottoline’s free modernity:

Vulgar [Mrs. Manresa] was in her gestures, in her whole person, over-sexed, over-dressed for a picnic. But what a desirable . . . quality it was—for everybody felt, . . . “she’s said it, she’s done it, not I,” and could take advantage of the breach of decorum, of the fresh air that blew in. (BTA 41)

Mrs. Manresa, like Ottoline, has a “rich flutty voice” (BTA 38). Seymour describes Ottoline’s voice as “a seductive singsong drawl” (279). Virginia thinks it a “queer nasal moan,” but reflects “that too was to the good in deflating immensities” (D5 136). After the memorial service, Lady Oxford confides that “she had expostulated with Ott. about the voice. Mere affectation” (D5 136). Lady Oxford then segues to the question regarding Bloomsbury’s unkind gossip about Ottoline, mentioned by Woolf in her obituary. Instead of replying to either of Lady Oxford’s remarks, Woolf “bantered her on her obituary” for Ottoline (D5 136, emphasis added).

Mrs. Manresa’s love of art and sponsorship of artistic young men like William Dodge is only a token of Ottoline’s enabling of struggling modern artists. Ottoline became infatuated with Augustus John in 1908, and by May was sitting for her portrait “almost daily” in his London studio (Seymour 82). By September he successfully redirected her embar-
rassingly generous presents to him to support sculptors Henry Lamb and Jacob Epstein (Seymour 84). Miranda Seymour’s biography makes clear how deeply involved Ottoline was in Roger Fry’s 1910 Post-Impressionist exhibition. In 1909, Fry named Ottoline to the committee of the Contemporary Art Society, and in 1910 her brother Henry was persuaded to act as chairman and her “cousin, Lord Howard de Walden, as its first president” (Seymour 87). In the summer of 1909, Ottoline had become enflamed with enthusiasm for Cézanne while visiting Paris with Dorelia John, and her appreciation of Cézanne and Van Gogh was deepened in a tour of Provence with Augustus Johns in the summer of 1910 (Seymour 88–89). In September, Fry persuaded Ottoline to return in October to Paris and Brussels to “review” the pictures “he was planning to bring to England” (Seymour 90). After the public outcry against the modernism of the paintings, Fry wrote her, “I can’t tell you how it helped me to have you at such a difficult time. . . . I don’t think I could have done it without you” (qtd. in Seymour 91). Mrs. Manresa’s protégé resembles Woolf’s satire of the hoards of young intellectuals and writers to be met in Ottoline’s drawing rooms. Like them, William Dodge is “of course a gentleman; . . . brainy—tie spotted, waistcoat undone; urban, professional, that is putty coloured, unwholesome; very nervous, exhibiting a twitch. . . . And fundamentally infernally conceited” (BTA 38). Mrs. Manresa sums up: “He’s an artist” (BTA 38). At Garsington in 1917, Woolf encountered “speckled & not prepossessing young men. One . . . a little red absurdity, with a beak of a nose, no chin & a general likeness to a . . . Bantam cock. . . . However he was . . . most carefully prepared to be a poet” (D1 78). Again, at Garsington in 1923, there were “thirty seven people to tea; a bunch of young men no bigger than asparagus; walking to & fro” (D2 243).

Mrs. Manresa’s sexual appeal and her implied availability for dalliance are another parallel with Ottoline. Mrs. Manresa arouses the masculine interest of both old Bart Oliver and his son Giles, Isa’s husband: “A thorough good sort she was. She made old Bart feel young” (BTA 43). The attraction between her and Giles is overt, and mutual: “He was the very type of all that Mrs. Manresa adored. His hair curled . . . his [chin] was firm; the nose straight, if short; the eyes . . . blue; and finally, . . . there was something fierce, untamed, in the expression which incited her, even at forty-five” (BTA 47). Giles has the Greek-god handsomeness of Henry Lamb, whose sadomasochistic affair with Ottoline

Figure 1: Lady Ottoline Morrell, 1912. Photographer: Baron Adolf de Meyer. Credit: National Portrait Gallery.
lasted from 1910 to 1913, overlapping her brief affair with Roger Fry and her long-term liaison with Bertrand Russell. For his part, Giles Oliver during the interval in *Between the Acts* acknowledges that his attraction for Mrs. Manresa is “lust,” as he kicks a stone across a field before he viciously trumps the snake trying to swallow a toad and gets “blood on his shoes” (*BTA* 99). Woolf portrays Mrs. Manresa as a seductress. She “caught [Giles’] eye; and swept him in, beckoning” (*BTA* 107); she “had him in thrall” (*BTA* 112).

However, Seymour makes a good case for the idea that Ottoline was rarely the pursuer and did not really enjoy sex—that she was trying to “reform” bad-boy Lamb (98) and submitted to Russell only intermittently, because he insisted that their love be complete (109–201). It is clear that Ottoline fed on the adoration of the academically renowned Bertie—and also that her intellectual development while involved with him made her far better educated than she was before. It is not for nothing that part of D.H. Lawrence’s satire of Ottoline in *Women in Love* is Hermione Roddice’s passion to know. In any case, it is understandable that Woolf could portray Ottoline as a love goddess, given the promiscuity described in her memoir, humbly lent to Virginia to read in 1932. Woolf reflects on the memoir that Ottoline “can’t tell the truth about love—but then that’s so interesting, & not discreditable, considering her upbringing” (*D4* 130). Her memoirs are full “of love letters” (Bertie and Ottoline wrote each other daily) and “copulation” (*D4* 130).

Woolf’s portrayal of Mrs. Manresa is much gentler satire than Lawrence’s portrait of Hermione, one of many hurtful, transparent satires of Ottoline penned by her “friends.” Hermione Lee paraphrases a letter from Woolf to Ottoline in which she expresses her indignation at Ottoline’s treatment by artists like Lawrence, whom she had aided: “Men of genius always skewed the emphasis towards matters of . . . desire; and were always getting furious when their vanity was outraged; and then (referring to Lawrence) they would put Ottoline into their books” (Lee 273–74).

Additionally, in the masculine yet “spoiled little boy” aspects of Giles Oliver, on whom Mrs. Manresa sets her seductive sights, Woolf may be satirizing D. H. Lawrence, perhaps paying him back for the unfair satire of Ottoline in *Women in Love*. Isa’s conclusion in *Between the Acts* that before she and Giles can make love they must fight can bother readers. It implies that Woolf thought her ideal of “peace” did not apply in marriage or sexual relations—that the barbaric layer of human nature related to sexuality prevents harmony. She explores the subject while writing the novel. Woolf finally read Hogarth’s English edition of Freud’s works in 1939–1940 and sexologist Havelock Ellis’s autobiography in 1940, commenting on his dependence on his mad wife’s vitality (*D5* 270–71). However, if one views the interrelationship of Giles, Mrs. Manresa, and Isa as a satire of the kind of triangle in which Lawrence, Ottoline, and Lawrence’s German wife Frieda were involved (and as a playful rebuttal of *Women in Love*), then Woolf’s belief about the necessity of fighting for sexual satisfaction generally is left in abeyance. Giles’ and Isa’s marriage then becomes just one in the “series of contrasts” which Woolf says in 1938 that *Pointz Hall* will be (*D5* 159). This “series of contrasts” makes more concrete her initial description of the book as including “real little incongruous living humour” (*D5* 135). They include the Romantic, “pure” attraction between Isa and farmer Rupert Haines, in stark contrast to the sexual attraction between Giles and Mrs. Manresa, with elements of violence, valor, and heroism in Mrs. Manresa’s view of Giles that echo the portrayal of the warrior in manliness and society’s view of valor in *Three Guineas*. In depicting varieties of
heterosexual pairings and a triangle of two women competing for a man, *Between the Acts* echoes *Women in Love*.

Isa had reflected that there are just three emotions—love, hate, and peace. All day she has been haunted by the newspaper account of the rape of a girl by soldiers. In the end, Isa concludes that sexual love must pass through a violent phase in order to arrive at “peace.” Cynically watching Giles being enticed by Mrs. Manresa, Isa “could hear . . . in their bedroom the usual explanation. It made no difference; his infidelity—but hers did” (110). At the end of the novel, she reflects, “Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace” (219). D. H. and Frieda Lawrence’s marriage was notoriously fraught with loud, angry quarrels. At Garsington, many of these quarrels centered on Frieda’s resentment of Lawrence spending too much time conversing with Ottoline (Seymour 212ff.). Ottoline, for her part, was convinced that Frieda was responsible for Lawrence’s satire of her in *Women in Love*. Seymour does not quite buy this, but she points out, “The most vicious attacks on Hermione are made by Ursula, and they sound uncannily like the letter which Frieda had written to Cynthia Asquith in which she accused Ottoline of being a cheap and vulgar fraud” (280). Isa’s conclusion that fighting must precede sexual satisfaction thus seems to have been a “need” in Lawrence’s “nature,” as Ottoline believed (Seymour 213). Isa’s conclusions about her marriage telescope the seven-page-long *Women in Love* scene of Rupert’s and Ursula’s nearly inarticulate rage with each other, interspersed with hateful shouting, concluding in their sweet, peaceful betrothal (304–10).

Perhaps because Lawrence’s Hermione envisions herself as the consummate hostess but readers see her as grossly manipulative, Woolf casts Mrs. Manresa as a visitor who drops by Pointz Hall with a picnic for herself and Dodge, rather than as a reflection of the grand hostess of Garsington, effortlessly mixing aristocratic art connoisseurs with painters and writers (see Figure 2). The hostess role is in abeyance in *Between the Acts*, parcelled out among several women characters—just as the authority of the minister’s traditional role is dissipated, as Melba Cuddy-Keane observes, in the Reverend Mr. Streatfield. When actors in Miss LaTrobe’s pageant forget lines, as Helen Southworth notes, Mrs. Manresa interjects words that rewrite “the lines dividing the classes” (126). Mrs. Manresa attempts to enact democratic manners during the tea interval, but the village women hold back from preceding “the gentry,” so she takes charge and starts “the ball rolling” (102). Mark Hussey recognizes Mrs. Manresa as one of Woolf’s characters “who smooth society’s rough edges, bring people together, and help promote . . . harmony (“‘I’ Rejected” 142). Ottoline’s aristocratic title is also missing from Woolf’s portrayal of Mrs. Manresa, and a bishop is substituted for the Duke of Portland, Ottoline’s half-brother. This may be part of Woolf’s effort to level class distinctions and model the sense of community that Cuddy-Keane discerns in the novel.

Living in Rodmell from 1939 to 1941, Woolf reflects on the sense of village community during World War II, but like Mrs. Manresa trying not to put herself forward at the tea table, Woolf’s ideal of mixing the classes was often frustrated. Woolf predicts in her diary “the supersession of aristocratic culture by common readers. Also . . . the end of class literature: the beginning of character literature; new words from new blood” (D5 267). However, in Rodmell, she gamely helped with the production of Women’s Institute plays and was demoralized by the experience: “My contribution to the war is the sacrifice of plea-
sure: I’m bored . . . and appalled by the readymade commonplaceness of these plays: which they cant act unless we help . . . to have my mind smeared; . . . & to endure it” (D5 288). She concludes that the conventionality is what is wrong—“not the coarseness” (D5 289). She would “argue, why cant the workers then reject us?”—this dullness is “the very opposite of . . . working class” (D5 289). At the beginning of the pageant in Between the Acts, Mrs. Manresa showily takes the lead in clapping and loudly expressing the pageant’s meaning. But in the tentative yet accurate questioning of the meaning on the part of the villagers audience at the end, Woolf may be modeling the rejection of the commonplace and faith in their own honest responses of which she believes working-class people capable.

In using Ottoline as the model for Mrs. Manresa, Woolf makes amends to Ottoline for Bloomsbury’s unjustly making her the butt of their satire. Woolf’s portrait retains Ottoline’s foibles and a bit of the silliness that made her a target for their ridicule, but overall, the portrayal is a warm and appreciative tribute to Ottoline.

Notes

1. That Mrs. Manresa thinks herself a “wild child of nature” is a persistent gentle parody in the novel (B4 50).
2. Helen Southworth lists several other models for Mrs. Manresa that critics have suggested (126n53).

Works Cited


Part Two: Exploring Woolf’s Life
Between 1891 and 1895, Vanessa, Thoby, and Virginia Stephen undertook to publish a collaborative weekly newspaper “in house” about their family’s lives, for a family readership. *Hyde Park Gate News* remained a restricted manuscript in the British Library, London, until November 2005, when Hesperus Press in London brought out my edition in the United Kingdom and the United States with a foreword by Hermione Lee. This paper is intended to offer an overview of these extraordinary documents. The journals were written in a spirit of exploration and curiosity. The Stephen children were calling attention to themselves in a very loud and clear manner, enjoying the transgressive nature of this new experience. The immediacy of the journal privileges us to witness at first hand the childhood compulsively revisited by Woolf in her adult works; the form rehearses techniques used later in her diaries and letters.

Volume I begins on Monday, 6 April 1891, and there is a gap until 30 November, then there are five issues in sequence until the end of that year. Volume II includes issues for forty-eight weeks of the year 1892. There are no surviving copies of the newspaper from 1893 or 1894. Extant from Volume V are thirteen issues for the first three months of 1895. Most of the editions are in Vanessa’s handwriting; she was “The Editor” (*Hyde Park Gate News* [HPGN] 14 Dec. 1891; Lowe 12) and may have acted as an amanuensis. Virginia, however, was the author of most of the family newspaper (Bell 64). The twelve-year-old Vanessa’s script is elegant, neat, and fluid. Virginia—nine and a half when these journals begin—has a tense, often blotched, confined, italicised style of handwriting. In Volume V—when she would have been thirteen—her writing can be difficult to read; she cramps her words, creating dense, tight text. Thoby—ten and a half when the journals start—has a bold, free, untidy style. Little care is taken with accuracy; the ink is thick and dark, and he crosses out some phrases. Although the children seem to have made neat “fair copies” of their work, many slips remain and are retained in this edition. Until I turned off the function, Microsoft Word kept telling me that it was quite unable to correct or even display the many spelling and grammatical errors I was transcribing from the manuscript!

The youngest Stephen, Adrian, is excluded from this enterprise. When he planned to produce a rival newspaper, his siblings’ comment reveals much about the family dynamics: “It will not be underrated by Mrs. Stephen nor overrated by Mr. Stephen” (*HPGN* 21 Nov. 1892; Lowe 145). Adrian was indulged by Julia Stephen, but had a more difficult relationship with his jealous father. There is glee from his siblings when Adrian fails to produce “The Talland Gazette.” He is advised to give up and “join with this respectable journal” (*HPGN* 27 June 1892; Lowe 75). Next, he tries to set up “The Corkscrew Gazette” (*HPGN* 21 Nov. 1892; Lowe 145), but, a week later, he has not delivered. They dismiss his “little ‘squitty’ paper,” announcing, with sarcastic triumph, that he “is now suffering from overwork” and “pretty liberal” “vomitations” (*HPGN* 19 Dec. 1892; Lowe 163).
Vanessa, Thoby, and Virginia, living as they did with ostentatiously literary adults, chose a popular form for their apprenticeship. They were familiar with similar newspapers and bought *Tit-Bits* weekly. Virginia recalls how they "read the jokes—I liked the Correspondence best—sitting on the grass" whilst eating Fry’s chocolate (Woolf, “A Sketch” 90). *Tit-Bits* included “Original Jokes,” stories, serials, advertisements, and “Answers to Correspondents.” The children imitate these features and attempt others. There are sketches based on true and fictional events; a “Story not needing word”; essays; notes on astronomy; diaries; hints for acceptable gifts; “Sundry Interesting Jotings”; “True Anecdotes”; poems and love letters from both male and female perspectives. The children offer random bits of advice—"many people do not know that when you have wrung a chikens neck it runs along without its head" (*HPGN* 21 Dec. 1891; Lowe 16); “Music-mistresses are in one way related to bull-dogs” (*HPGN* 25 Jan. 1892; Lowe 27). A series of riddles include “What is the difference between a spider and a dead horse? One has fly bites and the other bites flies” (*HPGN* 6 April 1891; Lowe 4). Advice is offered anonymously: "REDSKIN. Use PEAR’S SOAP every day" and “UNEMPLOYED. ‘Whatsoever thy hand fineth to do, do it with all thy heart’” (*HPGN* 7 Dec. 1891; Lowe 11).

In some respects, daring to write at all as junior members of this distinguished family could be seen as impertinent. In “Notes on Virginia’s Childhood,” Vanessa illustrates the effrontery of their enterprise. She writes that Virginia “was very sensitive to criticism and the good opinion of the grown-ups” (64). The constant wish to criticise, subvert, and undermine seems to have been the Stephen family’s habitual way of looking at life. The children deliberately left an issue of *Hyde Park Gate News* for their parents to find. Virginia is described as “trembling with excitement” as they wait to hear their reaction. Vanessa writes,

> We could see my mother’s lamplit figure quietly sitting near the fire, my father on the other side with his lamp, both reading. Then she noticed the paper, picked it up, began to read. We looked and listened hard for some comment. “Rather clever, I think,” said my mother, putting the paper down without apparent excitement. (64–65)

Julia’s detached, undemonstrative reaction says much about her attitude to her girls. Yet her four words are enough to “thrift her daughter; she had approval and had been called clever, and our eavesdropping was rewarded” (Bell 64–65).

The adult Virginia recalls experiencing an “extremity of pleasure . . . like being a violin and being played upon” when her mother appreciated something her daughter had written (Woolf, “A Sketch” 105). Virginia suffered agonies of uncertainty when revising her work, preferring the spontaneity and exhilaration of creation to the drudgery of correcting dull detail. Her perfectionist unease about how her work would be regarded contributed to post-publication depression.

Reading these journals, a vivid late-nineteenth-century upper-middle-class “soap opera” emerges. Major characters are Julia, Leslie, and Laura Stephen (Leslie’s daughter from his marriage to Minny Thackeray); George, Stella, and Gerald Duckworth (Julia’s children from her first marriage to Herbert Duckworth); and Vanessa, Thoby, Virginia, and Adrian. Minor characters include relations: other Stephens, the Fishers, the Vaughans,
and the Prinseps. There are also friends: Philip Burne-Jones, son of the painter Edward Burne-Jones; Arthur and Sylvia Llewelyn-Davies, close friends with J. M. Barrie, who featured their sons in his play Peter Pan and adopted them after the Llewelyn-Davies’ deaths. There are also the Holman Hunts, the Chamberlains, the Symonds, the Lushingtons, the Maitlands, and American friends, Charles Eliot Norton’s family and the Stillmans.

There is very little gravity in these pages. As in Greek tragedy, the difficult events happen “off stage.” Perhaps the children, usually so readily subversive, realized that they had to be sensitive in censoring difficult material. The daily events they cover are not dramatic, but rather mundane and inconsequential. Ob scene was cousin Jem Stephen, who had suffered a blow to the head and behaved violently, pursuing Stella in an irrational manner. After a severe manic episode, he was institutionalised, and in 1892, he starved himself to death. We are told that Julia’s invalid mother, Mrs. Jackson, has had “a most severe attack of a sort of mongrel disease” (HPGN 7 March 1892; Lowe 41), but her death, three weeks later, on 2 April 1892, is left unrecorded. The extremity of Laura’s situation is also glossed over, although it must have been a frequent topic of conversation. There’s a retrospective poignancy about the account of Julia’s influenza in Volume V. Adrian is ill at school, but Julia’s weaknesses and the stormy March weather prevent her visiting him. The children write, “In our next issue we hope to be able to report her being well or at any rate very nearly so” (HPGN 11 March 1895; Lowe 189). Adrian returns home, but no mention is made of their mother’s condition. Hyde Park Gate News stops after Monday, 8 April 1895. A month later, Julia Stephen is dead.

The relationship of children to parents and of youth to age is given parodic treatment in Hyde Park Gate News. The children affect a smugly moral, “grown-up” tone: “As one gets older one appreciates more the value of being young” (HPGN 11 April 1892; Lowe 53). When Adrian has his ninth birthday, Julia, frequently nostalgic for youth and innocence, wishes it were only his fifth because “one is much nicer when one is young” (HPGN 31 Oct. 1892; Lowe 132). We can imagine how this sentiment may have struck the other children who were all older than her cherished “joy.” Adrian’s ill health is an obsession in these journals—Julia nurses him tenderly, spoon-feeding him malt, “the uplifted and eager face of the little one whose pretty cherub lips are parted ready to receive [sic] the tit-bits from the fond Mother. Oh how like the old bird feeding it’s young” (HPGN 14 March 1892; Lowe 42). The inaccuracies in this passage undermine the pretence of satirical sophistication.

Several sections describe the return of precious sons to their ecstatic family. Perhaps the girls wrote these playfully provocative passages? In July 1892, Gerald arrives at St. Ives. “Our correspondent” theatrically records a “triumphal entry”; his mother leaning on him, “admiring brothers and sisters surrounding him,” followed by Stella, Leslie, and “faithful Shag bringing up the rear. Old and young stopped to admire the touching spectacle and many laughed out of pure sympathy for the joy that was depicted on the face of the good matron” (HPGN 18 July 1892; Lowe 83). In August, the “glorious event” of Thoby’s return is told with thinly concealed irritation: “We will draw the grey veil of silence over the joyous scene that ensued as it is too tender to be described” (HPGN 1 Aug. 1892; Lowe 88). One week later, Laura’s belated arrival receives, however, a brief, more muted account. In the next edition, the children go out in a boat to see the St. Ives regatta, but “Miss Laura Stephen and Shag were left on the shore gazing at the aquatic party” (HPGN 15 Aug. 1892; Lowe 94).
The most joyous times were at St. Ives, where the family spent summers from 1882 to 1894. It was a pastoral retreat from the city. Talland House, in contrast to 22 Hyde Park Gate, is “a heavenly prospect,” full of light and warmth (HPGN 16 May 1892; Lowe 63). There are games and activities: cricket, rounders, croquet, football, cat and mouse, hide and seek, “Tom Tiddler’s ground,” charades, “tableaux,” draughts, “Up Jenkins,” collecting shells, fishing, boating, walking, swimming. Jack Hills, Stella’s fiancée, teaches them to collect and label insects. Adrian was not allowed to go on the trip to the lighthouse where “Miss Virginia Stephen saw a small and dilapidated bird standing on one leg” with its eyes “picked out.” On their return journey, Master Basil Smith “spued like fury” (HPGN 12 Sep. 1892; Lowe 109). In the same issue, Gerald puts on a grand display of fireworks for Thoby’s twelfth birthday; the children are “super-exuberant,” and next day the garden is a scene of “ruin & destruction. The gate was entirely broken off its hinges” (HPGN 12 Sept. 1892; Lowe 108).

Food is greatly appreciated. They eat cherries, cream, bread and jam, grapes, peaches, oranges, cake, and chocolates. Leonard Woolf minutely recorded Virginia’s weight, which varied dramatically depending on her mental state. In these happy journals, her own healthy appetite is mocked: “The luncheon was perhaps the most interesting part to our author as it was pie and strawberry ice” and “to Miss Virginia’s delight there were cherries for tea the first she had tasted this season” (HPGN 6 June 1892; Lowe 69, 70). She takes an intense, even greedy, pleasure in food. At Evelyn’s School, the Headmaster’s wife, “on passing by remarked that Miss Virginia had taken in a good supply” of refreshment but, as soon as she gets home, Virginia eats more cake (HPGN 30 May 1892; Lowe 67).

The London editions document trips to glass blowing, a ventriloquist, the pantomime, Kensington Park, the zoo, birthday parties, plays, musicals, gondola rides, skating, and an ice carnival in Regent’s Park. Dogs feature regularly. There’s a story about Julia’s “fear of the dog who resides at 16 H.P.G.” (HPGN 14 Dec. 1891; Lowe 12). She attends police court where the dog’s owners are fined. In January 1892, Virginia, not quite ten, has to bear testimony “that the dog had flown at her . . . knocking her up against the wall” and biting her cloak (HPGN 18 Jan. 1892; Lowe 24).

On Sundays, often when Leslie was out with his walking group, the “Tramps,” Julia would entertain visitors, but the children were not always as welcoming as their mother. In the first volume, they leave a jokey space under the heading SUNDAY VISITORS, perhaps relieved that, unusually, there had been none that week. Those with “walk on” parts are caricatured. Dr. Creighton is “unceremoniously observed by a most precocious little girl to greatly resemble a bull-frog!” (HPGN 7 Dec. 1891; Lowe 9). Their music teacher, Madame Meo, is the “Old Pig” (HPGN 14 Nov. 1892; Lowe 141). Mrs. Wordsworth, their dancing teacher, is small, “rather like a bit of quicksilver,” with a glass eye (HPGN 21 Dec. 1891; Lowe 15). When their singing teacher, Miss Mills, is “plunged in the depths of illness,” they are not as “sorry as they ought to have been” (HPGN 12 Dec. 1892; Lowe 156). Physical appearance is often harshly mocked: Miss Parenti is “a lump of shapeless fat”; Conor O’Brien a “Liliputian” (HPGN 28 Nov. 1892; Lowe 149) and “diseased” (HPGN 14 Nov. 1892; Lowe 141); train passengers are “unwashed, uncombed, painted, dyed, frizzed, wigged” (HPGN 1 April 1895; Lowe 195). The new maid’s special manner of walking is criticised, her dress “makes the noise like that of a carpet being vio-
lently swept” (*HPGN* 12 Dec. 1892; Lowe 156). Virginia’s concrete “scene-making” can be seen in embryo.

The children have a precocious mastery of diverse techniques: pastiche, slapstick, comedy, satire, euphemism, hyperbole, whimsy, and suspense. Elaborate language is often used to debunk pomposity and social pretension: “The esteemed owner of the venerable mansion 22 Hyde Park Gate” (*HPGN* 29 Feb. 14 March 1892; Lowe 38); a “palatial residence” (*HPGN* 26 Sept. 1892; Lowe 114); “Here ended the Generals visit” (*HPGN* 21 March 1892; Lowe 46). There is an acute awareness of audience: “We have to announce to the public. . . . We hope that our gentle readers will pardon us” (*HPGN* 31 Oct. 1892; Lowe 135). The children are both writers and characters in the narrative; they refer to themselves using the third person as “the juveniles of 22 H.P.G.” (*HPGN* 15 Feb. 1892; Lowe 34). There is a sharp, witty, often malicious, quality to their observations.

Volume V includes some fascinating longer pieces considering abstract questions about morality, existence, and religion. The style is more experimental and literary. One invented letter takes as its focus the question, “What is a gentleman?” (*HPGN* 4 March 1895; Lowe 187). We know that same question, with an answer, was pinned in the hall of 22 Hyde Park Gate: “What is it to be a gentleman? It is to be tender to women, chivalrous to servants.” The writing uses *personae* to allow greater freedom of point of view. Authorship for these pieces is not claimed, but it is tempting to read these anonymous articles as Virginia’s.²

The final, tragicomic sketch begins with a stage direction: “Scene—a bare room, and on a box sits a lank female, her fingers clutch her pen, which she dips from time to time in her ink pot and then absently rubs on her dress” (*HPGN* 8 April 1895; Lowe 199). The anonymous “Author” looks out of an open window to a view like that from 22 Hyde Park Gate—chimney pots are wreathed in smoke, the “church in the distance” may be St. Mary Abbots to the north-west; towards Kensington Gardens, “the gloomy outlines of bleak Park trees rise.” The woman may be thinking of her childhood, “a most disagreeable expression crosses her face” (Lowe 200). Her Editor demands that she should write poetry, but her paper is blank. Time is running out and the calendar tells her that the sun will set at 6:42. The Author is under pressure to perform, to create for commercial publication. The “cheery” middle-aged Editor—who “knew her Author very well”—enters and asks, “Is it finished?” The Author, motivated by the incentive of a shilling a stanza, eventually manages to produce a hundred hack verses with the aid of a rhyming dictionary. Writing in this grim room of her own is seen as hard labour, not liberation. The editor is surely a projection of Vanessa; the anonymous apprentice author an avatar of an older Virginia.

We can read these journals as autobiography and as biography: both forms fascinated Virginia Woolf. In her essay “I Am Christina Rossetti” (1930), Virginia sums up the experience of reading biography:

> Here is the past and all its inhabitants miraculously sealed as in a magic tank; all we have to do is to look and to listen and to listen and to look and soon the little figures—for they are rather under life-size—will begin to move and to speak, and as they move we shall arrange them in all sorts of patterns of which they were ignorant . . . and as they speak we shall read into their sayings all kinds of meanings which never struck them. (*CE* 4: 54)
No doubt, now that the new edition of *Hyde Park Gate News* is in the public arena, readers will start to peer at all “the little figures,” to mark their words and consider the implications of their actions. The hermeneutic imperative will ascribe all sorts of surprising meanings to this once private family newspaper.

**Notes**

1. See *HPGN* 22 February 1892 (Lowe 36–37) for a lost dog and an “Essay on Dogs in General”; see also “Beauty” (*HPGN* 29 Feb. 1892, 7 Mar. 1892; Lowe 38, 39), “Pepper” (*HPGN* 28 Mar. 1892, 4 Apr. 1892; Lowe 49, 50), and “Tatters,” the pantomime dog (*HPGN* 14 Jan. 1895; Lowe 167). “Shag” is mentioned several times in Volume II, from 4 July through 5 December 1892 (Lowe 79, 82, 83, 89, 91, 94, 138, 152–53). A small lost dog is saved by Stella, who returned by cab, “poorer in money but richer in virtue” (*HPGN* 7 Nov. 1892; Lowe 136–37); Mrs. Cooke’s “homing” poodle is mentioned in the same issue.

2. In this context it may be pertinent to remember Woolf’s comment in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) that “Anon” was often a woman.

**Works Cited**


In Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, Alice speaks with the White Queen regarding the trouble with memory, how it works “both ways”—forwards and backwards. The scene depicts the queen’s discovery of her bleeding finger, despite the fact that she has yet to prick it on the shawl’s brooch. When Alice finally witnesses the actual injury, she asks, “But why don’t you scream *now*?” The queen responds, “Why, I’ve done all the screaming already. . . . What would be the good of having it all over again?” (249–50). A trauma also experiences memory “both ways”: the past as consistently relived in both present and future, an insight Woolf recognized in her analysis of Carroll’s work. As she writes in “Lewis Carroll,” collected in *The Moment and Other Essays* (1948):

> Childhood normally fades slowly. Wisps of childhood persist when the boy or girl is a grown man or woman. Childhood returns sometimes by day, more often by night. . . . Down, down, down we fall into that terrifying, wildly inconsequent, yet perfectly logical world where time races, then stands still; where space stretches, then contracts. It is the world of sleep; it is also the world of dreams. (81–82)

In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman alleges that psychically traumatized children experience “dissociative virtuosity,” where they “may learn to ignore severe pain, to hide their memories in complex amnesias, to alter their sense of time, place, or person, and to induce hallucinations or possession states” (102). Rhoda, volleyed through time, repeatedly reliving flashes of her childhood in a perpetually traumatic present, appears to create such an armor against reality. Woolf’s representation of Rhoda, one of the narrating fluid identities in her germinal text *The Waves* (1931), is at best illusory, dreamlike, a depiction of a traumatized female—one grounded in a perpetually traumatic present. She is a figure that, I contest, is representative not only of Woolf’s experimentation with trauma in her fiction, but also of an attempt to address and resolve her own traumatic recollections, which surface in journal entries and in *Moments of Being* (1976), as well as in her fiction, including *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *The Pargiters* (1931), and *The Years* (1937).

Current feminist criticism has largely ignored the importance of Rhoda and her trauma to the text. Andrea Harris cites Rhoda’s endurance of a “textual violence in being written out of the novel as a suicide,” but claims this violence is “tempered by the fact that this displacement is followed by . . . the incorporation of a feminine subject position by the novel’s central main character” (60). Promoting the fallacy of Rhoda as an ineffectual, devoured character, Harris alleges that, in the text, “Woolf sketches the contours of a new state of being in which difference no longer represents an obstacle or battlefield but instead a fertile ground of exchange” (62). However, Harris’s use of the term “exchange” contradicts her central argument; the only beneficiary in her analysis is Bernard. Similarly,
readings that allege Rhoda serves as a defeated lesbian character, as Annette Oxindine suggests, or as a figure subsumed by Bernard to emphasize Woolf’s “androgynous vision,” as argued by Harris, fail to grasp what I see as the vitality of Rhoda’s voices as well as her silences. Both Oxindine and Ariela Freedman dismiss the readings of Woolf’s use of the traumatized character as spiritual and artistic reinforcement for the “survivor”; citing Mrs. Dalloway, Freedman rejects the reading of female subjectivity as predicated on the gift of a male death” (86), that of Clarissa’s counterpart Septimus Smith, a reading in which, she notes, he becomes “the scapegoat of the novel. He dies so that she can live” (96). Similar are readings of The Waves assessing Rhoda’s role as a sacrifice for Bernard’s self-identification, where critics, as Oxindine suggests, “lay down the body of the ‘incandescent’ Rhoda, also a victim of suicide, and create in her male counterpart, Bernard, a figure many critics have come to revere as the ideal androgynous artist” (203).

All these devaluations of Rhoda neglect a crucial textual remnant—Woolf’s literal transplantation of Jinny’s nonsurvivable conflict onto Rhoda. As evidenced by Rhoda’s dominance in the first holograph draft, Woolf seems to become infatuated with the idea of a figure who desires to live outside of the competing selves, outside of the proper flow of time. Woolf initiated The Waves with a central female narrator in mind; in Alice to the Lighthouse, Juliet Dusinberre discusses the early sketch of the novel, asking, “Who is the lady? It is never said. Yet she is, unmistakably, Virginia Woolf herself, and the children in the book recognize both their separateness from her, and a mysterious tie between them” (171). In the first holograph draft, the narrator of the piece, whom Woolf merely designates as a “She” (The Waves: The Holograph Draft [TWHD] 16), claims,

I am telling myself the story of the world from the beginning. I am not concerned with the single life, but with lives together. I have set myself the task of finding discovering a place of the past . . . such fragments as time having broken the complete perfect vessel. (TWHD 9)

This narrator, a dissociated “perfect vessel”—in Dusinberre’s words, the master of a “shared consciousness” (85)—contains six “fragments,” each experiencing intertwining memory in a perpetual, timeless present. The only member to abandon the collective, unable to survive among the competing, fluid identities, is the ethereal Rhoda, Woolf’s traumatized figure whose unnamed experience excludes her from the physical world of her “companions. As Woolf writes in Rhoda’s voice in The Waves,

Look, the loop of the figure is beginning to fill with time; it holds the world in it. I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop; which I now join—so—and seal up, and make entire. The world is entire, and I am outside of it, crying, “Oh, save me, from being blown for ever outside the loop of time!” (21–22)

Woolf portrays Rhoda as existing outside of logical time, like the White Queen, where the displaced memory of some unrecognized pain is forever surfacing; here, Rhoda is doubly dissociated from both the female narrator and her sundered psyche.
Because the source of Rhoda’s trauma remains a mystery to the reader, occluded by Woolf, locked forever in an inaccessible past, hidden from any conscious confrontation by Rhoda and thus by the reader, Woolf draws the reader directly into a series of relived traumatic experiences while simultaneously referencing her own autobiographical experiences with trauma. As a means of working through her own trauma, Woolf appears to create Rhoda as an effort to separate her own traumatic past, one of sexual abuse and incest, from Jinny, a physical manifestation of survival.

Woolf interweaves the shared traits of Jinny and Rhoda in the first holograph draft. Woolf draws a comparison between Jinny and her father, a potential autobiographical reference to the mutual affinity between Woolf and her father:

> her mouth [was pink] was wide & her she had a great nose like her fathers. (TWHD 31)

Evidence from this draft suggests that Rhoda, who of the six characters occupies most of the interior monologues at forty-five pages, emerged from Jinny, being gradually polarized against Jinny’s physicality. In the holograph draft, Jinny not only experiences terror in the schoolroom, but dissociation of her self refracted in the looking glass(es) at the school, moments Rhoda directly lives in *The Waves*:

> The intolerable length of the morning, & its devastating dulness, pervaded the schoolroom, with its long desks, & its yellow walls, & where Rhoda sat doing sums, her trying to make the come right out sum work. Everybody had gone out & left her alone, everything in the world had receded. (TWHD 83)
There were two looking glasses on the way upstairs; one showed the head, the other the whole body. And if she saw her head only she was she felt I am the quicksilver in the leaf blanched & hardened; \* into despair . . . but when she saw her body melted in the other glass the quicksilver became molten again, & the leaf was veins in the leaf began to quicken & its & she felt green to be limp & soft (TWHD 31).

It is also at this point where Rhoda emerges, turning from the looking glass, thinking like Louis, that she had no face. Like Louis she had no not among you lodgement. I am only a passenger. And if you insist upon drawing me into your life (my unfitness will be discovered &) you will destroy me. (TWHD 32)

A direct interchange of names later in the holograph draft suggests that Woolf was working from a single character, which split into two opposing factions, one tangible and one not:

However, one day there was a great affair in Upper Rhoda Conklin street where Jinny, the flyaway child moody child, lived with her mother & grandmother for her father was dead. (TWHD 58)

Thrust into the world with no protector, the fatherless Rhoda springs not from the forehead of Zeus, but from the body of Jinny, the sensual self Woolf is incapable of recognizing in the mirror that haunts her in Moments of Being.

Reflecting on the sexual abuse she experienced as a child, where she was molested by her half-brother before the hall mirror, Woolf writes in Moments of Being,

Yet this did not prevent me from feeling ecstasies and raptures spontaneously and intensely and without any shame or the least sense of guilt, so long as they were disconnected with my own body. I thus detect another element in the shame which I had in being caught looking at myself in the glass in the hall. I must have been ashamed or afraid of my own body. (67–68, emphasis added.)

I argue that Woolf passes this characterization, where the physical cannot meld with the psychical, onto Rhoda.

The repeated use the mirror as symbolic of imprisonment, where the young girl’s image is refracted and splintered, is juxtaposed with open window imagery as a form of
escapism throughout *The Waves*. Woolf creates metaphors to describe Rhoda’s separateness from the other identities and from her ability to “escape” her traumatic imprisonment: “the birds sang in chorus first,” said Rhoda; “Now the scullery door is unbarred. Off they fly. Off they fly like a fling of seed. But one sings by the bedroom window alone” (10–11). Alone at the mirror, she is forced to face the fractured image that stares back at her; in contrast, Woolf poses Rhoda before many open windows, not merely because the window becomes a potential vector of escape for Rhoda, a break in the solidity of the walls to which she clings, but also because, as Quentin Bell notes in *Virginia Woolf: a Biography*, in 1904, Woolf tried to commit suicide by throwing herself from a window (90). Rhoda is positioned by windows throughout the text—not only in her narrative, but in the narratives of the other identities as well. The escape from the window is an escape from the confining structure, from the body, from the physical; Rhoda, exorcised from Jinny in the opening pages of the first holograph draft, can only find freedom through death. We may argue that Rhoda’s lack of a physical body em/bodies Woolf’s implementation of a traumatized identity within the text.

In contrast to the final edition of *The Waves*, in the holograph draft, Woolf envisions Rhoda as an imaginative child, not dissimilar to her description of her sister Vanessa and herself as “tomboys” who “played cricket, scrambled over rocks, climbed trees, were said not to care for clothes and so on” (*MOB* 68). The child Rhoda rises as a force of creativity, not dissimilar to the imperial imagination of the child Rose in the opening chapter of *The Years*. In the holograph draft, Woolf describes Rhoda as

\[ . . . \text{the avenger; she was somehow the woman who saved the was extremely valiant & adventurous; had her tragedy; was often given up for dead; woke the most extreme sympathy; felt even as she was making mistakes in German grammar that she was writing her being observed with the highest interest by people whose life she admiration & sympathy were never for a moment turned from her. (TWHD, 36–7)} \]

Similarly, in *The Years*, Rose is the self-ordained brave messenger to the “General,” “riding to the rescue!” (27). However, like Woolf’s crippling childhood sexual abuse, it is Rose’s confrontation with an apparent sexual predator that reduces her to the “little girl who had disobeyed her sister, in her house shoes, flying for safety to Lamley’s shop” (28).

Rhoda of the first draft, who claims herself leader of “the Russian people,” hardly seems the individual destined to be consumed, as Andrea Harris suggests, by the gluttonous John/Bernard of the holograph draft, the boy who

\[ \text{would talk, with his bread & paste thickly smearing his bread with anchovy paste. He ate in great mouthfuls; often absent mindedly. (TWHD 30)} \]

However, also like the vibrant Rose in *The Years*, who finds herself unable to reveal her traumatic experience with the predatory “horrid face; white, peeled, pock-marked” to
her rigidly Victorian family members and thus attempts suicide (27–28), Rhoda and her strong childhood force lose substance later in the first draft, in her adolescence.

Rhoda’s antireality, her imaginary realm of power, is, of course, ineffectual. Consigned to a subsocietal role by her trauma, she can only enact her desire in solitude, where she controls the petals within her brown basin: “some will founder. Some will dash themselves against the cliffs. One sails alone. That is my ship” (18–19). Her moment of solitude, of complete control, is stolen by Neville with his interruption, indicating Rhoda’s inability to maintain a sense of control while in the society of others. That she must imitate Susan and Jinny because she is ill equipped to compete socially, furthers the involuntary shattering of her already fractured consciousness.

A reading of Rhoda as representative of Woolf’s use of the personal and autobiographical offers an alternate understanding of the text; Woolf experiments with Rhoda’s trauma, a reflection of her own, as a rupture in the six-figured identity, a floating white petal that cannot survive the paralysis of identity, the failure to assume a complete self due to trauma, and the unsaid traumatic memory of abuse that has dominated her. Rhoda emerges as an emotionally paralyzed being whose trauma surfaces, like Woolf’s, through the scarred and dissociated refractions.

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BETWEEN THE ACTS:
OTTOLINE MORRELL AND MRS. MANRESA,
D. H. LAWRENCE AND GILES OLIVER

by Sally A. Jacobsen

In her biography of Lady Ottoline Morrell, Miranda Seymour indicts Bloomsbury for spreading cruel gossip about Ottoline which they knew to be untrue. Joanne Trautmann Banks has observed that Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, and Vanessa Bell, in their satirical remarks in their letters (at each other’s as well as at Lady Ottoline’s expense), were motivated not by viciousness but by the desire to entertain and outdo each other in the outrageousness of their wit. Whatever Bloomsbury’s intentions, Woolf’s *Times* obituary for Ottoline on 28 April 1938, suggests that Woolf felt Ottoline was owed recompense for her treatment. The obituary mentions that the “great lady” did not “escape the ridicule of those whom she befriended” (*D5* Appendix II, 365). That Woolf in *Between the Acts* may in a sense pay tribute to Ottoline in her portrayal of Mrs. Manresa is suggested by a record in her diary that she conceived *Between the Acts* the same day as she received news of Ottoline’s death, by her mention in Ottoline’s obituary that Bloomsbury had been unfair to her, by comments throughout the *Diary* of liking Ottoline despite Bloomsbury’s ridicule (particularly Vanessa Bell’s and Lytton Strachey’s) of her, and by Mrs. Manresa’s similarities to Ottoline. Woolf’s close conjunction of Ottoline’s death and her conception of *Between the Acts* appears in her diary entry for 26 April 1938:

Ottoline is dead. . . . The horrid little pellet screwed my brain. . . . Yet in spite of that here I am sketching out a new book. . . . Why not Poyntzet Hall: . . . all lit. discussed in connection with real little incongruous living humour. . . . We all life, all art, all waifs & strays—a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole. . . . And English country; & a scenic old house—& a terrace where nursemaids walk. (*D5* 135)

Mrs. Manresa’s traits, which Lady Ottoline may have inspired, include her pride in being a free “new woman” devoted to pleasure; her sexual appeal; her plummy intonation, flamboyant dress, hats, and jewels; her taste and knowledge about art and sponsorship of young artists, including homosexual ones such as William Dodge; her belief in a democratic mingling of classes; and her love of nature.1 The number and depth of these similarities override others’ suggestions that Mrs. Manresa is inspired by Katherine Mansfield or Vita Sackville-West.2 It may be true, as Evelyn Haller points out, that Manresa’s name comes from a street on which Mansfield lived (qtd. in Hussey, *Virginia* 154), but aside from external details like that and Manresa’s foreignness, it is difficult to imagine the nervy, intensely artistic Mansfield as a model for the extroverted, sexy, and extravagant Manresa. Similarly, Mitchell Leaska’s idea that Manresa is modeled on Sackville-West (12–13) is outweighed by Ottoline’s parallels with Manresa in sponsorship of homosexual young artists and heterosexual flirtatiousness, despite Sackville-West and Ottoline sharing Manresa’s flamboyance and aristocratic connections. Manresa’s tone seems wrong for Sackville-West;
Woolf does not think Sackville-West quite so foolish as Ottoline or Mrs. Manresa. She had already parodied Sackville-West much more lovingly and extensively in *Orlando*.

Woolf’s liking for Ottoline is consistent throughout her diary, and it is possible that their mutual love of walking in nature was their initial bond. In November 1917, Woolf and Ottoline escape the crush of guests at Garsington to go for a walk, and Woolf concludes, “On the whole I liked Ottoline better than her friends have prepared one for liking her. Her vitality seemed to me a credit to her. . . . To the outsider the obvious view is that O. & P. & Garsington House provide a good deal, which isn’t accepted very graciously” (*D1* 79). Even in the passage in Woolf’s diary most critical of Ottoline, when Woolf tries hard to fall in with Strachey’s and Vanessa Bell’s rationalization of their scorn for Ottoline and spreading gossip about her—that Ottoline was generous to artists because she wanted fame and glory for her good works—Woolf cannot help liking Ottoline. At Garsington again in June 1923, Woolf at first concurs with Strachey and Bell, then changes her mind about Ottoline’s “ulterior motives”:

> A loathing overcomes me of human beings—their insincerity, their vanity—a wearisome & rather defiling talk with Ott. last night is the foundation of this complaint. . . . Her egotism is so great. “I am much more sensitive than most people,” . . . the first words she said that she meant. . . . Yet on Saturday night I liked her. (*D2* 243)

Then Woolf changes her mind again, privately, in her diary, steeling herself to be critical and ungenerous:

> I want to bring in the despicableness of people like Ott: . . . I have been too tolerant often. . . . She’s always being kind in order to say [so] to herself at night. . . . Ottoline invites the poor little embroideress to her party, . . . to round off her own picture of herself. (*D2* 244–45)

As Miranda Seymour suggests, Bloomsbury’s criticism of Ottoline was widespread in society. After Ottoline’s memorial service, Lady Oxford innocently asks Woolf, “Tell me, though, why did her friends quarrel with her?” (*D5* 136), echoing Woolf’s remarks in Ottoline’s obituary about the unkindness of Ottoline’s friends. An awkward pause follows, in which Woolf is silent. Duncan Grant finally answers the question about Bloomsbury’s dislike somewhat ambiguously—“She was exigeante”—deflecting Lady Oxford (*D5* 136).

In 1919, Woolf attempted to summarize Ottoline’s character:

> She struck her unmistakable note upon entering the room . . . magnificently upright & held together; her blue blood giving her the carriage of assurance & self-respect which is rare among the intellectuals. . . . She was . . . as I believe, genuinely, kindly, & well wishing, though . . . bewailing as usual her disasters in friendship, . . . though anxious for reconciliations. . . . L’s verdict was that she was “very nice”; the first time he has ever said that. (*D1* 272)

Isa Oliver’s wondering whether Mrs. Manresa is “genuine” echoes Woolf’s ambivalence about Ottoline (*BTA* 42). Woolf’s summing up of Ottoline’s character could have led to the gentle parody in Mrs. Manresa as a “wild child of nature” (50). In 1919, Woolf
wrote that Ottoline’s “intuitions are more penetrating than many of the profoundly rea-
sonable remarks of our intellectuals; & to me she always has the pathos of a creature
vaguely afloat in some wide open space, without support or clear knowledge of its direc-
tion” (D1 272). In Between the Acts, the first thing Mrs. Manresa says she does when she
comes down to the country is to “take off [her] stays . . . and roll in the grass.’ . . . ‘That's
genuine,’ Isa [thinks]. Quite genuine. And her love of the country too” (42). Mrs. Manresa
often “wore an old garden hat; taught the village women not how to pickle and preserve;
but how to weave frivolous baskets out of coloured straw. Pleasure’s what they want, she
said” (42–43).

Woolf writes of Ottoline even more affectionately from 1927 on, after the Morrells
have been forced to give up Garsington and remove to an apartment in Gower Street
(comparatively humble after the magnificence of Bedford Square) and after any pretense
of greatness has been removed. In 1927, Woolf “had a shabby easy intimate talk” with
Ottoline (D3 152). When Woolf calls on her in 1932, Ottoline is out—selling off her
“Lawrence first editions (how I'd like to tell that to Lytton!)” thinks Woolf (D4 73). In
November 1932, she writes that it’s “a queer thing that Ott shd. come, after all these years,
old shabby tender to my sofa; & I liked her” (D4 130).

Woolf’s most frequent passing sketches of Ottoline note her outlandishly sumptu-
ous dress and over-made-up appearance; for example, at a 1917 exhibition of modern art
organized by Roger Fry at the Mansard Gallery, Ottoline is “in black velvet, hat like a
parasol, satin collar, pearls, tinted eyelids, and red gold hair” (D1 61; see Figure 1). Mrs.
Manresa’s extravagance in appearance includes her gloves, bright red lipstick, and curva-
ceousness: “Her hat, her rings, her finger nails red as roses, smooth as shells, were there for
all to see,” thinks Isa (BTA 39). Th at Mrs. Manresa is a “New Woman” devoted to pleasure
is indicated not just in freedom from practicality and insistence that the village women
focus on pleasure in their crafts, but also in her strolling “the garden at midnight in silk
pyjamas,” her “loud speaker playing jazz,” and her “cocktail bar” (39). Her flamboyance
mirrors Ottoline’s free modernity:

Vulgar [Mrs. Manresa] was in her gestures, in her whole person, over-sexed,
over-dressed for a picnic. But what a desirable . . . quality it was—for everybody
felt, . . . “she’s said it, she’s done it, not I,” and could take advantage of the breach
of decorum, of the fresh air that blew in. (BTA 41)

Mrs. Manresa, like Ottoline, has a “rich fluty voice” (BTA 38). Seymour describes Ot-
toline’s voice as “a seductive singsong drawl” (279). Virginia thinks it a “queer nasal
moan,” but reflects “that too was to the good in defl ating immensities” (D5 136). After
the memorial service, Lady Oxford confides that “she had expostulated with Ott. about
the voice. Mere affectation” (D5 136). Lady Oxford then segues to the question regarding
Bloomsbury’s unkind gossip about Ottoline, mentioned by Woolf in her obituary. Instead
of replying to either of Lady Oxford’s remarks, Woolf “bantered her on her obituary” for
Ottoline (D5 136, emphasis added).

Mrs. Manresa’s love of art and sponsorship of artistic young men like William Dodge
is only a token of Ottoline’s enabling of struggling modern artists. Ottoline became infat-
uated with Augustus John in 1908, and by May was sitting for her portrait “almost daily”
in his London studio (Seymour 82). By September he successfully redirected her embar-
rassingly generous presents to him to support sculptors Henry Lamb and Jacob Epstein (Seymour 84). Miranda Seymour’s biography makes clear how deeply involved Ottoline was in Roger Fry’s 1910 Post-Impressionist exhibition. In 1909, Fry named Ottoline to the committee of the Contemporary Art Society, and in 1910 her brother Henry was persuaded to act as chairman and her “cousin, Lord Howard de Walden, as its first president” (Seymour 87). In the summer of 1909, Ottoline had become enflamed with enthusiasm for Cézanne while visiting Paris with Dorelia John, and her appreciation of Cézanne and Van Gogh was deepened in a tour of Provence with Augustus Johns in the summer of 1910 (Seymour 88–89). In September, Fry persuaded Ottoline to return in October to Paris and Brussels to “review” the pictures “he was planning to bring to England” (Seymour 90). After the public outcry against the modernism of the paintings, Fry wrote her, “I can’t tell you how it helped me to have you at such a difficult time. . . . I don’t think I could have done it without you” (qtd. in Seymour 91). Mrs. Manresa’s protégé resembles Woolf’s satire of the hoards of young intellectuals and writers to be met in Ottoline’s drawing rooms. Like them, William Dodge is “of course a gentleman; . . . brainy—tie spotted, waistcoat undone; urban, professional, that is putty coloured, unwholesome; very nervous, exhibiting a twitch. . . . And fundamentally infernally conceited” (BTA 38). Mrs. Manresa sums up: “He’s an artist” (BTA 38). At Garsington in 1917, Woolf encountered “speckled & not prepossessing young men. One . . . a little red absurdity, with a beak of a nose, no chin & a general likeness to a . . . Bantam cock. . . . However he was . . . most carefully prepared to be a poet” (D1 78). Again, at Garsington in 1923, there were “thirty seven people to tea; a bunch of young men no bigger than asparagus; walking to & fro” (D2 243).

Mrs. Manresa’s sexual appeal and her implied availability for dalliance are another parallel with Ottoline. Mrs. Manresa arouses the masculine interest of both old Bart Oliver and his son Giles, Isa’s husband: “A thorough good sort she was. She made old Bart feel young” (BTA 43). The attraction between her and Giles is overt, and mutual: “He was the very type of all that Mrs. Manresa adored. His hair curled . . . his [chin] was firm; the nose straight, if short; the eyes . . . blue; and finally, . . . there was something fierce, untamed, in the expression which incited her, even at forty-five” (BTA 47). Giles has the Greek-god handsomeness of Henry Lamb, whose sadomasochistic affair with Ottoline

Figure 1: Lady Ottoline Morrell, 1912. Photographer: Baron Adolf de Meyer. Credit: National Portrait Gallery.
lasted from 1910 to 1913, overlapping her brief affair with Roger Fry and her long-term liaison with Bertrand Russell. For his part, Giles Oliver during the interval in *Between the Acts* acknowledges that his attraction for Mrs. Manresa is “lust,” as he kicks a stone across a field before he viciously troumps the snake trying to swallow a toad and gets “blood on his shoes” (*BTA* 99). Woolf portrays Mrs. Manresa as a seductress. She “caught [Giles’] eye; and swept him in, beckoning” (*BTA* 107); she “had him in thrall” (*BTA* 112).

However, Seymour makes a good case for the idea that Ottoline was rarely the pursuer and did not really enjoy sex—that she was trying to “reform” bad-boy Lamb (98) and submitted to Russell only intermittently, because he insisted that their love be complete (109–201). It is clear that Ottoline fed on the adoration of the academically renowned Bertie—and also that her intellectual development while involved with him made her far better educated than she was before. It is not for nothing that part of D.H. Lawrence’s satire of Ottoline in *Women in Love* is Hermione Roddice’s passion to know. In any case, it is understandable that Woolf could portray Ottoline as a love goddess, given the promiscuity described in her memoir, humbly lent to Virginia to read in 1932. Woolf reflects on the memoir that Ottoline “cant tell the truth about love—but then thats so interesting, & not discreditable, considering her upbringing” (*D4* 130). Her memoirs are full “of love letters” (Bertie and Ottoline wrote each other daily) and “copulation” (*D4* 130).

Woolf’s portrayal of Mrs. Manresa is much gentler satire than Lawrence’s portrait of Hermione, one of many hurtful, transparent satires of Ottoline penned by her “friends.” Hermione Lee paraphrases a letter from Woolf to Ottoline in which she expresses her indignation at Ottoline’s treatment by artists like Lawrence, whom she had aided: “Men of genius always skewed the emphasis towards matters of . . . desire; and were always getting furious when their vanity was outraged; and then (referring to Lawrence) they would put Ottoline into their books” (Lee 273–74).

Additionally, in the masculine yet “spoiled little boy” aspects of Giles Oliver, on whom Mrs. Manresa sets her seductive sights, Woolf may be satirizing D. H. Lawrence, perhaps paying him back for the unfair satire of Ottoline in *Women in Love*. Isa’s conclusion in *Between the Acts* that before she and Giles can make love they must fight can bother readers. It implies that Woolf thought her ideal of “peace” did not apply in marriage or sexual relations—that the barbaric layer of human nature related to sexuality prevents harmony. She explores the subject while writing the novel. Woolf finally read Hogarth’s English edition of Freud’s works in 1939–1940 and sexologist Havelock Ellis’s autobiography in 1940, commenting on his dependence on his mad wife’s vitality (*D5* 270–71). However, if one views the interrelationship of Giles, Mrs. Manresa, and Isa as a satire of the kind of triangle in which Lawrence, Ottoline, and Lawrence’s German wife Frieda were involved (and as a playful rebuttal of *Women in Love*), then Woolf’s belief about the necessity of fighting for sexual satisfaction generally is left in abeyance. Giles’ and Isa’s marriage then becomes just one in the “series of contrasts” which Woolf says in 1938 that *Pointz Hall* will be (*D5* 159). This “series of contrasts” makes more concrete her initial description of the book as including “real little incongruous living humour” (*D5* 135). They include the Romantic, “pure” attraction between Isa and farmer Rupert Haines, in stark contrast to the sexual attraction between Giles and Mrs. Manresa, with elements of violence, valor, and heroism in Mrs. Manresa’s view of Giles that echo the portrayal of the warrior in manliness and society’s view of valor in *Three Guineas*. In depicting varieties of
heterosexual pairings and a triangle of two women competing for a man, *Between the Acts* echoes *Women in Love*.

Isa had reflected that there are just three emotions—love, hate, and peace. All day she has been haunted by the newspaper account of the rape of a girl by soldiers. In the end, Isa concludes that sexual love must pass through a violent phase in order to arrive at “peace.” Cynically watching Giles being enticed by Mrs. Manresa, Isa “could hear . . . in their bedroom the usual explanation. It made no difference; his infidelity—but hers did” (110). At the end of the novel, she reflects, “Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace” (219). D. H. and Frieda Lawrence’s marriage was notoriously fraught with loud, angry quarrels. At Garsington, many of these quarrels centered on Frieda’s resentment of Lawrence spending too much time conversing with Ottoline (Seymour 212ff.). Ottoline, for her part, was convinced that Frieda was responsible for Lawrence’s satire of her in *Women in Love*. Seymour does not quite buy this, but she points out, “The most vicious attacks on Hermione are made by Ursula, and they sound uncannily like the letter which Frieda had written to Cynthia Asquith in which she accused Ottoline of being a cheap and vulgar fraud” (280). Isa’s conclusion that fighting must precede sexual satisfaction thus seems to have been a “need” in Lawrence’s “nature,” as Ottoline believed (Seymour 213). Isa’s conclusions about her marriage telescope the seven-page-long *Women in Love* scene of Rupert’s and Ursula’s nearly inarticulate rage with each other, interspersed with hateful shouting, concluding in their sweet, peaceful betrothal (304–10).

Perhaps because Lawrence’s Hermione envisions herself as the consummate hostess but readers see her as grossly manipulative, Woolf casts Mrs. Manresa as a visitor who drops by Pointz Hall with a picnic for herself and Dodge, rather than as a reflection of the grand hostess of Garsington, effortlessly mixing aristocratic art connoisseurs with painters and writers (see Figure 2). The hostess role is in abeyance in *Between the Acts*, parcelled out among several women characters—just as the authority of the minister’s traditional role is dissipated, as Melba Cuddy-Keane observes, in the Reverend Mr. Streatfield. When actors in Miss LaTrobe’s pageant forget lines, as Helen Southworth notes, Mrs. Manresa injects words that rewrite “the lines dividing the classes” (126). Mrs. Manresa attempts to enact democratic manners during the tea interval, but the village women hold back from preceding “the gentry,” so she takes charge and starts “the ball rolling” (102). Mark Hussey recognizes Mrs. Manresa as one of Woolf’s characters “who smooth society’s rough edges, bring people together, and help promote . . . harmony (“I’ Rejected” 142). Ottoline’s aristocratic title is also missing from Woolf’s portrayal of Mrs. Manresa, and a bishop is substituted for the Duke of Portland, Ottoline’s half-brother. This may be part of Woolf’s effort to level class distinctions and model the sense of community that Cuddy-Keane discerns in the novel.

Living in Rodmell from 1939 to 1941, Woolf reflects on the sense of village community during World War II, but like Mrs. Manresa trying not to put herself forward at the tea table, Woolf’s ideal of mixing the classes was often frustrated. Woolf predicts in her diary “the supersession of aristocratic culture by common readers. Also . . . the end of class literature: the beginning of character literature; new words from new blood” (D5 267). However, in Rodmell, she gamely helped with the production of Women’s Institute plays and was demoralized by the experience: “My contribution to the war is the sacrifice of plea-
sure: I’m bored . . . and appalled by the readymade commonplaceness of these plays: which they can’t act unless we help . . . to have my mind smeared; . . . & to endure it” (D5 288). She concludes that the conventionality is what is wrong—“not the coarseness” (D5 289). She would “argue, why can’t the workers then reject us?”—this dullness is “the very opposite of . . . working class” (D5 289). At the beginning of the pageant in Between the Acts, Mrs. Manresa showily takes the lead in clapping and loudly expressing the pageant’s meaning. But in the tentative yet accurate questioning of the meaning on the part of the villagers audience at the end, Woolf may be modeling the rejection of the commonplace and faith in their own honest responses of which she believes working-class people capable.

In using Ottoline as the model for Mrs. Manresa, Woolf makes amends to Ottoline for Bloomsbury’s unjustly making her the butt of their satire. Woolf’s portrait retains Ottoline’s foibles and a bit of the silliness that made her a target for their ridicule, but overall, the portrayal is a warm and appreciative tribute to Ottoline.

Notes
1. That Mrs. Manresa thinks herself a “wild child of nature” is a persistent gentle parody in the novel (B4 50).
2. Helen Southworth lists several other models for Mrs. Manresa that critics have suggested (126n53).

Works Cited
Part Four:  
Exploring London’s Spaces
VIRGINIA WOOLF AND THE TECHNOLOGIES OF EXPLORATION:

JACOB’S ROOM AS COUNTER-MONUMENT

By Robert Reginio

The approach will be entirely different this time,” Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary as she was composing Jacob’s Room in 1920; “no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen. What the unity shall be I have yet to discover: the theme is a blank to me” (D2: 13). The voyage of exploration she was conducting in her fiction took place during a time when the British nation was literally and figuratively rebuilding itself after the loss and disillusionment of World War I. The narratives that defined the country’s identity were strained under the pressure of having to account for the war’s costs. At this time a proliferation of memorial projects, both national and local, sprang up across Britain and Europe.¹ Scaffolding and bricks could indeed be seen everywhere. In contrast to these rebuilding efforts, Woolf’s novel would keep “a blank” at its center. While the war memorials implied a return to the unity the nation once represented, through her novel Woolf put the narratives and myths of national unity into question. Jacob’s Room and the Cenotaph, the central British war memorial in London, can be compared by examining how they experiment with incorporating emptiness into their forms as they attempt to account for the losses of the war. I will first define the memorial gesture of the Cenotaph and then, in contrast, look closely at Woolf’s novel to see how she symbolically reconstructs and, in so doing, questions the concept of the nation in the aftermath of the war.

Like the war memorials, Jacob’s Room is a meditation on the intersection of personal memory and history. As such, the novel engages with the ideology of the nation, a way of thinking that effectively binds the personal to the collective, or, to put it differently, the national imaginary provides the space for the individual to understand his or her memories as part of a collective. Woolf centers her novel on an absence: Jacob’s death in World War I is continually foreshadowed throughout the text, and Woolf denies her narrator access to Jacob’s internal life. Yet, in a novel that draws us into the subjectivities of its other characters, Jacob’s Room functions less as an interrogation of the mutability of individual perspective and functions more like a counter-monument. Since Woolf denies her reader access to Jacob’s inner life, his death is obliquely felt, although it is not a tragedy per se since Jacob is never present for the reader in the way other characters in the novel are. Mourning, the “process” putatively inaugurated through memorialization, is forestalled. This aversion to pathos in a novel reacting to the manifold losses of World War I is one reason to identify it as a counter-monument.

Writing on the counter-monument, James Young notes that the possibility that memorials “might somehow redeem” the terror of something like the Holocaust or, in this case, World War I “with the instrumentalization of its memory continues to haunt a postwar generation of memory artists” (7). The predicament of post–World War II memorial artists in Germany as described by Young mirrors the predicament of those artists like Woolf who struggled with the impetus to memorialize and the antithetical desire to critique state-sponsored memorial gestures: “How does a state recite, much less
commemorate, the litany of its misdeeds, making them part of its reason for being?” (7). One response can be found in counter-monuments, “brazen, painfully self-conscious memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premises of their being . . . [similar to] the ways European artists have begun to challenge the traditional redemptory premises of art itself” (7). The conflicted response to collective loss that gives rise to the formal tension of the counter-monument (namely, the desire to memorialize coupled with the need to critique memorial collective gestures) is one way to account for the structure of Jacob’s Room.

Jacob’s Room is centered on an absence, not unlike the British nation whose capital in the years following World War I was centered around another purposefully constructed absence: the Cenotaph (Greek for “empty tomb”) on Whitehall. Both the Cenotaph and Jacob’s Room foreground absence not only thematically, but also in their very form. As Britain was planning for celebrations marking the end of the war, government officials decided to commission the construction of a temporary monument to serve as a focal point for the military parades taking place in London on 19 July 1919, “Peace Day.” Yet the public was drawn to the monument; thousands came to the city to pay their respects. This temporary monument subsequently became permanent by popular demand.

Thus, as Woolf was composing Jacob’s Room, the process of memorializing Britain’s loses was dramatically unfolding in the nation’s capital. This process was marked by a give-and-take between the government’s official ceremonies and the public’s need for a permanent monument in the city. But can the solidity and solemnity of a monument speak of the story of its inception, of decisions both “official” and “unofficial,” or does a monument by its very nature speak only with a unified “official” voice? Woolf noted in her diary during the Peace Day celebrations of July 1919 that the individual must speak: “One ought to say something about Peace Day, I suppose,” she writes, reluctant to enter into the collective memorial ceremonies, “though whether its worth taking a new nib for the purpose I don’t know” (D1: 292). She asks herself if the various feelings of the day will remain a part of people’s memories or if the shapes of the official memorial ceremonies will be all that remains of the day: “One could confess what a horrid fraud it seemed; & if, years later, these docile herds will own up that they too saw through it, & will have no more of it—well—should I be more cheerful?” (D1: 293). In the face of such bitterness, Woolf continued to write, and Jacob’s Room in part records her resistance to the shape of official memory found in the Cenotaph.

Designed by Edwin Lutyens, the Cenotaph consists of an empty stone coffin sitting atop an abstract catafalque whose subtly arching lines lead the spectator’s eyes to its apex (see Figure 1). The gesture embodied by the Cenotaph is twofold. It is part of a more traditional notion of burying the heroic dead where the stability of the national or communal identity of those who are represented by and those who are readers of the monument precedes the heroic memorialization of that group’s struggles. looked at in this way, the memorial gesture is an extension of the military battle: it reifies national or communal boundaries. Yet the Cenotaph is also a modern reimagining of the memorial space set aside for fallen warriors. By calling attention to the fact that many of those fallen are anonymous to the country at large and yet are still fit to be mourned, the active engagement of the mourner is highlighted. The mourner brings his or her name to the Cenotaph.
This suggests that mourning remains active, that the costs of the war need to be remembered (not just the heroes), and that in the Cenotaph’s solemnity, the moral righteousness of the state (its very source), is able to transcend the irrational waste of World War I.

Benedict Anderson begins *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* by evoking the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a modern memorial form created in the wake of World War I. The remains of England’s unknown soldier were interred in Westminster Abbey across from the Cenotaph, and the two memorials—one enfolding an absence, the other holding the anonymous remains of a soldier—were not only dedicated at the same time, but they both partake of the discourse of nationalism. Anderson suggests that, “void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly national imaginings” (9). For Anderson, these alternately empty and anonymous tombs are examples of the way nationalism converts arbitrary contingencies into narratives of destiny and inevitability. The Cenotaph, as a national monument, calls for remembering, but does not ask how the imagined national community itself gets narrated.

Purposefully anonymous, the Cenotaph and the Tomb of the Unknown are parts of an attempt to recover, from the reality of World War I’s anonymous mass death, a sense of dignity and meaning. This recovery attempt can be linked to Anderson’s description of how a colonial nation will recover and collect artifacts of colonized cultures. He argues that in this case the specific artifacts are not as important as the historical narrative that can be created through them:

Each ruin [catalogued by the colonial powers in the margins of its empire] became available for surveillance and infinite replication. As the colonial state’s archaeological service made it technically possible to assemble the series in mapped and photographed form, the state itself could regard the series, up historical time, as an album of its ancestors. (185)

A Tomb of the Unknown functions in a similar way, becoming another instance where nationalism could work its “magic,” turning “chance into destiny” through the creation of an “immemorial past, and, still more important . . . a limitless future” (Anderson 11).
By virtue of the fact that a mourner supposedly shares a national identity with the person whose remains are interred in the Tomb of the Unknown or the persons represented by the Cenotaph, a national history is at once substantiated (there is material evidence and official markers of this history) and carried on into the future (in the mind and memory of the mourner).

Like the ruins collected by the colonial state, the personal memories of each mourner find a place in relation to the teleological shape of national history when centered on a monument such as the Cenotaph. Although this teleological shape is constructed through the subsumption of personal narratives into the collective, the monument clears a space where this teleological shape is taken to be original. The abstract shape of the Cenotaph and its appropriation of the rhetoric of anonymity in the empty coffin sculpted at its apex allows for gestures of collective mourning through an enforced silence. Yet, as Woolf attempts to reveal in her postwar novels, the ongoing narration of the nation and its multiple and sometimes conflicting histories indeed remains audible. A novel like *Jacob’s Room* tries to help us listen.

The Cenotaph’s abstract design responded to the problems of mourning attendant upon a nation after a full-scale modern war. There is no doubt that the memorial eschews specifically heroic, figurative representations of soldiers or leaders. It is also true that this rejection of figuration reflects, in part, a recognition that, after the losses of World War I, such forms of overtly redemptory memorials will not suffice. Yet the abstract design of Cenotaph coupled with the fact that any memorial will eventually become divorced from the circumstances of its inception offers the reader of the monument’s memorial gesture the opportunity to posit an equally abstract notion of humanity that transcends (and we might even say that obscures) the profound questions about the war that no memorial can adequately answer. Allan Greenberg, writing from the perspective of architectural history, explains that the Cenotaph

> shows how a great work of architecture may encompass within its rubric the full range of deep emotions that are associated with a terrible war, and how it may rise above the fickle strains of public sentiment and opinion that are the inevitable outgrowth of such a period of crisis to breach the fences of political ideology and social class and touch our common sense of kinship and humanity. (6)

This description of the Cenotaph notes how the memorial does not open up a space for the contentious local narratives energized by the war. Rather, the memorial reserves a space for transcendence—a transcendence, as Anderson notes, that is central to the rhetoric of nationalism. In fact, the rhetoric of anonymity and abstraction marshaled by the monument served to limit the narratives that could be woven into public ceremonies. Adrian Gregory notes that on Armistice Day in 1921 unemployed ex-servicemen were allowed to march in protest past the Cenotaph. They distributed handbills that inverted the rhetoric of anonymity by urging the participants to “revere the memory of our class who fought, bled and died, but don’t forget the unknown warriors living” (59). The wreath they lay at the Cenotaph had an inscription reading, “From the living victims—the unemployed—to our dead comrades who died in vain” (qtd. in Gregory 59). As Gregory notes, “There was irony and parody in this procession, but also solemnity and respect for the dead” (59).
Here, Gregory describes a procession that takes issue with the monument and what the ex-servicemen perceived as the empty ceremonies surrounding it.\(^3\)

The absence written into the Cenotaph, a space buffeted by the teleological rhetoric of the nation, is not the space where Woolf figures Jacob’s loss. Rather, the narrator focuses on the street, the city, and the country containing the personal memories of those for whom this absence is meaningful. She wants to discern how the absence is created, constructed, and maintained. To leave her novel decentered, to fashion it as a counter-monument, to create a memorial embodying failure, indeterminacy, and forgetting (if anything, despite the culture encircling and contextualizing him, Jacob is “forgotten”), to embody indeterminacy in this way is to wrest the unknowability suggested by the monument’s abstractions from the process of national mourning. Essentially, by examining not the mourning process of her characters, but instead their memories and the culture through which they voice them, she asks questions that might be asked about the future of memorials like the Cenotaph. When the particular, immediate stories of mourning and the memories they contain vanish—as they must—will a recovery of the war’s meaning be possible at Britain’s memorial sites? Will the losses, shorn of the individual voices of mourning, be used by the nation to underwrite a future rhetorical mobilization of the dead? Where do these voices find their inscription?

In responding to these questions, the counter-monument initiates a critique of traditional memorial gestures at the same time it struggles to respect the urgent need in a society for some sort of memorial gesture to be made. Chapter Four of \textit{Jacob’s Room} performs the critique inherent in the counter-memorial gesture. In this chapter, Woolf ironically frames the way the ideological assumptions of nationalism inform how Jacob and his companion literally and figuratively map England, juxtaposing the ways in which male insiders traditionally chart the space of the nation from a mobile position and female outsiders attempt to fix their own position within the nation. Male characters in this chapter delineate their space within the nation using established technologies, such as the map, compass, and telescope. These objects become symbolic representations of a particular way of imagining the nation that underwrites the memorial gesture of the Cenotaph. The chapter opens with Jacob and his friend Timothy Durrant sailing around southwestern tip of England while on holiday from Cambridge. They are completing their trip and are heading to Durrant’s home, where his mother is planning a dinner party in celebration of their return. Timmy Durrant is navigating the boat, and Jacob is amazed at his skill:

\begin{quote}
For the Scilly Isles had been sighted by Timmy Durrant lying like mountain-tops almost awash in precisely the right place. His calculations had worked perfectly, and really the sight of him sitting there, with his hand on the tiller, rosy gilled, with a sprout of beard, looking sternly at the stars, then at a compass, spelling out quite correctly his page of the eternal lesson-book, would have moved a woman. Jacob, of course, was not a woman. (47)
\end{quote}

Timmy’s calculations—“precise,” “perfect,” “correct”—are at once his own and the product of maps and charts written ages ago and perfected over the years. This mastery allows him to fit into a pose that clicks into place as surely as his calculations match the turn of the compass. “The eternal lesson-book” is a collective symbol for the technology
he manipulates, but it also refers to the masterful pose he apes—looking at the stars, then
to his compass—and the fact that that pose makes him fit for his place in the book of
British history. As gestures of memory, reading the charts, manipulating the compass, and
reading the stars are based on “memories” already in place: the literal space of the nation,
its idealized rendering on the map, and even the stars themselves constituting a system
of inscriptions to be read. The technology, like Timmy Durrant himself, exists to access
these inscriptions.

Similarly, the very language the boys use is prepared for them, shaped by history
and tradition. When the two have an argument over some petty matter, it expands into a
philosophical discussion. The dialogue that resolves their argument is not represented in
the text. Woolf suggests, rather, that the “reasonableness” behind the platitudes of Liberal
British progressivism is embodied in the linguistic poses they strike:

“That’s about as near as I can get to it,” Durrant wound up.
The next minute it was a quiet as the grave.
“It follows . . .” said Jacob.
Only half a sentence followed; but these half-sentences are like flags set on
tops of buildings to the observer of external sights down below. What was the
coast of Cornwall, with its violet scents, and mourning emblems, and tranquil
piety, but a screen happening to hang straight behind as his mind marched up?
“It follows . . .” said Jacob.
“Yes,” said Timmy, after reflection. “That is so.” (50)

The verbal gestures and poses of the young men are enough to convey their mastery. Woolf
shows how Jacob has inherited and is shaped by a tradition that has become a series
of gestures surrounding an absence. The actual, geographical nation is reduced to a series
of similarly incomplete abstractions (“violet scents,” “mourning emblems,” and “tranquil
piety”) in order to serve as a suitable backdrop for the young men’s performance. Ulti-
mately blotting out external reality, this backdrop is integral to the monumental memorial
gesture, a gesture that necessarily obliterates the contentious history of its coming into
being. Foreshadowing Jacob’s death, his obliviousness to the performative aspect of his
interaction with Timmy functions like the screen of the myths and rhetoric of nationalism
that obscure the history of how that rhetoric and its myths came to be.

Considered as symbols, the chart and compass represent techniques of accessing al-
ready established national and cultural memories: they are techniques dependent on fixed
points. Durrant’s compass is wedded to the chart of England; this reliance allows him to
archive his calculations in the “eternal lesson-book” (47). Once they return to land and
attend the dinner party, another symbol of exploration extends Woolf’s critique. At the
party, guests wander about on the terrace of the Durrants’ house. An older guest, Mr.
Clutterbuck, asks the women who walk by to look through his telescope at the constel-
lations. At the center of the passage, the telescope is a symbol whose meaning changes
depending on who accesses it. For Mr. Clutterbuck, the telescope is a tool for accessing
the meaningful patterns already mapped across the night sky. For women gazing through
the telescope, the vision is one that offers less assurance:
Miss Eliot was looking through Mr. Clutterbuck's telescope at the edge of the terrace.

The deaf old man stood beside her, fondling his beard, and reciting the names of the constellations: “Andromeda, Bootes, Sidonia, Cassiopeia...”

“Andromeda,” murmured Miss Eliot, shifting the telescope slightly.

Mrs. Durrant and Charlotte looked along the barrel of the instrument pointed at the skies.

“There are millions of stars,” said Charlotte with conviction. Miss Eliot turned away from the telescope. The young men laughed suddenly in the dining room.

“A very fine night,” shouted Miss Eliot into Mr. Clutterbuck’s ear.

“Like to look at the stars?” said the old man, turning the telescope towards Elsbeth.

“Doesn’t it make you melancholy—looking at the stars?” shouted Miss Eliot.

“Dear me no, dear me no,” Mr. Clutterbuck chuckled when he understood her.

“I’m coming in,” said Miss Eliot. “Elsbeth, here’s a shawl.”

“I’m coming in,” Elsbeth murmured with her eyes to the telescope. “Cassiopeia,” she murmured. “Where are you all?” she asked, taking her eye away from the telescope. “How dark it is!” (59–60)

In this passage, human myths are written into the eternal stars. As the stars are appropriated in the service of telling an “eternal” story, so the telescope collapses the seemingly limitless space into specific, bounded images—parts that make up a complete story. Mr. Clutterbuck masters the purely visible and is deaf to the gap-filled night and the fragmentary voices surrounding him. The narrator, however, is alive to the language being spoken by the characters. The myths that are composed through this technology and to which Mr. Clutterbuck points the women highlight the bounded and “composed” lives of women. The telescope maps out the lives of women, pointing to “eternal” truths (the constellations) and implying the power of objective reason (the technology that accesses the constellations). A product of the age of science and colonial exploration, the telescope expresses the elegant design and immense reach of reason central to the Enlightenment notion of its transcendental nature. In the passage, however, this instrument of measurement is also linked to ancient myths that center on the powerlessness of women and the role of men as liberators and caretakers. The telescope is able not only to bind two geographically distant points, but in the symbolic network of the novel, it can bind the rational and the irrational.

In a similar fashion, Woolf’s novel maps out points where the desire for closure and readability suggested by the map, compass, and telescope meets its limits. This desire is ultimately overthrown by World War I and the losses that challenge traditional memorial gestures. Both Miss Eliot and Elsbeth, an old woman and a young woman, peer at their past and their destiny. Miss Eliot gazes at Andromeda and its suggestion of beautiful youth offered up to the elements and to the heroic actions of a hero like Perseus. Elsbeth peers at the image of the mother, Cassiopeia, her mythic story suggesting the limits of
self-assertion. Her final comment—“How dark it is!”—comes as a result of her quick shift of focus: from the bright, eternally true, composed, and delimited image of myth, to the large, empty spaces with which each character—primarily in their attempts to understand Jacob despite his silence—must struggle. Her disorientation suggests that a sight narrowed to such exclusive myths will never be able to map the present and its radically unbounded time.

The purposefully fissured surface of the novel—its similar use of only fragments to delineate the shape of Jacob’s life—expresses Woolf’s resolute opposition to postwar memorial gestures that try to incorporate such gaps back into a purposeful national history. In general, this resolution is at the heart of her major novels as they struggle to outline the fate of personal memory, often shaped in fragments, in contrast to the large, paradoxically inhuman shapes of collective memory. The larger question her work tries to answer is how to reconstitute, if one should and if one can, a culture whose collapse is charted through each ironic displacement enacted by modernist literary narration. The Cenotaph, in order to stand as the mute repository of collective memory and national identity, encourages similarly muted public ceremonies. The ritual solemnity associated with Armistice Day ceremonies ensures that personal stories are silenced in the favor of a collective presence. Grouped at the monument, we bring our own memories to the site, yet this evident collectivity is predicated on the fact that our personal narratives are not enunciated.

A last personal memorial gesture framed in Woolf’s novel that counters the memorial gesture of the collective is Mrs. Flanders’ holding up a pair of Jacob’s shoes to his friend. The fragmentary remains of Jacob at the novel’s end—his empty shoes—are offered as a piece of a broken world for which Betty Flanders cannot find a place. No map or chart of Britain has any space in which the fragment can be situated and understood. The narratives embodied in the constellations encircled by Clutterbuck’s telescope are pieces of a larger mythic continuity: taking up one, you take up the whole. Jacob’s shoes stand metaphorically for Jacob as a fragment, suggesting that the novel is centered on the fragments we readers have of him. These fragments all lie outside the gaze of the tools of empire and exploration: the chart, the compass and the telescope.

Mrs. Flanders’ gesture at the end of the novel can be read as desperate—it is a “holding up” of that which has been broken, offering it to Bonamy who, as an educated English man, has access to the “tools” that at one time could have effectively measured, classified, archived, and thus “understood” these relics. Yet her gesture is also a “holding out” of her pain, a pushing away of the impossible task of reconstitution for which the shoes have become a symbol. Mrs. Flanders’ gesture evinces a desire to be rid of the deformations scored into one’s own personal memory and a desire to memorialize with the relics Jacob’s life should have offered: wedding photos, academic diplomas, children’s birth certificates, a last will and testament. Jacob’s Room reconfigures the coordinates of the modern novel by mapping the absences individual mourners like Mrs. Flanders are left struggling to comprehend. Traversing the gaps of postwar reality without the tools that at one time could encompass an empire, Woolf nevertheless offers the fragmented testimony of her journey as a powerful counter-monument.
Notes

1. The literature on World War I and the problem of memory is large and steadily growing. As an example of how these issues were shaped during and after the war in Britain see Hynes's *A War Imagined*. For how these issues affected Europe in general, see Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*; for a survey of the problems of postwar memory across Europe after both World Wars, see *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, edited Winter and Sivan; and for a study of the problem of memory in Germany after World War I and its influences on German culture during World War II, see Mosse’s *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*.

2. Jay Winter notes that perhaps one million people made the pilgrimage to the Cenotaph in London in 1919 alone (“Forms of Kinship” 54–55).

3. His analysis bears a striking resemblance to Alex Zwerdling’s important description of *Jacob’s Room* as a “satiric elegy,” a work that embodies a “double awareness of the sharpness of grief and its absurdity” (82).

4. I am drawing the notion of the place of reason in the rhetoric of Liberal progressivism from Vincent Sherry and his chapter on Woolf in *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*.

Works Cited


The form of Mrs. Dalloway (1925) is remarkable for the way it achieves a fusion of the internal with the external, giving space added depth, giving it the vastness that modernist writers such as James Joyce and e. e. cummings associated with the individual consciousness. In Virginia Woolf’s narrative, inside and out are continually turning upon each other so that space begins to seem immeasurable and is therefore able to make room for the life that cannot be measured. Space that appears finite has in reality an infinite depth, housing the life that is infinite. And space in general is, from this perspective, full of rooms, so that one cannot so much move across it—following the trajectory of a road or a front line during war—as move into it. This is the real terra incognita. An experience of this depth makes the imperialist attempt to conquer a territory, and the life within it, appear both brutal and absurd. Woolf’s formal experiment, which can be compared with the experimental work of her contemporaries, both in literature and the visual arts, is, for these reasons, a direct response to imperialism and war.

The work of Woolf scholars has made clear that Woolf’s aesthetics were by no means divorced from social issues. Scholars such as Kathy Phillips and Linden Peach show how apparently indirect methods—shifts in perspective, juxtaposition, imagery—could be used to critique militarism and imperialism. In fact, by reconceptualizing space, Woolf strikes at the very roots of imperialist attitudes. Anna Snaith also challenges the relegation of Woolf to a private, apolitical realm. At the same time, she criticizes the reaction that locks Woolf into the public sphere. Separating the two spheres makes us blind to the depth of Woolf’s critique. As I will describe, public space in Mrs. Dalloway is essentially composed of internal space: it is made up of “rooms” and in this sense can be neither mapped nor claimed. Woolf’s challenge to the imperialist ethos was a profound one, reconceptualizing space itself.

A SPACE CONSTITUTED OF ROOMS

Space is that which is experienced from within, and the narrative line of Mrs. Dalloway is continually moving out of one room and into another, creating a sense of the larger, physical space that is constituted of “rooms” and has therefore an extra depth. For example, the reader is immersed in Septimus’s internal world, a space that is, for the moment, alive with beauty. Then, abruptly, we find ourselves seeing from Lucrezia’s perspective: “She could not sit beside him when he stared so and did not see her and made everything terrible; sky and tree, children playing, dragging carts, blowing whistles, falling down; all were terrible” (33). She watches her husband “sitting in his shabby overcoat alone, on the seat, hunched up, staring” (33), and we become keenly aware of the visible limits of his body. Having inhabited his mental universe, we see the stark outline dividing his physical existence from the rest of the physical world—and connecting it. We are now seeing
through the eyes of another, but in the sudden transition between one realm and another, there is a glimpse of the single physical reality within which these various realms coexist.

There is no perspective outside of this space, and the narrator can only move from one limited point of view to another. But in each moment of transition, there is a brief but unmistakable expansion. The narrator keeps moving, crossing the threshold of one “room” into another, isolating the moment that the “thing outward . . . darts into a thing inward,” as Ezra Pound put it in “Vorticism” (467), and thus gradually builds up the tremendous world that is constituted of rooms, each a cosmos in itself, each with infinite depth. A focus on the limits of the individual—the sense of life as a room—does not contract the world but, on the contrary, makes it all the more spacious, by giving it real depth.

Fully plunged into Lucrezia’s space, the reader experiences the world through her eyes, its opaque darkness. “There was nobody. Her words faded. So a rocket fades. Its sparks, having grazed their way into the night, surrender to it, dark descends, pours over the outlines of houses and towers” (34): “I am alone; I am alone! she cried, by the fountain in Regent’s Park” (35). We accompany Lucrezia into her world, seeing Septimus from her perspective, how he sits alone, in his shabby overcoat. Then: “Men must not cut down trees. There is a God” (35)—abruptly, we are plunged into Septimus’s thoughts. There is no transition. The bright space of the city contains both worlds, and both are dark insofar as they remain hidden.

“Still, the sun was hot” (97). Even as she is swallowed in darkness, Lucrezia is walking through London, and it is a June day. Peter is sitting on a bench nearby, and we experience the world from his perspective, from within the space he inhabits—his “room.” He has been remembering: “It was awful, he cried, awful, awful!:

Still, the sun was hot. Still, one got over things. Still, life had a way of adding day to day. Still, he thought, yawning and beginning to take notice—Regent’s Park had changed very little since he was a boy, except for the squirrels—still, presumably there were compensations—when little Elise Mitchell, who had been picking up pebbles to add to the pebble collection which she and her brother were making on the nursery mantelpiece, plumped her handful down on the nurse’s knee and scudded off again full tilt into a lady’s legs. Peter Walsh laughed out. (97–98)

The lady, it turns out, is Lucrezia, but she is unknown to Peter, who, immersed in personal memories, still sleepy, has begun to waken to the world around him. His observations are subjective, yet he is located in a real world, since Lucrezia, whom we have come to know from the inside, is the lady impinging upon his thoughts. A sense of her inner life is by no means dispelled as we focus on Peter, who has seen a young girl crash into a lady’s legs. On the contrary, our perception of Lucrezia’s reality is heightened because it is joined to the physical being we now see through Peter’s eyes. The visible object is not just an object of perception; it has become a vivid manifestation of life.

When Peter’s laugh bursts forth as if he himself were impacted, the narrative itself is propelled back out of “his room” and instantly inward also, for there is no such thing as an external space:
But Lucrezia Warren Smith was saying to herself, It’s wicked; why should I suffer? she was asking, as she walked down the broad path. No; I can’t stand it any longer, she was saying, having left Septimus, who wasn’t Septimus any longer, to say hard, cruel, wicked things, to talk to himself, to talk to a dead man, on the seat over there; when the child ran full tilt into her, fell flat, and burst out crying. (98)

It is surprising to see the event repeated in what seems like an echo or rebounding. It seems that the event does not exist in linear time so much as in a multidimensional space. Keeping to a timeline, the narrative’s form would have expressed the dominance of a single perspective, but its goal is to describe a single space filled with various life. And so the moment of impact reverberates:

That was comforting rather. She stood her upright, dusted her frock, kissed her. But for herself she had done nothing wrong; she had loved Septimus; she had been happy; she had a beautiful home, and there her sisters lived still, making hats. Why should she suffer?

The child ran straight back to its nurse, and Rezia saw her scolded, comforted, taken up by the nurse who put down her knitting, and the kind-looking man gave her his watch to blow open to comfort her. . . . (98)

The man, of course, is Peter. And now the rapid back and forth movement begins to suggest that while we are in the thoughts of one character, the other continues to be present and play his or her part in the scene. While the chronology of time is disrupted, the continuity of life is maintained. We have left Peter, who is seen now from the outside as the kind-looking man showing his watch, but the narrative line of his ongoing life glimmers in the recesses of a space which is deep with interior worlds. Each person is simultaneously an object and a subject: the kind-looking man both looks and is looked at, and thus is the material world filled with perceiving objects. Ultimately, the narrative describes not so much the path of the individual subject slicing through an objectified world as the wavelike motion of the subject impressing itself upon coexisting subjects.

Traditionally, the internal and external are kept distinct, and at first, we are taken aback to see Peter from the outside, a mere man on a bench after he had seemed to contain the universe. But characters continue to be thus abruptly circumscribed. Resembling jars, they hold within what lies beyond them.

The transitions—the edges that join interior with exterior, that break open the individual rooms to the world around them—are therefore tremendously important. While there is no overall direction, there is continual movement, a continual rupturing of self-containment and flooding-in of reality. The narrative is repeatedly “building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh” (5). Mrs. Dalloway suggests that in the aftermath of World War I, the action that was given significance and felt to be critical to the future of Europe was not progressive. It existed rather in this continual renewal of awareness—this is the ongoing event to which the novel gives shape. The novel as a whole is a kind of modern dance, the narrative line moving like a body through space, reveling
in the awareness of contact, striving toward the “new and harmonious order” that Ruth St. Denis imagined, a life “that bridges the two worlds, the inner and the outer” (25).

The Italian sculptor, painter, and theorist Umberto Boccioni—fascinated by the threshold between interior and exterior and wishing to make his subjects “live in the environment which has been created by their vibrations” (“The Plastic Foundations” 89–90)—created the futurist painting *Simultaneous Visions* (1911), pictured in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Umberto Boccioni, *Simultaneous Visions*, 1911.

Tracing, as Boccioni did, the “ties which unite our abstract interior with the concrete exterior” (“Technical Manifesto” 242), the narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* takes on a similarly radical form. We are in the thoughts of an individual; then, ejected into the space surrounding his or her body, observing the “concrete exterior,” we realize that this space houses the spirit we have just encountered. The seeing subject becomes the visible object, but the transition is sharp and defined, and there is a sense of eyes looking back. Thus is the reader—who might otherwise receive life with a “fixed unsurprised
gaze” (39)—continually surprised and taught to connect the visible with the invisible. The narrative manages to present a body and at the same time the invisible life within it, supplementing sight with the vision of “insight,” which Apollinaire, speaking for so many of his contemporaries, deemed essential (14). The political implications are tremendous. In a novel about World War I, Henri Barbusse wrote that, for the person looking out over a battlefield dotted with soldiers, “each of those tiny spots [becomes] a living thing . . . full of deep thought, full of far memories and crowded pictures” (219–20).

Frank Lloyd Wright, referring to the revolution in architectural form, described how inner space could become visible as “the room.” He made this room “the soul of his design” (“An Autobiography” 216). Working in a different medium, Woolf uses the same design principle. Moving back and forth across the thresholds between individuals and their world, bringing the interior out and the exterior in as Wright did, her narrative creates a new sense of the depths of space—the “space within to be lived in,” as Wright put it (“A Testament” 218).

Because space is made of rooms, it leaves every object of perception radically unknown. Woolf uses certain encounters, between Septimus and Peter especially, to point to these concealed depths:

He was talking, he was starting, this man must notice him. He was looking at them.

“I will tell you the time,” said Septimus, very slowly, very drowsily, smiling mysteriously. As he sat smiling at the dead man in the grey suit the quarter struck—the quarter to twelve.

And that is being young, Peter Walsh thought as he passed them. (107)

To Peter, Septimus and Lucrezia are lovers squabbling under a tree, youthful, naive. The line dividing his consciousness from theirs is sharply drawn, and a bitter irony seems to gouge the division between them as Peter, ignorant of Septimus’s shell shock and nervous condition, begins to muse sentimentally about his own susceptibility to impressions. Gazing at this casualty of a barbarous war, Peter is happy to have returned from the edges of the Empire to the center of civilization. Later, hearing the bells of the ambulance that will remove Septimus’s body, he admires his culture’s efficiency—“one of the triumphs of civilisation” (229). His ignorance is painful.

Yet the inescapable subjectivity of his impressions does not indicate that people are hopelessly lost to one another. On the contrary, if the edge is drawn so thick, and the reader’s attention focused on it, it is so that a new concept of space can emerge. Space is not a transparent homogeneity, but suspends together lives of impenetrable depth. To believe in the possibility of omniscience as if there were no such depth only further obscures a reality that can at least become present in its mystery.

Thus the narrative does not remain inside a single character but is continually crossing from inside to out, and through its repeated cross-hatching draws attention to the receding edge, to the fact that people coexist and have to make sense of one another, and if they fail, it is because the other person is a reality and not a projection. The many inhabitants of London are all invisible to each other. Often, they fail to connect. The greater the failure, the more marked is the transition and the heavier the outline around
the physical being so that it becomes like a jar, its life undeniable, inseparable from the space surrounding it.

Remarkably, even as it is, for the most part, a series of interior monologues, the narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* succeeds in creating a strong sense of a single reality, one that is filled with life and is therefore preferable, in the view of many artists of the time, to external, homogeneous space. This external space was represented by linear perspective, which, while seeming to provide an objective picture of the world, conveyed only the perspective of a single, stationary viewer. According to many experimental artists of the time, the person who believed in the ultimate truth of this picture did not perceive the space that contains other seeing subjects.

Woolf explored this vision of a world emptied of life in her characterization of Dr. Holmes. The doctor, summoned to treat Septimus for shell shock, tells him to take an interest in things “outside himself,” like cricket, a “nice out-of-door game” (31, 37). Believing in an external, homogeneous space, he rejects the possibility of a personal connection to the world and inserts himself between Septimus and the window of his room. Later, after Septimus has died, this is where Lucrezia will see Holmes, “the large outline of his body standing dark against the window” (228). The doctor’s way of seeing is fatal, quite literally, for his consciousness has no contact with the life-filled space around him. Space seems to him an uninhabited void, and the potential for harm, according to Woolf, is enormous. Her novel proposes an alternative world, shaped by different concepts of space and time, a world both material and spiritual, within which people can at least strive to connect.

Characterizing *Mrs. Dalloway’s* narrative as a whole is a continuous turning inside out for the sake of assembling life, a filling of space with more and more interior life. It is impossible to trace the development of any single narrative like a line on a map. If anything, a kind of convergence takes place as the characters are brought together, confronted with each other, and the emptiness gradually filled.

**IN THE CLEARING OF THE WAR**

Richard, who has a sudden “vision . . . of himself and Clarissa; of their life together,” becomes eager “to travel that spider’s thread of attachment between [them]” (173), to bring her flowers, to celebrate this connection, what he calls “an event, this feeling about her” at luncheon (174). Not to speak of it is “the greatest mistake in the world” (174). One becomes lazy, shy. One becomes detached. But in the aftermath of the war, Richard is intensely aware of the city around him and Clarissa’s presence within it.

*Mrs. Dalloway*, in form as much as in content, is a powerful expression of the experience of life in the wake of the war. For many, linear time had stopped, and the presence of a surrounding world became intense. The awareness of someone else’s reality was in itself “an event”: “Thinking of the War, and thousands of poor chaps, with all their lives before them, shovelled together, already half forgotten,” Richard feels how the world spreads itself around him (174). It is a plain flooded by the sound of Big Ben, which marks the moment with “first the warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable” (178). The clock strikes as he approaches the door. Its sound floods the room where Clarissa sits “at her writing-table; worried; annoyed,” before her husband enters (178). “Really it was a miracle thinking of
the war. . . . Here he was walking across London to say to Clarissa in so many words that he loved her” (177). “His life was a miracle” (177).

In the universe of the novel, the sky above London is vast and still. A plane moves in and out of the clouds, writing letters that dissolve into this expanse, into which the various sounds of the city also rise and fade away. According to Wallace Stevens, these are “the consolations of space”—things have become nameless and real. What Woolf accomplishes in the movement of her narrative, Stevens describes explicitly in his poem “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven”:

The consolations of space are nameless things.
It was after the neurosis of winter. It was
In the genius of summer that they blew up

The statue of Jove among the boomy clouds.
It took all day to quieten the sky
And then to refill its emptiness again,

So that at the edge of afternoon, not over,
Before the thought of evening had occurred
Or the sound of Incomincia had been set,

There was a clearing, a readiness for first bells,
An opening for outpouring, the hand was raised:
There was a willingness not yet composed,

A knowing that something certain had been proposed,
Which, without the statue, would be new,
An escape from repetition, a happening

In space and the self, that touched them both at once
And alike, a point of the sky or of the earth
Or of a town poised at the horizon’s dip. (346)

In the wake of the war’s explosion, “something certain had been proposed,” to use Stevens’ phrase; there was indeed “a clearing, a readiness for first bells” (346) and it is into this newly cleared space that the narrative of Mrs. Dalloway ventures, moving freely and without constraint, as a plane does over the city of London:

[It] soared straight up, curved in a loop, raced, sank, rose. . . . All down the Mall people were standing and looking up into the sky. As they looked the whole world became perfectly silent, and a flight of gulls crossed the sky, first one gull leading, then another, and in this extraordinary silence and peace, in this pallor, in this purity, bells struck eleven times, the sound fading up there among the gulls. (29–30)
Mrs. Dalloway conveys a powerful sense of the clearing that the war made, exploding the statue of Jove. Proposing an end to the “repetition” of history, this novel, like much experimental art of the time, sought to describe a new kind of event—a “happening / in the space and the self that touched them both at once / and alike.” Woolf’s novel records this happening. Making of the self and space a continuum, the novel moves like a ripple or wave, encountering one life after another, individual microcosms within the whole—illimitable rooms.

It is a vision profoundly threatening to the imperialist ethos, to any conquest by force. Stamping “her own features . . . on the face of the populace” (151), the goddess Conversion is even now engaged—in the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa, the purblind London, wherever in short the climate or the devil tempts men to fall from the true belief which is her own—is even now engaged in dash- ing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance. (151)

A force of destruction living also in “Sir William’s heart,” Conversion is usually “con- cealed . . . under some plausible disguise; some venerable name; love, duty, self sacrifice” (151–52). In her service, imperialists threaten the space that both extends forever and has inner depth, like a room. Traveling across the face of the earth, they are either unaware of this dimension or seek to collapse it. In all its multiplicity, life expands into this space, which is never exhausted and which the narrative of Mrs. Dalloway evokes through a continual blooming motion. Everywhere, there is the hidden life, nameless, that surprises. A simultaneous vision of vastness and the microcosms flowering within it makes the behavior of the imperialist—who treats the world like a map, moving across it while stamping it with names—both brutal and absurd. One can no longer travel outward without traveling inward.

Works Cited

THE TWENTIETH PART:
WORD AND IMAGE IN WOOLF’S READING ROOM

By Benjamin Harvey

ow, in its retirement years and impressively reset within Lord Foster’s crystalline
courtyard, the British Museum’s Reading Room has become a kind of grand
monument to its own glorious past. Virginia Woolf’s name adds its peculiar lus-
ter to this past, and today’s tourist can easily find her there. Upon entering the space,
one merely has to glance at the informational plaque beside the door and there she is,
ensconced within an impressive and extensive list of “Notable Readers.” Similar lists can
be found in the museum’s publications and online. “In addition to Lenin,” the British
Museum’s Web site informs us, “the roll call of those holding reader passes included Karl
Marx, Charles Dickens, George Bernard Shaw and Virginia Woolf.” But now, not even a
reader’s pass is necessary to enter the space: you and I can just walk in, absorb the spectacle,
and imagine Woolf hard at work there.

Or perhaps not hard at work at all! For, as any good Woolfian knows, although she
clearly found the Reading Room extremely useful and enjoyed what she called its “bookish
atmosphere” (D3: 80), her easy assimilation into the room’s lore and potent mystique is
sharply at odds with what we know of her writings, where women feel distinctly uneasy
about working in the Reading Room, and where their names are either excluded from lists
or appear in lists written by men. With this in mind, this paper will focus on the architec-
tural space of the Reading Room and Woolf’s descriptions of it in her two “room” texts
of the 1920s: Jacob’s Room (1922) and A Room of One’s Own (1929). The space’s recent
renovation reminds us of Woolf’s interest in an earlier attempt to spruce up the Reading
Room—the 1907 redecoration, which she mentions in Jacob’s Room. Finally, I’ll return to
the question of Woolf’s presence in the Reading Room by considering two attempts to
imagine her there.

Completed in 1857, the Reading Room would have reminded Woolf of the eminent
Victorians of her father’s generation. Indeed, Leslie Stephen appears in an 1885 Punch
cartoon of the space in * almost exclusively male company,* clutching, as his attribute, The Dic-
tionary of National Biography (see Figure 1, next page). The presiding luminary (literally,
the light) in the scene, resurrected especially for the occasion, is Sir Anthony Panizzi, the
museum’s Principal Librarian at the time of the room’s completion; although the room’s
architect was Sydney Smirke, Panizzi—much to Smirke’s annoyance—was happy to take
much of the credit for the success of the structure, to the point where it was, and is, often
referred to as “Panizzi’s Dome.” Each time she entered the Reading Room, Woolf would
have passed beneath a portrait bust of Panizzi, placed over the main door. Her knowledge
of the relationship between the Reading Room and Panizzi can be detected in her draft for
Jacob’s Room; although the draft contains no sketch for the scene in the room that appears
in the final text, Woolf does briefly introduce a character called “Signor Panizzi” (JRHD
103). Not accidentally, his absence in the published novel coincides with the insertion of a
new scene—the one set in Panizzi’s Dome.
Architecturally, the Reading Room is striking for the extreme ends to which it pursues the logic of its own spoke-and-wheel organization—a circle divided into twenty equal portions (see Figures 2 and 3). This basic scheme runs through and connects every level of the building: oculus, dome, drum, and the ground floor plan and furnishings. This system even affected how one would order materials. Aligning architecture with language, each of the bays in the room was allotted a letter—A through T—and, having occupied a specific seat at a desk—say, H8—readers would then include this information in their book requests. In *A Room of One’s Own*, as in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), this kind of alphabetic organizational system will be aligned with the privileges and training enjoyed by male scholars; thus as the narrator’s frustrations increase and her notebooks become covered with scribblings, jottings and, finally, a drawing, she glances “with envy at the [male] reader next door who was making the neatest abstracts, headed often with an A or a B or a C” (*AROO* 30).

Surrounded by the concentric arcs of the general catalogue (another supreme achievement of alphabetical ordering), the Reading Room’s superintendent occupied the circular, and slightly raised, space at very the center of the room. From this position, of course, he

Figure 1: Joseph Swain, *Valuable Collection in the Reading-Room, British Museum*, from *Punch*, 28 Mar. 1885, p. 155.
enjoyed clear sightlines down the room’s desks, which radiate outwards from this center. As Woolf’s contemporaries noted, the structure of the Reading Room approximates a more benevolent, open-plan version of Bentham’s panopticon, where centralized surveillance enforces appropriate behavior and manufactures a keen sense of self-awareness. In *A Room of One’s Own*, this sense is suggested by the narrator’s feeling of alienation, her sense that she is an object of attention, a harried “thought in the huge bald forehead” (26).
Aside from the masculinity of the space, this formulation also nicely captures an air of self-surveillance, of a divided mind keeping tabs on its own thoughts; the readers Woolf places in her Reading Room are always keenly aware of one another.

Woolf’s preferred image for the room's geometry was the cartwheel and, in A Room of One’s Own, the narrator is strangely attracted to this figure, as though needing to articulate a relationship to her physical environment. Having ordered her books (a process Woolf outlines with some care), she waits for them to arrive and draws cartwheels upon “the slips of paper provided by the British tax-payer for other purposes” (32); after their arrival, the books, of course, then drive her to drawing her imaginary author portrait of Professor von X, an image she defaces by superimposing “cartwheels and circles over the professor’s face” (32). Appropriately, she turns the wheel in her favor, making of it an instrument of retribution, a kind of Catherine’s Wheel.

Thanks to Woolf’s journals and letters, and to the British Museum’s own records, we can reconstruct something of her early relationship to this cartwheel. Woolf began working there during the first decade of the twentieth century, and her accounts of the space—particularly the scene in Chapter 9 of Jacob’s Room—draw heavily on her memories of this period. The library’s regulations required readers to obtain a ticket before they could use the collection, and for this purpose, they needed a letter of recommendation from a suitable source or else from a “householder.” Virginia Stephen’s letter was written by Thoby Stephen, her older brother and the legal householder of 46 Gordon Square. Not himself a reader (at least no reader’s ticket for him survives), Thoby noted in his letter that his sister was interested in “reading works related to English literature & history.” Though vague, this apparently sufficed: Woolf was granted a reader’s ticket (reference no. A82849) and is recorded as first entering the Reading Room on 8 November 1905. Woolf’s introduction to the room, then, followed shortly after her move to Bloomsbury and was presumably necessitated by her burgeoning activities as a reviewer, writer, and sometime lecturer. (She was also using the London Library heavily during this time.) In a letter to Violet Dickinson of 28 November 1906, Woolf provides us with a more precise picture of her activities, and mentions that she had been “in the Brit. Mus. all the morning [reading] sermons on the death of Christina Rossetti” (L1: 253).

Just eighteen months after receiving her reader’s ticket, Woolf was shut out of the Reading Room for six full months. The fiftieth anniversary of the Reading Room’s opening occurred in 1907 and, partly to commemorate this event, the interior was given a much-needed redecoration. But a reduced number of readers—those who had managed to obtain “special tickets”—could still be accommodated elsewhere in the museum, in the Large Room and the Catalogue Room. Another letter to Violet Dickinson, dating from 1 October 1907, records that Woolf was among them: “To punish you,” she teased, “you shant know what it is I’m doing—and yet,—it involves the British Museum, and a special ticket” (L1: 313). Woolf went on using the Reading Room after its redecoration, but then seems to have stayed away for a long period. In her journal entry for 7 May 1926, she notes that she had been working in the British Museum again, adding that “It must be 15 years since I read here” (D3: 80) Assuming this chronology is correct, it is curious that Woolf apparently did not feel the need to revisit the space when she wrote Jacob’s Room, and instead relied on her memory. Given her history in the room, it is not altogether surprising that she dates her scene “not so very long” after its reopening in late
1907 (JR 105). Familiar with the room before its redecoration, and then waiting—surely, with considerable curiosity—for its unveiling, Woolf would have been acutely conscious of the way the room had been altered.

For Woolf, the most striking change was also mentioned in The Times on the day of the reopening: “The panels in the breastwork of 19 of the windows round the dome bear great names in English literature—from Chaucer to Browning—picked out on a gold ground, the 20th panel being occupied by the clock” (“The British Museum” 9). Located just above the famously high shelves lining the room, and just below the arched windows, the names owe something to earlier, abandoned plans to decorate the dome’s interior with an elaborate picture cycle; these schemes placed statues of famous authors on the twenty plinths between the windows, an ambitious idea which in 1907 was more cheaply realized using language.7 Fascinated and repelled by this new addition, Woolf repeatedly dwells on the names in her writing. In A Room of One’s Own—they appear as “a band of famous names” (26); a cancelled-out passage in the draft puts it more sharply, noting that “only the names of men encircle the proud dome” (WF 40). In a diary entry of 1926, Woolf observed how the high-brow room combined cultural and spatial hierarchies: “Written up,” she writes, “are the names of great men; & we all cower like mice nibbling crumbs in our most official discreet impersonal mood beneath” (D3: 80).

Woolf had already made similar observations in Jacob’s Room, where she drew attention to the making of the list, to its temporal—and thus provisional—aspect. She also named one of the names. “Not so very long ago,” we read, “the workmen had gilt the final ‘y’ in Lord Macaulay’s name, and the names stretched in unbroken file round the dome of the British Museum. At a considerable depth beneath, many hundred of the living sat at the spokes of a cart-wheel” (JRHD 105). A few paragraphs later, Woolf describes the reaction of “Julia Hedge, the feminist” to these names:

She looked about her. Her eye was caught by the final letters in Lord Macaulay’s name. And she read them all round the dome—the names of great men which remind us—“Oh damn,” said Julia Hedge, “why didn’t they leave room for an Eliot or a Brontë?” (JRHD 106)

Julia reads the names “all round the dome,” as though they were a sentence, with, apparently, Macaulay’s name at the end. But we might note several things here. First, on a literal level, the names were not entirely an “unbroken file,” for “the twentieth panel” was occupied by the clock. Second, if the clock may, potentially, be thought of as a chink in the room’s ideological armor, it also bore an extremely strong relationship to the ordering of the names around it. Judging from the photographic evidence, these names—surnames only, all caps—were ordered almost strictly chronologically according to date of birth. Beginning with CHAUCER in the bay immediately to the right of the clock, they then ran clockwise all the way round to the bay on the clock’s other side (see Figure 3, next page).8 Here, one could find not MACAULAY, but BROWNING. In turn, this chronological ordering was in lockstep with the preexisting alphabetical arrangement of the desks, so that Chaucer was aligned with A and Browning with T.

The room’s cultural, chronological, alphabetical, and architectural orders meshed to situate readers precisely: a researcher seated in H8, for example, might have felt the influ-
ence of Locke’s name up above, and could Julia Hedge have been seated in the R’s as her eyes gazed up to Macaulay’s name? (Finally, someone reaching R!) The addition of the names added to the room’s panoptic qualities. Now, literal surveillance from the center was accompanied by a kind of metaphorical surveillance from the peripheries, from the gods of the pantheon above and around the room, each of whom seemed to have a special stake in the slice of the structure over which he presided. The redecoration also added to the clock’s importance: while it started and ended the list of names, these names turned the entire room into a giant chronometer, and the clock appeared within this scheme as a kind of plan and model of the very space around it.

But why, one wonders, does Julia Hedge gaze up at Macaulay’s name, rather than—as one might expect—Browning’s? She may, of course, have simply misremembered this detail. But Macaulay is certainly an extremely appropriate name to dwell upon for a number of reasons. By twice drawing attention to the Y at the end of Macaulay’s name, Woolf underscores the relationship between the names and the sequence of the alphabet. “A few letters of the alphabet were sprinkled round the dome,” she writes later in the chapter (JRHD 107). With Macaulay’s Y, the alphabet is almost over, and a golden circle of exclusion has been completed. But beyond this, the title of his most famous work, his History of England, resonates nicely with the room’s band of canonical literary names, several of whom provided the subject matter for well-known essays by Macaulay. He was also both a good friend of Panizzi and, as Leslie Stephen mentioned in the Dictionary of National Biography’s entry on Macaulay, a trustee of the British Museum during the period of the Reading Room’s construction. More than any other of the nineteen names, Macaulay’s suggests both the self-supporting logic of the canon of which he is part and the foreclosing of this charmed circle to other—arguably more deserving—names.

Woolf’s Julia Hedge helps us to understand the room’s unrelenting masculine bias, but she also helps us to envisage, if only for a moment, an alternative scenario—a Read-
ing Room where male and female names might coexist under the room’s windows. And I want to conclude by considering a possibility Woolf didn’t entertain for us in her room texts: namely, that her own name might be envisaged within the scheme of the Reading Room. Woolf had a chance to imagine herself in just such a situation when she read E. M. Forster’s *Aspects of the Novel*. Forster pictures “the English novelists not as floating down that stream which bears all its sons away unless they are careful, but as seated together in a room, a circular room—a sort of British Museum reading room—all writing their novels simultaneously” (9). In her review of Forster’s book, “The Art of Fiction” (1927), Woolf quoted this very passage, and added the following comment: “So simultaneous are they, indeed, that they persist in writing out of their turn. Richardson insists that he is contemporary with Henry James. Wells will write a passage which might be written by Dickens” (106–7). The harmonious simultaneity of Forster’s conceit becomes, in Woolf’s gloss, a kind of competitive jockeying for position, where authors seem to be on the verge of appropriating one another’s work; but she chooses not to mention that, rather awkwardly, Forster’s final pair of “sons” consisted of Lawrence Sterne and Woolf herself, who, appropriately enough, is represented by an excerpt from *A Mark on the Wall* (Forster 18–20).

Vanessa Bell’s dust-jacket for *A Room of One’s Own*, on the other hand, might be read as a more playful and more subversive vision of Woolf’s relationship to the Reading Room (see Figure 4). It’s unclear to me whether Bell had actually read *A Room of One’s Own* when she made its dust jacket, but even if she had not, she certainly accompanied Woolf on her 1928 trip to Newnham and, through this experience and subsequent conversations with her sister, must have had a good sense of the book’s drift and knowledge of its various locations—she must have had, in other words, the kind of information that an artist would want, and expect, to know before embarking on making a cover. Although Bell never seems to have had her own reader’s card, the British Library does, in fact, record a “Mrs. V. Bell” in its register of temporary users of the Reading Room. This V. (and let, for argument’s sake, V. equal Vanessa) used the room in March 1920 and then again in May 1923—that is, not too long after the publication of *Jacob’s Room*. Bell’s response to the space would, surely, have been strongly shaped by Chapter 9 of Woolf’s text. Perhaps her eyes, like Julia Hedge’s, even strayed upwards to the names above her.

Typically, Bell’s dust jacket is understood as implying a domestic space in a manner akin to the cover of *Jacob’s Room*;
in both, framing elements surround central objects, and the interval between these two—between central and framing elements—might imply the presence of a window. The reading public’s inability, or predicted inability, to join the dots and actually see a room in these two covers seems to have been something of a running joke at the Hogarth Press. Leonard Woolf recalled in Downhill All the Way that the cover of Jacob’s Room puzzled booksellers and buyers because “it did not represent a desirable female or even Jacob in his room” (76). Woolf may have been recalling such responses when she penned her enthusiastic assessment of the cover for A Room Of One’s Own. “What a stir you’ll cause,” she told her sister, “by the hands of the clock at that precise hour! People will say—but there’s no room” (L4: 81). The “hands of the clock” make, of course, a V (the sisters’ shared initial). But the image’s austere forms hint not at private space—this is no Jacob’s room—so much as the more pompous and austere gestures of public architecture. And two of Bell’s prominent geometric shapes—the subdivided circle and the dome or arch—are also prominent features both of Sydney Smirke’s building and of Woolf’s descriptions of it. That is, we might read the cover as a kind of cross-section of a domed space containing a clock, or as a clock situated before an arched window (see Figure 5). Both possibilities evoke the Reading Room.

To return to Woolf’s two comments on the cover: Why, we might ask, would the precise hour indicated by the clock’s hands cause a “stir,” unless this is a special kind of clock, say a clock in a particularly important location? As for Woolf’s second comment (“People will say—but there’s no room”), this could relate to Bell’s nonliteral depiction of a space, but might also be taken as a Julia Hedge–like comment about the apparent lack of space in the Reading Room’s ring of names. And Bell’s achievement is to find room where none seemed available, to imply Woolf’s subversive presence within the Reading Room’s list of literary stars. More ingeniously still, she suggests that this fluid, repetitive, feminine V is not just a present fact or a future hope, but has been there as long as “the hands of the clock” have been signaling it. It was there long before the addition of the names declared the room to be a masculine space, and there when these gilded letters slowly began to fade. While today, the clock remains in its bay, the same cannot be said for the nineteen names, which were erased in a further redecoration of 1952. But the ideological groundwork for this act had surely been prepared by those thinkers, like Woolf, who had concerned themselves with critiquing the rationale supporting any narrowly construed cultural canon. Though Woolf’s descriptions of the Reading Room no longer entirely apply to the space we see today, this in itself might be taken as a measure of their success.
Notes

1. While The British Library has now left the British Museum, it should be noted that Woolf can also be found in its new premises. Elisa Kay Sparks informs me that “busts of Eliot and Woolf are in the entrance alcove to the Rare Books and Manuscripts Reading Room of the New British Library.”

2. And for more names, see Marjorie Caygill (4, 46–47).

3. This is not the first paper to consider the subject: see especially Ann Fernald’s “The Memory Palace of Virginia Woolf” and Ruth Hoberman’s “Women in the British Museum Reading Room during the Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries: From Quasi- to Counterpublic.”

4. The poet A. Mary F. Robinson is the lone woman in the cartoon; she is depicted leaning on her volume *A Handful of Honeysuckle* (1878).

5. See, for example, “Reading Dangerously” in *The Times*, 13 Feb. 1928, p. 13.

6. All the information in this paragraph concerning Woolf’s reader’s ticket is taken from a précis, which was kindly provided to me by the British Museum Archives.

7. For more on these unrealized decorative schemes and reproductions of the two main proposals, see Crook (187–91).

8. The entire list of nineteen names ran as follows: Chaucer, Caxton, Tindale, Spenser, Shakespeare, Bacon, Milton, Locke, Addison, Swift, Pope, Gibbon, Wordsworth, Scott, Byron, Carlyle, Macaulay, Tennyson, and Browning. Photographs of the Reading Room’s interior taken from this period are surprisingly scarce and often indistinct; I thank Gary Thorn, the Museum Archivist from the British Museum Central Archives, for helping me to confirm my reading of the relationship between the names and the room’s architecture.

9. I thank J. Cawkwell, a volunteer at the British Museum Central Archives, for investigating this matter and retrieving this information.

10. P. R. Harris describes the fate of the 1907 redecoration: “The names remained until the redecoration of 1952, growing gradually fainter” (27).

Works Cited


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While writing *The Years* (1937), Virginia Woolf identified in her diary two dimensions of human life that she sought to express as a writer: the “I; and the not I; and the outer and the inner” (*WD* 259). In this paper, I will focus on the second of these dimensions, which takes the form of two binaries in *The Years*: indoors/outdoors and psychological interiority/material externality. While scholars have discussed the novel’s critique of separate sphere ideology, little attention has been paid to the importance of material space in *The Years*, yet, as I will argue, Woolf’s depiction of supposed spatial divisions and inevitable connections articulates inherent associations between the politics of home and nation. Even while presenting indoors/outdoors and interiority/externality as oppositions, Woolf also insists on their inseparability, exploring what connects as well as separates the “outer” and the “inner,” both materially and psychologically, concerns that in turn depict the relationship of the individual “I” with the social structure. Woolf’s treatment of these binaries shows that the spatial component of *The Years* calls for more attention than it has thus far received. I will look at two aspects of a spatial analysis of *The Years*: Woolf’s opposition and concomitant conflation of public and private spaces and the correlation of urban topography with conceptual diagrams of social structures. These aspects demonstrate how *The Years* links the politics of home and nation through its exploration of the interconnections of space, gender, and the social system.

The importance of a spatial analysis is evident when we understand the novel as demonstrating Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope, which “expresses the inseparability of space and time” (84). Clearly, the time component is stressed in the structure of *The Years* through its title and its organization into chapters titled by years, and by the preludes that begin each chapter with descriptions of weather and season, evoking cyclical time and natural cycles. Time is also brought to the fore in the novel’s emphasis on generational differences and the temporal development of the Pargiter family as it changes over the years. What is perhaps less obvious but equally important—though it has not been adequately addressed in Woolf scholarship—is how the narrative progresses through space as well as time and how the two are essentially connected. For instance, changes in women’s social position from the novel’s opening in 1880 to its final chapter in the “present day” of 1937 are charted through their quotidian experiences in London, experiences that are rooted in particular locations.

Every scene has a concrete setting, often in a particular home or a specific city street and these settings frequently reappear, sometimes transformed by temporal changes. Homes (Abercorn Terrace, Browne Street, Hyams Place, etc.) are depicted as salient with meaning (they are “materialized history,” as Bakhtin says of Balzac’s descriptions of houses [247]), holding the memory of the past as well as the feelings and furniture of the present. To use the terminology of urban studies theorist Kevin Lynch, the homes are nodes, points by which the characters enter the city. Woolf is interested as well in the paths
that characters trace between these and other London nodes and much of the novel takes place out of doors, as characters move about London. Even in the preludes, the narrator identifies particular places and locates individuals socially through their occupation of space. Bakhtin writes that the significance of chronotopes in the novel is that they are “the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events,” the “knots” that provide “the meaning that shapes narrative” (250). While Woolf’s meandering narrative in *The Years* engages less in knots than in flows, the concept of the chronotope is useful in articulating the interdependency of time and space in *The Years* and their constitutive role in the narrative. Indeed, Woolf’s diary reveals that for about a year (from 2 September 1933 through about September of 1934) she planned to call the novel *Here and Now*, a title insisting on spatial as well as temporal location.

The double focus on space and time is apparent from the novel’s start in “1880” and its depiction of the rigid divide between public and private space for middle-class women. In contrast to the Pargiter sons, who go away to school and are expected to have a social life outside the home, the Pargiter sisters are expected to occupy themselves within the domestic sphere. As Woolf shows through significant details, the result of this domesticity is a lack of education, an economic dependence, and a sexual competition between the daughters. In the essay following this section in *The Pargiters* (1977), an earlier version of *The Years*, the narrator describes Delia and Milly’s boredom as a profound waste of human potential as, with little to occupy their minds, they are reduced to competing with one another for male attention and spying upon a neighbor’s young male caller. The narrator says of the sisters, “They are young and healthy, and they have nothing to do but change the sheets at Whiteleys and peep behind the blinds at young men going to call next door” (28). Their restriction to private space parallels restrictions to intellectual and sexual knowledge.

As feminist geographer Doreen Massey observes, “the limitation on mobility in space, the attempted consignment/confinement to particular places on the one hand, and the limitation on identity on the other—have been crucially related” (179). Spatial separation of men and women is indicative of the separation along gender lines of opportunities for education, work, and self-development. *The Years* charts changes in women’s social position and identity through their evolving relationship to the city, particularly through changes in their mobility, as confinement to and exclusion from certain places informs their knowledge about the world and their places in it.

Against the stasis of the Victorian domestic interior, Woolf represents movement in city streets as offering a vehicle for thought, contrasting the freedom women experience in the city streets with the constraints of domestic life. Eleanor, the eldest sister, enjoys some independent travels in London by virtue of her philanthropic work. The joy she experiences in the city is in contrast to the tedium of her home life. In the chapter “1891,” Eleanor “heard the dull London roar with pleasure. She looked along the street and relished the sight of cabs, vans and carriages all trotting past with an end in view” (94), and later, “The uproar [of the city] came upon her with a shock of relief. She felt herself expand” (112). In Woolf’s depictions of the urban milieu, the expansiveness offered in the streets is diametrically opposed to the constraints of the family home. In “1911,” when for Eleanor “everything was different. Her father was dead; her house was shut up; she had no attachment at the moment anywhere” (195), she wonders, “Should she take another house?
Should she travel? Should she go to India, at last? [At middle-age, her life] was beginning. No, [she thinks,] I don’t mean to take another house, not another house,” linking the materiality of a house with the constraint of domesticity (213). Later sections of the novel find that she does go to India, that she plans to go to China, and that she has taken, not a house, but a flat in London. The youngest daughter, Rose, will protest that Abercorn Terrace was not the only place she had lived, “feeling vaguely annoyed, for she had lived in many places, felt many passions, and done many things” (166), associating her mobility with her larger life experience.\(^6\)

The interconnectedness of material environment with individual consciousness is also apparent in what I identified as a second aspect of a spatial analysis of The Years: the correlation of urban topography with the view of one’s place in the social system. For example, in her passage along Bayswater Road on a city bus, Eleanor notes that the buildings are divided into “public houses and private houses” (101), a view that is indicative of her awareness of traditional spatial dichotomies. In contrast, Martin (who is incidentally described as a flâneur), looks into shop windows and into kitchens with equal interest and detachment (225). Woolf’s synchronous depiction of individuals’ relationships to the city and to the larger social system is not unlike Fredric Jameson’s discussion of “cognitive mapping,” in which he extrapolates Lynch’s spatial analysis to “the realm of social structure” to suggest that individuals’ mental maps of city space correspond to their mental maps of social and global totality (353).

The connections between psychological state and physical environment are explicitly demonstrated in one of what Leonard Woolf described as “two enormous chunks” Woolf deleted from The Years in 1936, after the manuscript had been typeset (302). In this deleted scene, set at night in 1921, the now “elderly” Eleanor walks fearfully toward an underground station as the architecture of the city takes on her sense of danger:

One of the big shops was being pulled down, a line of scaffolding zigzagged across the sky. There was something violent and crazy in the crooked lines. It seemed to her, as she looked up, that there was something violent and crazy in the whole world tonight. It was tumbling and falling, pitching forward to disaster. The crazy lines of the scaffolding, the jagged outline of the broken wall, the bestial shouts of the young men, made her feel that there was no order, no purpose in the world, but all was tumbling to ruin beneath a perfectly indifferent polished moon. (qtd. in Lee 466)\(^7\)

Here, the repetition of the words “violent” and “crazy,” the repeated description of the young men’s “bestial shouts,” and the preponderance of harsh consonants—“zigzagged,” “crooked,” “scaffolding,” “jagged,” “broken”—convey Eleanor’s sense of alarm. Eleanor’s fear is reflected in the architecture of the cityscape as “something violent and crazy” in the crooked lines of scaffolding becomes a metonym for “something violent and crazy in the whole world.”

The ability of an individual’s spatial sense of the city to represent her sense of the larger social structure indicates that interiority and external material space are intertwined. I would argue that Woolf’s exploration of this interconnection reflects back upon the presumed separateness of public and private spaces. Indeed, against a rigid binary of pub-
lic and private, the narrator makes clear that the outside world nevertheless enters the home. As Anna Snaith observes, Woolf’s “feminism and her pacifism in the 1930s were founded on the continuity between public and private realms, the oppression found in the public realm being linked to that of the private” (13). This continuity is of course directly expressed in Three Guineas (1938), where Woolf writes “that the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other” (142). While Woolf revised away from explicit political statements in The Years, the analogy between the domestic sphere and the British social system remains, a point I return to below.

Woolf’s demonstration of the inherent interconnection between public and private spheres is made through spatial metaphors. While, as I’ve discussed, The Years opposes the stasis and constraint of the Victorian domestic interior to the movement and freedom of city streets, the distinction between private space and public space is subtly but insistently subverted. This double move is linguistically apparent in the second Pargiters essay, which follows what would be the first chapter of The Years. In this passage, the narrator describes the Pargiter girls’ confinement to the home and the danger of the public streets:

Eleanor and Milly and Delia could not possibly go for a walk alone—save in the streets round about Abercorn Terrace, and then only between the hours of eight-thirty and sunset. . . . For any of them to walk in the West End even by day was out of the question. Bond Street was as impassable, save with their mother, as any swamp alive with crocodiles. The Burlington Arcade was nothing but a fever-stricken den as far as they were concerned. To be seen alone in Piccadilly was equivalent to walking up Abercorn Terrace in a dressing gown carrying a bath sponge. (37)

Scholars have noticed how public streets are described as a dangerous wilderness, and a place of contagion, for middle-class girls. As Judith Walkowitz has shown, the shopping destinations of Piccadilly Street, Bond Street, and the Burlington Arcade were known as particularly redolent with male “pests” and prostitution. While the narrator’s deliberate exaggeration makes light of what her position in the 1930s has the freedom to mock, it is clear that the girls’ movements are seriously limited. I would argue that we need also to notice how the separateness of public and private spaces is illustrated by the imaginary spectacle of one of the Pargiter girl’s appearance alone on a street. Significantly, the outrageousness of the hypothetical situation is depicted by transferring a private scene—“walking . . . in a dressing gown carrying a bath sponge”—to public urban space, a transference that challenges even as it describes that separateness.

Woolf’s playful reversal of the private domestic space/public urban space dichotomy evokes Walter Benjamin’s similarly playful reversal in his illustration of the flâneur’s comfort in the city, though the implications could not be more different. As Benjamin writes in Charles Baudelaire:

The street becomes a dwelling for the flâneur; he is as much at home among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls. To him the shiny, enamelled signs of businesses are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a
bourgeois in his salon. The walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; news-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done (37).

In this description of the flâneur’s psychology, Benjamin turns the inside out; business signs are equated with oil paintings, walls with desks, newsstands with libraries. The flâneur is so at ease in metropolitan public space that the city itself becomes his household. His intimate knowledge of the city is akin to possession. Woolf enacts a similar reversal of interior and exterior spaces, but does so with an emphasis on the importance of gender in spatial experience. Whereas Benjamin imagines possession of the city akin to possession of a household, Woolf describes dispossession in both public and private realms.

In Woolf’s formulation, the division between public and private spheres is maintained by what she calls “street love,” or the threat of sexual danger (P 50). In “1880,” ten-year old Rose defies the rules and goes out alone in the dark to the shop at the corner. On her way to the shop, she is nearly grabbed by a man standing in the shadows and, on her way back home, he exposes himself to her. In the third Pargiters essay, Woolf’s narrator comments upon this scene, describing not only the danger to girls and women in the streets, but also the consequent need for their protection within the private sphere. The danger outside, in other words, enables their cloistering at home. Rose’s experience is

a very imperfect illustration of . . . street love, common love, of the kind of passion which pressing on the walls of Abercorn Terrace made it impossible for the Pargiter girls to walk in the West End alone, or to go out after dark unless they had a maid or a brother with them. (50)

Such danger continues long past 1880. It is in fact the adult Rose who, visiting Sara and Maggie in 1910, looks out their window and asks if they find it unpleasant “coming home late at night sometimes with that public-house at the corner” (172). Woolf’s most intense illustration of a women’s sense of danger and restrictions in the streets occurs in the excised “1921” section, in which Eleanor heads home after dining alone in a restaurant and changes her path from fear:

[Eleanor] half meant to walk home through the Park. . . . But suddenly as she glanced down a back street, fear came over her. She saw the men in the bowler hats winking at the waitress. She was afraid—even now, even I, she thought . . . afraid. Afraid to walk through the Park alone, she thought; she despised herself. It was the bodies fear, not the minds, but it settled the matter. She would keep to the main streets, where there were lights and policemen. (qtd. in Lee 465)

The expression of “common love” by customers at the restaurant (“men in the bowler hats”) makes the darkness of the park at night threatening. In spite of Eleanor’s circumscription of her movements in choosing to walk home through the lighted and patrolled streets, she is troubled by a sense of imperilment. Her familiar and beloved city becomes a dangerous and unfamiliar landscape as her fellow pedestrians are rendered bestial: “a group of young men lurched past, bawling out a coarse, defiant song, their arms linked
together, so that she stepped off the pavement to avoid them—[their faces were] the faces of beasts, she thought, in a jungle” (qtd. in Lee 465–66). *The Pargiters’* narrator’s sardonic reference to a street being like a “swamp alive with crocodiles” is realized in the form of a nightmare. Eleanor’s change in course illustrates the interconnection between power and pedestrian routes in the city and, despite Woolf’s ultimate omission of this charged passage, the close association of power and space remains apparent in the novel.

Awareness of the spatial aspects of the novel also reveals the connections between the politics of home and nation, though Woolf removed the most explicit analogies from *The Years*. Woolf symbolically illustrates the permeability between public and private realms through the infiltration of noise and light from the outside world into the domestic space. In “1880,” as the children eat in silence, “the sun, judging from the changing lights on the glass of the Dutch cabinet, seemed to be going in and out” (12). While the movements of sun and clouds are detected through second-hand evidence, the image is suggestive of the girls’ wistful attention out of doors. An inside/outside dichotomy is further challenged by the streets’ aural infiltration into the home. When Crosby draws the curtains at Abercorn Terrace, “a profound silence seemed to fall upon the drawing-room. The world outside seemed thickly and entirely cut off . Far away down the next street they heard the voice of a street hawker droning; the heavy hooves of van horses clopped slowly down the road” (20). The construction of an opposition between the streets outside and the rooms inside (the “world outside seemed . . . entirely cut off”) is simultaneously undermined by the noises that nonetheless enter (notably, noises of laboring London in the forms of “the voice of a street hawker” and the clomping of delivery horses).

A further dichotomy is both proposed and abolished in the opposition between these noises of labor and the middle-class drawing room. The leisure of the drawing room is opposed to the labor outside but the “droning” voice of the street hawker and the slow and “heavy” clomping of the horses suggest the dull routine of the young women’s lives. A few pages later, Delia and the dying Mrs. Pargiter hear “a street hawker droning down the road” (25), connecting both street and drawing room with the sick room, that place of “confinement.” The opposition of movement in city streets to the stasis of the domestic interior is thus rendered ambivalent at best.10

While *The Years* demonstrates that the repercussions of spatial dichotomies are very real, it undercuts spatial divisions by suggesting a correspondence between the politics of home and nation through the intrusion of the outside world into domestic space. As I have also argued, Woolf similarly critiques the dichotomy of outer material realm and inner psychological one by expressing the impact of the material environment on subjectivity. By exploring how psychological interiority is bound up with external material space, *The Years* suggests a correlation between individuals’ mental maps of city space and their perception of their social position. In its exploration of what lies between the material and psychological polarities of “the outer and the inner,” *The Years* demonstrates the impact of gendered spatial segregation on individual identity. The novel also suggests that such segregation might be transcended as individual consciousness, urban topography, and the social system are mapped together.
Notes

1. In her important study of the evolution of *The Years* from Woolf’s initial plans to her final revisions, Grace Radin regrets that Woolf “deleted, obscured, or attenuated” much of its political and social content (148). Similarly, while Hermione Lee notes that “*The Years* suggests the same analogies as *Three Guineas* between the structure of the Victorian household and the organization of society in twentieth-century Britain” (xiv–xv), she goes on to object that this point of view is expressed only “mutedly and evasively” in the published novel (xxiii). Other scholars have recognized how this content remains in sublimated form in the published novel through implicit connections between public and private spheres: Beverly Ann Schlack observes that the marital and the marital were the key objects of Woolf’s scorn; Sallie Sears notes that sexuality in *The Years* is “political” rather than “personal” (211); Margaret Constock discusses the political dimensions of private conversations; Kathy J. Phillips finds a critique of Empire in the relations between “private affairs and public policy” (42); Linden Peach examines how evacuation is “unequivocally integrated with the public sphere” (174); Anna Snaith quotes Alex Zwerdling’s remark that, “in almost everything she wrote, Woolf demonstrated her concern with the ways in which private and public life are linked” (11). All of these critics are primarily concerned with the ideological implications of the gendered divide between public and private spheres. With the notable exception of Peach, they do not focus on material spaces. Whereas Peach discusses public spaces in *The Years*, I am interested in the interplay between public and private spaces and between interiority and external locations. Andrew Thacker notes that in Woolf “the territory of the mind is informed by an interaction with external spaces and places” but does not address *The Years* (152–53).

2. Interestingly, Bakhtin’s “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel” (1937–1938) is contemporary with *The Years* (1937).

3. In *The Image of the City*, Lynch identifies five types of elements by which citizens image their city: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks.

4. See Peach for a discussion of the street as both text and chronotope in *The Years* (180–82).

5. Woolf was much more explicit about the educational, financial, and social divisions between daughters and sons in *The Pargiters* than in the final published novel, though, as Snaith describes, “the fictional reconstruction of historical situations remains. In general, the tension between male and female siblings caused by the boys’ education is preserved in *The Years*, but details about the discrepancy in education are omitted” (98).

6. As Susan Squier has observed, *The Years* traces the parallel developments of “women’s movement into public life from the private sphere, and their corresponding drift from family life in the upper-middle-class districts of Victorian London and Oxford to independent life in the working-class districts of modern London” (141). Eleanor’s choice of a flat over another house and the selling of Abercorn Terrace also register the changing topography of London from family houses to flats. See Richard Dennis for discussion of this phenomenon and late Victorian and Edwardian responses to it.

7. The two extracts are included as the appendix of the edition edited and introduced by Hermione Lee. In “‘Two enormous chunks’: Episodes Excluded during the Final Revision of *The Years*,” Radin notes that that this excised scene evokes an entry in Woolf’s diary in May 1932, revealing that the “jagged skyline with its scaffolding was the seminal image that set Virginia Woolf’s mind working on the idea for this novel” (250). Radin acknowledges that it seems odd that Woolf would have removed this generative image, but concludes that it was Woolf’s need to shorten the novel and provide it greater coherence that led to its deletion.


9. In spite of the implied impact of Rose’s childhood trauma, the memory of her experience does not seem to restrict her movements as an adult. Rose is shown moving confidently about London, speaking for women’s suffrage on a platform, and getting arrested for throwing bricks in protest. However, as Patricia Moran writes (arguing that Woolf is both narrating and repressing her own molestation by her half-brother), there is also a suggestion that Rose suffers from traumatic memory. Certainly, as a child Rose has feelings of guilt (she cannot tell what she saw) and fears that the man would find her in her home (the loss of her sense of the protection of boundaries perhaps symbolically following from her transgression of them).

10. See Kate Flint, Rishona Zimring, and Angela Frattarola for detailed discussions of how Woolf’s treatment of urban noises often serves to acknowledge human connections.
Works Cited


Progressive proof of *Virginia Woolf Walking* (see cover) by Elisa Kay Sparks.
Part Five: Exploring Foreign Lands
“...am come to be a great authority on America in these parts. I can actually bear testimony that you are human beings (more or less), that you smoke like Christians, and behave in all respects with somewhat more resemblance, externally, to the English race than might have been expected,” writes Leslie Stephen to his new American friend James Russell Lowell in January 1864, several months after returning from his first visit to America (SL1: 14). Stephen was to travel to the United States two more times, in 1868 with his new wife, Minny Thackeray Stephen, and again in the summer of 1890 to visit an ailing Lowell and to receive an honorary degree at Harvard University. Conversely, as is well known, Virginia Woolf, though she came close to accepting Irita Van Doren’s invitation in 1927 to travel to New York to write a series of essays for the New York Herald Tribune, never did venture to America. Critics have speculated on her acerbic quips about America and Americans in her diaries and letters, but most have concluded that though she certainly evinced a “complex and ambivalent” attitude toward the country and its inhabitants (Ginsberg 347), she ultimately found it, as Andrew McNeillie argues, “a positive space, a place of democracy and futurity, of largely enabling modernity, but one hampered by European traditions, by the haunting shades of English literature, by the want among Americans of ‘a language of their own’” (McNeillie 43).

This problematic attitude toward the American language—its self-consciousness and crudeness on the one hand, its vitality and incompleteness on the other—resounds throughout Woolf’s essays in three American periodicals, The Saturday Review, The New Republic, and Hearst’s International and Cosmopolitan, between 1925 and 1938. In the first of these, “American Fiction” (1925), Woolf defines herself metaphorically as an “English tourist in American literature” (CE2: 111), casting herself as an outsider and an observer of the American writers under scrutiny. In the second, “On Not Knowing French” (1929), she launches a five-month controversy in the Correspondence section of The New Republic over the differences between American and British English. And in the final essay, “America, Which I Have Never Seen” (1938), she distances herself physically from America and allows her imagination—Orlando fashion—to travel across the Atlantic, past the Statue of Liberty, over New York City, into the American countryside, and back to the “Cornish rock” on which her body has sat during the several pages of mental flight.

Differentiating himself from the “ordinary tourist,” the “commercial traveler,” or the “institution hunter” in America, Leslie Stephen, unlike Woolf, moves beyond the tourist’s view to achieve a reciprocity between England and America evinced both in his friendships with James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., and Charles Eliot Norton and in his series of essays (1866–1873) on English institutions for the newly founded liberal American journal The Nation. But his two Cornhill Magazine essays, “American Humour” (1866) and “Some Remarks on Travelling in America” (1869), best illustrate the disparity of Stephen’s and Woolf’s opinions of American literature, language and culture.
Both father and daughter approach consensus on one point—their generally patronizing view of American literature as immature and less nuanced than its British counterpart. In both Stephen’s and Woolf’s estimation, American literature is still too new, too indebted to its European roots, to rise above the “second rank” (Stephen, “American Humour” 29). According to Stephen, such nineteenth-century writers as Theodore Parker, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow “have not struck out any new paths of thought; they have been imitators rather than leaders; they have all shown a certain incompleteness indicating an insufficient mastery of their subjects” (29). Stephen blames these limitations on the youth of the country: “It almost seems as if in a young country grown-up men had immature minds” (29). Nearly sixty years later, Woolf, like Stephen, will continue to fault this immaturity and a resultant tendency toward imitation in “American Fiction.”

Stephen published “American Humour” several years after his first trip to America. In the essay, he attempts to distinguish a distinctly American genre separate from, if still inferior to, its British counterpart. If the highbrow American writers simply imitate their British counterparts, at least the American humorist demonstrates originality: “American humor has a flavor peculiar to itself. It smells of the soil. It is an indigenous home growth” (30). Stephen compares American humor to the early youth of an author, to the early Dickens, for instance, whose *Pickwick Papers* lacks the “the stock of experience and observation of life which is necessary for a really great novelist” (30). Proffering the pseudonymous Artemus Ward (C. F. Browne), a clownish character with unorthodox orthography as an example, Stephen opposes American to English humor, noting the former’s tendency to “absurd understatement” and “profane swearing” (33). Stephen had already reviewed *Artemus Ward* for *The Saturday Review* in 1865, comparing Ward’s humor to Thackeray’s in the latter’s *The Snobs of England*. He finds Thackeray’s humor typically British—more nuanced and refined, a “wax-chandelier” as compared to Ward’s “flaring gas-lamp” (526).

An English reader of such American texts, according to Stephen, necessarily misses the nasal tone that characterizes American speech and must make do with the cropped dialect, slang, and the misspelled words. Though he praises Lowell’s *Biglow Papers* for their “Yankee wit” (the highest level he grants to American humor), Stephen concludes that the American humorist lacks the intellectual ballast of such British humorists as Charles Lamb. The American tendency to practicality coupled with a half-educated mind will (at least for now) produce only “applied” as opposed to “pure” humor. Stephen reserves his highest praise for his acquaintance Oliver Wendell Holmes’s *Autocrat of the Breakfast-table*. Though he exhibits the same shrewdness of the other American humorists, Holmes meets the British standard of good taste: “He . . . is never guilty of transgressing the bounds of really good taste” (“American Humour” 43).

In her review of a centenary biography of Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1909 for the *TLS*, Virginia Woolf appears to challenge Stephen’s elevation of Holmes to the pantheon of British humor. Though she admires the briskness of Holmes’s prose, she questions whether he “can be called a humorist in the true sense of the word” (“Oliver Wendell Holmes,” *E*1: 298). He is too practical, his range is too limited, and, perhaps worst of all, his “style shares . . . the typical American defect of over-ingenuity and an uneasy love of decoration” (*E*1: 297). Where Stephen allows equal status with their British counterparts
to a select number of his American literary friends, Woolf emphasizes the disparity between American and British humorists always to the advantage of the latter.

In her essay "American Fiction," Woolf draws closer to Stephen's evaluation of American writing though she opts for a different persona. Writing sixty years earlier in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, Stephen had adopted a paternalistic stance toward American writers, noting in his introduction to "American Humor" that, in regard to literature, Americans "are . . . our subjects as much as when they were our colonies" (29). Woolf, on the other hand, attempts to establish her identity as a foreigner, an "English tourist in American literature," who wants to seek out differences, not detect similarities, between the writers of both nations. Though she cautions that her "tourist's attitude" is inevitably crude and one-sided (a self-reflexive demonstration of what Melba Cuddy-Keane terms her "critique of the touristic consciousness" [121]), she manipulates the touristic metaphor to condemn the self-consciousness of American writing American authors are either too anxious to imitate their British models (see, for example, Emerson, Lowell, and Hawthorne) or too eager to assert their own individuality as Americans. Such "acute self-consciousness" impedes their writing (113); it makes Sherwood Anderson too recent and hasty and Sinclair Lewis too bitter.

These authors, Woolf argues, need a new language, one distinct from British English: "The first step in the education of an American writer is to dismiss the whole army of English words which have marched so long under the command of dead English generals" ("American Fiction," CE2: 113). She had argued similarly in a 1917 review of American essayist Henry Sedgwick that American writers needed a "language of their own which would make its own traditions . . ." ("Melodious Meditations," E2: 81). Such a language, best exemplified by Walt Whitman's "Preface to Leaves of Grass," would grant its writers "greater self-confidence" and would make them less sensitive to English criticism (E2: 81).

Lacking Whitman's daring and exuberance, most American writers at best can only demonstrate their originality—their decisive break from British writers—by their choice of an inferior genre. Thus, like Stephen, Woolf offers an American humorist as the best example of the freshness and vitality of American writing. Ring Lardner's baseball stories, You Know Me, Al, rather improbably impress Woolf's English touristic consciousness as Artemus Ward had captured Stephen's English traveler's sensibility. Woolf admires Lardner's lack of self-consciousness, his focus on the story itself instead of on "whether he is remembering Fielding or forgetting Fielding; whether he is proud of being American or ashamed of not being Japanese" ("American Fiction," CE2: 117–18). Lardner's characters lack the deadening clasp of self-consciousness; they have substituted games, specifically the American game of baseball, for society. On one hand, Woolf, like Stephen, admires this new "applied humor," though, like Stephen too, she sees such writing as immature, "on the threshold of man's estate," suggestive of a new kind of indigenous writing (121). As Elaine Ginsburg remarks of Woolf's attitude toward Americans and American writing,

She considered America a decidedly peculiar civilization, coarse and unpolished, though with an energy that bespoke promise. American writers she thought rather inferior on the whole, but she judged them by the same critical standards
she applied to others. . . . She demanded . . . a story free of any consciousness of
the author’s manipulations. (359)

If Artemus Ward and Ring Lardner represent a distinctively new and unself-con-
scious American language and literature, Henry James, himself always a tourist in Brit-
ish English (according to Woolf), embodies the self-consciousness of the imitator that
both Stephen and Woolf deplore. Woolf argues that both James and Edith Wharton have
yielded to, rather than rebelled against, British culture. In so doing, they have incorrectly
stressed social differences: “What their work gains in refinement it loses in that perpetual
distortion of values, that obsession with surface distinctions—the age of old houses, the
glamour of great names—which makes it necessary to remember that Henry James was a
foreigner if we are not to call him a snob” (“American Fiction,” CE2: 119).

Woolf’s reiteration of this charge against James sparked a brief controversy several
years later, in 1929, between English and American correspondents in The New Republic.
In “On Not Knowing French,” on the difficulty of truly absorbing a language other than
one’s own “native tongue,” she proffers the unfortunate example of James’s use of the Eng-
lish language: he will “often write a more elaborate English than the native—but never
such unconscious English that we feel the past of the word in it, its associations, its attach-
ments” (348). This criticism of James—an American writing British English—prompts
two responses in the April 24 issue of The New Republic—one from Harriot T. Cooke and
the other from Edmund Wilson—in addition to a mock apology from Woolf herself.

Cooke bristles at Woolf’s assumption that James’s “native” tongue lacks resonance.
He asks, “Just as a matter of curiosity, I am interested to know what she considers the na-
tive language of Henry James—Choctaw, perchance!—since he came from the wilds of
Boston” (281). Woolf’s sarcastic rejoinder turns on British versus American definitions of
“native”—native tongue/Native American Indian—to accentuate both cultural and lin-
guistic differences and to drive home her point that “climate and custom” play crucial
roles in the development of one’s speaking and writing. Her two-paragraph “apology,”
“The American Language,” is a rhetorical masterpiece in which she ostentatiously excuses
herself for assuming that the language of Tennyson and Whitman differs and then agrees
that

America is merely a larger England across the Atlantic; and the language is so
precisely similar that when I come upon words like boob, graft, stine, busher,
doose, hobo, shoe-pack, hiking, cinch and many others, the fact that I do not
know what they mean must be attributed to the negligence of those who did not
teach me what is apparently my native tongue. (281)³

She apologizes for affecting to appreciate the newness of Lardner, Anderson, and Lewis
and promises she will “cancel those views” in deference to Cooke’s complaint. Further,
she alludes to an 1871 essay by her father’s friend Lowell, “On a Certain Condescension
in Foreigners,” to suggest that an alternative title might be “‘On a Certain Touchiness
in’—dare I say it?—‘Americans’” (281).

In his essay, Lowell does indeed assume a defensive posture, protesting against British
allegations of Americans as vulgar, their speech as nasal, their country as immature. He
faults both the British and Europeans for their inability to “see America except in caricature” (71), but he argues that, since the Civil War, America has reached maturity even if the British are reluctant to acknowledge it. After refusing to close the door on such British friends as L. S. (Leslie Stephen), the “most lovable of men” (73), Lowell concludes, “It will take England a great while to get over her airs of patronage toward us, or even passably to conceal them. She cannot help confounding the people with the country, and regarding us as lusty juveniles” (80). Until the English “learn to look at us as we are and not as they suppose us to be” (81), Lowell fears an uneasy relationship between the peoples will persist. Woolf’s response to Cooke in The New Republic thus draws on a perception that, ironically, Stephen and Lowell had tried personally through their friendship to resolve. By alluding to Lowell’s essay, Woolf projects both the friendship and the dispute into the post–World War I world of 1929.

The controversy the James paragraph had ignited continued to brew through Edmund Wilson’s condemnation of Woolf’s “perverse view” that the language of American writers was too self-conscious to reflect cultural depth. It was fueled further by both English and American correspondents. In the ensuing series of letters from April to July, the controversy brewed under the two titles of “The American Language” and “Words Across the Sea.” Woolf did not respond again, but both the Englishman George Catlin, “resident during part of each year in America” (“The American Language” 335), and Cooke, along with two others, kept the conversations going in the correspondence section. Catlin defended the Americans against Woolf, lamenting a British tendency to “take out a patent for the English language” and charging Woolf to “reflect whether her view is not untenable in literature, pernicious in politics and evil in its cultural consequences” (“The American Language” 335). Herbert G. Purchase, an American who resided in England for several years, wrote a letter complaining of his treatment at the hands of the English who “made it clear . . . that they deny to all English-speaking people outside their own ‘tight little isle’ any part or lot in the shaping and formation of our common tongue” (26), and Catlin wrote again in June that the differences in speech were more symbolic and class-ridden than philological. Cooke, the first to react to Woolf’s comment, finally closed the controversy in July 1929 by distancing himself from the American English spoken by Lardner’s characters and concluding that Woolf herself would not have appreciated being judged by “the language of [Dickens’s] Sam Weller or any other cockney” (236).6

The controversy that Woolf launched represents one side of her ambivalent attitude toward American fiction and language. The other side—her attitude toward the American landscape, which she only saw in photographs or learned of from her father and her friends who had traveled to America—was far less critical; it was, in fact, amusingly fanciful. The only figure in her writing to evince attraction to America and Americans coupled with only a slight sense of superiority is the character Kitty Lasswade in The Years (1937), the novel published between the New Republic controversy and Woolf’s final essay on America, “America, Which I Have Never Seen.” In the 1880 section of the novel, the American couple, the Fripps, make a brief appearance at the Oxford home of Kitty’s parents. The husband could be from any country, Kitty thinks, but Mrs. Fripp “was American, a real American” (58) whom Kitty likes even if the other Oxford ladies laugh at Mrs. Fripp’s “fascinating, if nasal, voice” (59) and though Kitty’s mother disapproves of Mrs. Fripp’s makeup. Woolf’s portrait of Mrs. Fripp as seen through Kitty’s eyes is itself
ambivalent. Though Kitty is momentarily exhilarated by Mrs. Fripp’s invitation to visit her in America, she, like Woolf, never accepts it, and though she is relieved to leave the Bodleian for an ice cream stop, she reflects that “she had never done the Bodleian quite so quick as she had done it that morning” with Mrs. Fripp (59). The Fripps do not appear again, but their placement next to Kitty’s visit to the lower middle-class Lucy Craddock and the rural Robson family suggests Woolf’s class-conscious comparison of Americans with the lower English classes.

Never having visited America, Woolf has no need to distinguish between traveler and tourist or to justify her impressions of the country. Her father, on the other hand, in his 1869 essay “Some Remarks on Travelling in America,” defends his decision to journey to America to an American friend who asks, “What induced you to come to this country?” (321). Stephen is anxious to distinguish himself from the three varieties of typical British tourists—the “commercial traveler,” the “institution hunter,” and the “ordinary tourist”—and to insist that in spite of “a certain monotony of character” (327) one encounters in America, the best aspect of the country is the “pleasant intimacies” that promise to become “durable friendships” (328). In fact, three of the people Stephen met in New England—Lowell, Holmes, and Norton—were to become some of his closest friends. Stephen is far less interested in the landscape or the sights, finding a newness and rawness, an untidiness that contrasts sharply with tight neatness of the English countryside or the exhilaration of the Alps (to which he returned repeatedly on his mountain-climbing trips). Yet he moves beyond the admittedly superficial and imaginative view Woolf will adduce in her last essay on America to probe the political, personal, and social character of the people. In a telling passage, he contrasts the superficial glimpse of the ordinary tourist with the depth of the traveler who wishes to push beyond the tourist’s gaze:

In America, what is revealed to the superficial observer is comparatively uninteresting; what lies below the surface is of far greater value. If you see a pyramid or a cathedral for five minutes you carry away something; but in learning the character of man or a nation, the first five minutes probably gives you only something to unlearn. (335)

Woolf never unlearned her impressions of America. Her 1938 essay on America, “America, Which I Have Never Seen”—published in response to Hearst’s International and Cosmopolitan Magazine’s question, “What interests you most in this cosmopolitan world of today?”—seemed to hint at least that she was intrigued by the thought of America, but the resulting essay ultimately disappoints. As in “American Fiction,” Woolf maintains her “touristic persona” in this essay, but here the persona is split between a female “Imagination” personified as a bird and an editorial “we” (or the English public) solidly planted on a rock on the coast of Cornwall (21, 144–45). This bifurcated persona figures Woolf’s own bifurcated view of America—its language, literature, and people. On the one hand, “Imagination” signifies Woolf’s appreciation of the newness and vitality of the language and country; on the other, the “we” maintains its staunchly English position, ridiculing the rawness, the lack of depth—“culture’s hum and buzz of implication,” which Lionel Trilling argues American literature lacks (206). The imaginary bird fancifully flits across the Atlantic, pauses to view the Statue of Liberty and to muse on the clarity of the air,
and then hovers over a “scraped and scrubbed” New York composed of “high towers, each pierced with a million holes” (21). Before the critical editorial “we” prods “Imagination” to scrutinize the houses, “Imagination” voices a theme that had resonated in both “American Fiction” and in Woolf’s apology in The New Republic—the promise of a new “American” language: “The old English words [“Imagination” reports] kick up their heels and frisk. A new language is coming to birth” (21). But before this language can articulate itself, the “we” pushes it to observe the cultural differences from England—the lack of privacy, family portraits (tying people to ancestry), servants, communion—“‘The Americans never sit down to a square meal’” (144). The roads are straight and smooth as “billiard balls”; the countryside is “primeval.” Suddenly, “Imagination” descends from its birdlike position to settle herself in one of the omnipresent speeding automobiles, where she has only an instant to remark on the past—“the red man aims his tomahawk at a bison”—before it shoots on through the present of an “up-to-date city” and toward the future (another metaphor for America). The “we” interrupts the fast-paced journey again to inquire about the people. Echoing Stephen’s comment to Lowell, it asks, “Are they human beings as we are?” (144), to which “Imagination” responds that they are “much freer, wilder, more generous, more adventurous, more spontaneous than we are” (145).

In the final paragraphs of the essay, “Imagination” returns to the “we” sitting on the Cornish rock (coming full circle, as McNeillie notes, completing “a return trip rather than a one-way journey across the Atlantic” [53]), but first “Imagination” commands the “we” to “look” and “observe” both the accelerated speed of the culture and the principal way in which America differs from England: “‘While we have shadows that stalk behind us, they have a light that dances in front of them . . . they face the future, not the past’” (145). Yet “Imagination,” for all its buoyant optimism about America, does not have the final word. The “we” concludes the essay with a vision of an old woman half-filling a basket with “dead sticks for her winter’s firing” (a reminder of the slow steadiness of English civilization) coupled with the undercutting comment, “Imagination, with all her merits, is not always strictly accurate” (145).

In 1869, Leslie Stephen had hinted that the traveler (not the tourist) to America must try to view the land and the people without preconceived notions: “The New World is in certain respects even more instructive than the Old, to those who visit it with their eyes open” (“Some Remarks on Travelling in America” 336). Woolf did not, according to Nigel Nicolson, regard America with her eyes open. In his Introduction to Volume 5 of Woolf’s Letters, Nicolson laments Woolf’s reluctance to travel to America. He argues that “her preconceived notions of America . . . and her unconcealed prejudices about the character of its people, might have been changed by first-hand knowledge of its loveliest districts and its most intelligent men and women” (L5: xii). Though he could certainly be critical of American language and landscape, each trip to America reinforced Leslie Stephen’s appreciation of the people, especially of his three friends, whom he stated were closer to him than any of his British acquaintances save John Morley. Of one of these friends, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., Woolf writes dismissively to Ethel Smyth in 1940: he is “a beautifully urbane, witty, over cultivated American” (L6: 402). Taken together with Kitty Lasswade’s view of the uncultivated Mrs. Fripp in The Years, this comment reveals Woolf’s reluctance to move beyond the two stereotypes she outlines in all of her writings about America and the Americans: on the one hand, the naïve and crude (though refresh-
ing) ingénue, on the other, the pseudosophisticated imitator of European culture. Her father, often depicted as harsh and oblivious in Woolf’s memoirs, pierced beyond these stereotypes toward a more humane assessment.

Notes

1. Woolf mentions this invitation in both her diary entry of 23 January 1927 (D3: 124) and in a letter of 30 December 1926 to Vita Sackville-West (L3: 313).

2. Though she also generally follows McNeillie’s assessment, Cheryl Mares suggests that Woolf was reluctant to accept a real American literary canon, one that could be pinned down, “reified” (“‘The Strangled, Difficult Music’” 5). Mark Hussey, in his essay “Virginia Woolf in the U.S.A.,” alludes to her piece in Hearst’s International and Cosmopolitan, but focuses on Woolf’s significance to American feminism and her reception in America. He argues for Woolf’s “cosmopolitanism, her radical democracy,” and suggests that the “roots” of these qualities may be “found in American soil” (58). Jane Marcus’s “Wrapped in the Stars and Stripes: Virginia Woolf in the U.S.A.” is similarly concerned with Woolf studies in America and the devaluation of Woolf in England amongst British intellectuals. Neither Hussey nor Marcus, however, address the intense ambivalence of Woolf’s frequently dismissive, even hostile, comments about America and Americans.

3. Artemus Ward was a pseudonym for Charles Farrar Browne (1834–1867), an American newspaper reporter and columnist, who later became famous for his humorous letters. He was briefly editor of Vanity Fair, the American equivalent of Punch. He traveled to London where he delivered burlesque lectures and wrote for Punch (see Melville Landon’s “A Biographical Sketch”).

4. In another essay, “Humour,” in Cornhill in 1876, Stephen calls American humor “cynical irony” (318) and again subordinates American to British humor, noting that the American version is a “caricature” of the “old savage kind” of humor that is nearly obsolete in England: “The whole art consists in speaking of something hideous in a tone of levity. Learn to make a feeble joke about murder and sudden death and you are qualified to set up as a true humorist” (326).

5. Woolf’s apology precedes a discussion in 1931 in The Times on American slang. There, a letter signed “Abnus,” prompts Hamilton Eames to submit a brief glossary of American slang terms, among which is “cinch,” one of the words Woolf instances in her response to Cooke. Several days later, another correspondent, W. Ashton Phillips, writes a letter to the editor of The Times tracing the etymology of “cinch” back to the Spanish cincha (girth) and, by extension, to cowboy and rancher terminology.

6. Two essays that touch closely on the difference between British and American English appeared in the May and September issues of The New Republic. T. S. Matthews’ review of Lardner’s Round Up in the May 22 issue compared Lardner’s vernacular to that of Shakespeare and Chekov, noting the use of colloquial speech aimed at a popular audience. Matthews, like Woolf, perceives a certain vitality in Lardner that encourages the coining of new words and phrases and concludes that Lardner’s “individuality lies in his application of the popular language” (35). More philosophically, John Dewey writes an essay in the September 18 issue discussing the European’s stereotypical notion of the American type as characterized by “quantification, mechanization and standardization,” traits that to the European indicate a lack of critical thinking and an “absence of social discrimination” (118). However, the same thread suggested in 1871 by Lowell appears here in Dewey’s allusion to the threat of American barbarianism.

7. Andrew McNeillie comments extensively about this essay in “Virginia Woolf’s America.” He also alludes to the controversy provoked by Woolf’s comments in her piece “On Not Knowing French.” But McNeillie’s thesis presents Woolf as having a considerably more positive view of America than I detect in her writings. McNeillie conflates Woolf’s admiration for modernity and modernism with American democracy, and views Woolf as “a spokeswoman for the principle of democracy” (44). This seems to me to be much truer of Stephen’s view, especially as evinced in his series of articles on England for the democratic periodical The Nation.

8. Stephen’s farewell letters to Holmes and Norton (Lowell had died in 1891) testify to the deep friendship he felt for them (see L2: 529, 542).
Works Cited

Many sources went into the making of Virginia Woolf’s America, including reports from some of her contemporaries who wrote about their travels in America, or corresponded or talked with her about them, and various earlier works from the long and fascinating tradition of British travel writing on this country. To see America through Woolf’s eyes, we need to see it through as many of these other writers’ eyes as possible, since that is largely how her own vision of this country was formed.

In a sense, the English have been writing about America since the mid-16th century. As Woolf points out, “[The] whole of Elizabethan literature [is] strewn with . . . references to that America—‘O my America! My new-found-land’—which was not merely a land on the map, but symbolized the unknown territories of the soul” (“The Elizabethan Lumber Room,” E4: 56). In this paper, I can only gesture toward the riches of this larger British discourse about America, but that may be sufficient to show how tracing continuities and breaks with it on Woolf’s part can help to restore a measure of historical depth to her comments on America, and can also heighten our awareness of both the different contexts in which she was writing and of her changing responses to changing times. As a case in point, I consider certain comments Woolf makes about American place names and the American language against the backdrop of remarks on these subjects by a range of her predecessors in this tradition. I then show how situating Woolf’s comments on America in this larger context can affect how we read a relatively more extensive piece she wrote on this country, her 1938 essay “America, Which I Have Never Seen,” an essay Andrew McNeillie rightly calls a “jeu d’esprit” (54), but one whose ambiguities and tonal complexities have recently drawn increased critical attention. Finally, I speculate about why, by the late 1930s, America no longer serves Woolf as an adequate symbol for “the unknown territories of the soul.”

Woolf, who never traveled to this country, begins her essay “America, Which I Have Never Seen” with a disclaimer, as did Matthew Arnold a half century earlier in his essay “A Word About America,” which he wrote before he had been to the United States. “Imagination,” Woolf writes, “unfortunately, is not an altogether accurate reporter; but she has her merits: she travels fast; she travels far. And she is obliging” (56). Arnold acknowledges that “Englishmen easily may fall into absurdities in criticizing America, most easily of all when they do not, and cannot, see it with their own eyes, but have to speak of it from what they read” (“A Word About America” 73). He contends, however, that as a friend of democracy who is critical of not just the American experiment but the English social system as well, he “has earned the right, perhaps, to speak with candor” (74–75). Woolf’s disclaimer, unlike Arnold’s, is parodic, but in both essays the disclaimer serves as a nod to convention that allows the writers to go ahead and write what they please. In her essay, though, rather than trying to avoid falling into absurdities, Woolf gleefully indulges in them, ostensibly to praise, but arguably also to satirize this “most interesting” country.
In her private writings, Woolf often echoes the sentiment Arnold expresses in “A Word More About America,” after he had been to the United States: “Of all countries calling themselves civilized, except Russia, [America is] the country where one would least like to live” (153). What Arnold particularly deplores about America is the virtual absence of any sign of aesthetic sensitivity. “How can an artist like it?” Arnold asks. “The American artists,” he observes, “live chiefly in Europe” (175). As Elaine Ginsberg points out, in the typescript version of “American Fiction,” Woolf sympathized with American expatriate writers. They “had reason,” Woolf wrote, “when they retired to Paris and London and left those scarecrows and abstractions to ripen into some semblance of humanity before they touched them with the tips of their pens” (qtd. in Ginsberg 352–53). In the published version of “American Fiction” (1925), however, she sides with Emerson and Whitman (or, to choose a closer American contemporary, William Carlos Williams), arguing that, like it or not, American writers must make their imaginations “take root” in their own country, if they are ever to develop a literature of their own (E4: 270).

Still, the doubts behind Arnold’s question “How can an artist like it?” seem to have contributed to Woolf’s own repeated decisions not to cross the Atlantic. Her hesitation also reflects the influence of the long tradition of British travel writing about this country. Both Oscar Wilde and Matthew Arnold had noted that Americans lack, in Arnold’s words, “any trained or natural sense of beauty” (“A Word More” 175). Both writers point to American place names as evidence of this failing, though in his “Impressions of America,” Wilde exempts the Spanish and the French, who “have left behind them memorials in the beauty of their names,” and criticizes only “the English people,” who “give intensely ugly names to places” (Prose 704). He “refused to lecture” in a town called “Grigsville,” he explains, because it “had such an ugly name. . . . Supposing I had founded a School of Art there—fancy ‘Early Grigsville.’ Imagine a School of Art teaching ‘Grigsville Renaissance’” (704–05). An irritated Arnold complains that

the mere nomenclature of the country acts upon a cultivated person like the incessant pricking of pins. What people in whom the sense for beauty and fitness was quick could have invented, or could tolerate, the hideous names ending in ville . . . Briggsvilles, Higginsvilles, Jacksonvilles . . . the jumble of unnatural and inappropriate names everywhere? (175)

If it is not some ugly “ville,” then it is a wholly incongruous place name like “Marcellus or Syracuse,” the resulting “folly,” Arnold suggests, “of a surveyor who . . . happened to possess a classical dictionary” (“A Word More” 175).

This passage from Arnold may lie behind Woolf’s remarks in a letter to Vita Sackville-West, who in 1933 was in the United States lecturing on, among other subjects, modern literature. “By the way,” Woolf asks, “are you lecturing on me in Albertvilleapolis, PA?” (a place-name “invented,” the editor painstakingly informs us; L5: 148). Like Wilde and Arnold, Henry James complains in The American Scene of passing through “ugly ‘places’ with name[s] as senseless, mostly, as themselves” (463–64). Robert Louis Stevenson, however, found American place-names “rich, poetical, humorous, and picturesque” (Works 101). Recognizing that “all times, races, and languages have brought their contribution” to American nomenclature, he is charmed by the results: “Pekin[g] is in the same State
with Euclid, with Bellefontaine, and with Sandusky. . . . Chelsea, with its London associations . . . is a suburb to . . . primeval Memphis” (101). Although in her public writings, Woolf at times celebrates the effects on the English language of the mixing of cultures and peoples, it seems that privately she can’t pass up an opportunity to make a joke.  

In the same letter to Vita Sackville-West, Woolf imagines that the next stop on her U.S. tour—after another twenty-five hours on the train—will be a town called “Balmoralville” (after the Royal Family’s Scottish home). Balmoralville, Woolf suggests, will be “like Peacehaven, only 75 times larger” (L5: 147–48). Peacehaven, a coastal town in Sussex that got its start in 1916, was supposed to be a dream development, a “garden city by the sea” (Wyatt). The streets were laid out on an American grid system, with no plan for a town center (Carey). A nationwide competition was held to name the town, with plots of land for prizes; a lengthy legal battle ensued over alleged fraud, ensuring the venture widespread publicity (Bernard). By 1927, Woolf held the following opinion of the place:

> Would it much affect us . . . if a sea monster erected his horrid head off the coast of Sussex and licked up the entire population of Peacehaven and then sank to the bottom of the sea? No. . . . All that is cheap and greedy and meretricious . . . has here come to the surface and lies like a sore, expressed in gimcrack red houses and raw roads . . . and [here she seems to be quoting promotional ads] “constant hot water” and “inside sanitation” and “superb views of the sea.” (“A Brilliant Englishwoman Writes to Me,” E4: 290)

Peacehaven also turns up in the following entry in Woolf’s diary a couple of years later: “All aesthetic quality is there destroyed. Only turning and tumbling energy is left. The mind is like a dog going round & round to make itself a bed”—possibly, an allusion to the sprawling town’s lack of a center (D2: 156). In the early 1990s, apparently running true to form, Peacehaven won a nationwide poll for the title of “Britain’s most boring town.” In short, Woolf suggests, however facetiously, that this is what lies in store for Vita Sackville-West when she steps off the train in Balmoralville, U.S.A. Next, Woolf invents the town’s mayor, “who is called, I should think, Cyrus K. Hinks,” and has him escort Sackville-West from the train station to “a large baptist Hall” where she will proceed to “lecture on Rimbaud” (L5: 148).

We arrived here in Balmoralville by briefly considering how Wilde, Arnold, James, and Woolf use “ugly” American place names to suggest that Americans generally lack a “sense of beauty and fitness” (Arnold 175). Of course, Woolf is amusing herself and the aristocratic Sackville-West by inventing place names whose aristocratic associations seem ridiculously out of place. Although his intent is not satirical, as is Woolf’s, Stevenson also seems amused by his litany of incongruous place-names, with its implicit jostling or crumbling of social hierarchies and the collapse of any sense of historical depth caused by the juxtaposition on the same “plain,” as it were, of place-names (often illustrious) from other times and cultures.

Henry James also considers the effects on the English language of the mixing of cultures and peoples in America in a striking passage from *The American Scene*, a work that Woolf read when it first came out in 1907 (L1: 304–05). Touring the cafés of New York’s East Side, a neighborhood “swarming,” James tells us, with “the sights and sounds . . . of
a Jewry that burst all bounds” (131), he listens to the “unprecedented accents” in which English is being spoken all around him and looks in vain “from face to face for some betrayal of a prehensile hook for the linguistic tradition as one had known it” (139). He concedes that “the Accent of the Future” may emerge from these “torture-rooms of the living idiom,” an accent that “may be destined to become the most beautiful on the globe and the very music of humanity” (139). Whatever its destiny, “certainly,” he claims, “we shall not know it for English—in any sense for which there is an existing literary measure” (139).

Some thirty years later, the passage from The Years (1937) featuring the song of the caretaker’s children resonates with this passage from The American Scene, but goes beyond it. While James at the dawn of the new century is tortured by the sounds of this newly emerging, distinctively American language (139), Woolf’s Eleanor Pargiter, that “fine old prophetess” (“TY” 328), pronounces the song of the caretaker’s children “beautiful,” though to most everyone else in the room, it is just so much “hideous noise” (430). The song of the caretaker’s children is not in any recognizable language, let alone English, but Woolf by implication welcomes its emergence, unlike the anguished Henry James.6

In a sense, Woolf also turns the tables on James in her essay “On Not Knowing French” and the subsequent exchange of letters to the editor after its appearance in the New Republic in February 1929.7 She implies in this essay that James is the one whose English seems tortured, or at least excessively formal.8 In response to her irate American readers’ letters to the editor, Woolf hails the signs of a new, separate American language (“The American Language” 281). When Oscar Wilde, returning from his first trip to the United States, observed that “the English and Americans have everything in common, except of course, their language,” he presumably meant that as a judgment against the Americans (Jullian 105). Woolf, however, claims to envy American writers the freedom they have to make a new language of their own (“American Language” 281). She would agree with Kipling’s claim that Americans “delude themselves into the belief that they talk English . . . the English” (American Notes 29), but would disagree with his observation that “the American has no language,” but only “dialect, slang, provincialism, accent” (30). Instead, as early as 1917, Woolf endorsed the idea that “American” was a new language in the making, one that “could make its own traditions” (“Melodious Meditations,” E2: 81), and in time give rise to a new, distinctively American literature (“American Fiction,” E4: 278). As McNeillie points out, “Woolf understood that America and American literature were emergent formations . . . and this excited her sympathy as a self-conscious experimentalist” (44).9

Some commentators, including McNeillie, think that the America Woolf presents in her 1938 essay “America, Which I Have Never Seen” is still essentially “a positive space, a place of democracy and futurity, of largely enabling modernity” (McNeillie 42).10 According to Beth Rigel Daugherty, “America,” Woolf’s reply to the prompt put to writers for the Hearst Cosmopolitan’s monthly series—“What interests you most in this cosmopolitan world of today?”—was suggested to her by a New York agent, who had encouraged her to write the article in the first place as part of a strategy for marketing her short pieces in the United States (15–16). This disclosure reminds me of the reason Woolf gave for rejecting the New York Herald Tribune’s 1927 invitation to spend a month in the United States: “They say the natives are poisonous. In my articles I should have to tell so many lies I
should be corrupt for ever” (L3: 324–25). Ginsberg claims that “America, Which I Have Never Seen” “reveals much of [Woolf’s] ambivalence about the country,” in spite of her efforts to write “diplomatically” for an American audience. Woolf offers only “grudging . . . praise,” Ginsberg contends, for “the spontaneity and energy of Americans and . . . the technological advances of American society” (350). Eleanor McNees thinks that “Woolf’s admiration for [American] modernity and modernism” was genuine, but that McNeillie conflates it with an admiration for American democracy, which McNees finds is “much truer of Leslie Stephen’s view” of America than Virginia Woolf’s (130 n7).

My view of Woolf’s “America” is closer to Ginsberg’s. In fact, I think that this essay can be read as a send-up or parody of the whole tradition of British writing about America. There is affection in it, but still Woolf seems to mock her own dreams of “democratic highbrowism” (Cuddy-Keane, Virginia Woolf 58), as well as the collective utopian dream of America as the New World, “the Great Good Place” (Conrad 167). She simulates the “see-no-evil, let’s pretend demeanor” that some writers find typical of Americans in relation to their own country (Simic 131). Her imaginary America is a fairyland where you can have your cake and eat it, too; you can have your primeval wilderness and drive straight through it, sixty cars abreast, at ninety miles per hour, with no impact on the place or the people.

This image seems to illustrate, in a fantastic way, H. G. Wells's observation in his 1906 travel book The Future in America: “America . . . is still an unoccupied country, across which the latest developments of civilization are rushing” (69). Woolf’s adoption of an imaginary “bird’s eye view” of America in this essay may also be a take off on Wells. “Let me try now and make some sort of general picture of the American nation as it impresses itself upon me,” he writes. “It is, you will understand, the vision of a hurried bird of passage, defective and inaccurate at every point of detail, but perhaps for my present purpose not so very much the worse for that” (68). Wells, a socialist, found the country insufficiently democratized in 1906 (245), but on balance he remained hopeful that America would come through on its “splendid promise of a new world” (203). During the 1930s, however, when he paid two more visits to the United States, he became “thoroughly disillusioned . . . about society in general” and, in particular, about America (Rapson 260).

Woolf’s “America, Which I Have Never Seen” is written in the vein of the satirists and fantasists, which she describes in “Phases of Fiction” (1929) as a mode of writing she turns to out of “a craving for relief” (CE2: 89). Since the satirists and fantasists are not bound by realism, she explains, they briefly free readers from the pressures of “reality,” encouraging us to believe that “Perhaps all this pother about ‘reality’ is overdone” (CE2: 91). In its fantastic qualities, Woolf’s “America” reflects the escapist impulse that Valentine Cunningham finds characteristic of the 1930s. During this “pervasively escapist age,” he observes, “escapology reigned even in the . . . left, where escapism, the opposite of commitment, was one of the most prominent taboos” (371). As a satirist, however, Woolf simultaneously marks the limits of those fantasies; so, the essay keeps veering toward caricature, which can have a critical edge. Her America also has a postmodern feel to it because everything—the past, all cultures—exists there on the same plane; it is history as theme park. What James wrote of New York City at the turn of the century is true of Woolf’s imaginary midcentury America: it is “all formidable foreground” (130).
In “America, Which I Have Never Seen,” then, Woolf is not showing “Imagination” embracing “a refreshing modernity,” as McNeillie suggests (53), so much as she is rapidly recycling various “scraps, orts and fragments” (*BTA* 189), various key images and themes associated with the American cityscape/landscape/machine-dreamscape. She is not embracing but mocking the American obsession with speed and technology through hyperbole and rapid shifts of perspective and place. Her references to the primeval landscape and vast plains are about as hackneyed as her image of “a red man” with a tomahawk (59), and seemingly as blank and one-dimensional. At the essay’s end, Woolf does what she says the great satirists and fantastics do: “At the critical moment,” she gives the piece “that little extra push so that [it becomes] something more than the whims and fancies of a brilliant brain” (‘Phases of Fiction,” *CE* 2: 93). And yet, her closing observation, that America . . . faces the future, Europe the past, is the most hackneyed of all ideas associated with the “New World.”¹² As McNeillie points out, the immediate historical context (and our knowledge of the events that were about to unfold) account for this observation’s poignancy and power. The judgment Woolf makes here becomes even more compelling if we suspect that she did not see an American future as a meaningful alternative to Europe’s entrapment by the past.

Woolf’s letters and diaries, as well as some of her writings for the public, suggest that by this time, if not sooner, she had disconnected serious utopian energies and “the language of ‘futurity’ and questing” (McNeillie 47) from even the idea of America—let alone the “land on the map” (“The Elizabethan Lumber Room,” *E*4: 56)—and was trying to find another focus for them. Invocations of “the New World” recur in the “1917” section of *The Years*, but by the time we get to the “Present Day” (335), the recurrent phrase shifts to “another world.”¹³ In this final section, when Eleanor Pargiter, “just back from India” (356), longs “to see . . . another kind of civilization,” it is not America but Tibet she envisions (335). “Next year,” we learn, “she’s off to China” (356). These repeated references to the East (and the increased emphasis on the longings of “the soul” in this section) are signs of the profound psychological and spiritual transformations that Woolf by this point thinks are prerequisites for the emergence of any truly New World.

In short, Woolf seems to be searching for a new symbol for “the unknown territories of the soul” that America had often stood for since Elizabethan times (“The Elizabethan Lumber Room,” *E*4: 56). As Peter Conrad points out in his *Modern Times, Modern Places*, “Utopias have to be positioned somewhere off the map beyond the margin of reality, and the new continent [America] was too large and loud, too ideologically confident and economically prosperous to remain marginal” (501). Perhaps even the idea of America was, by the late 1930s, not politically radical enough for Woolf (that is, not feminist, pacifist, and socialist enough—and not “transnational,” in Spivak’s and Friedman’s sense of that term [Spivak 284, qtd. in Friedman 130]). Woolf may also have foreseen how readily the idea of America could be reduced to the political, making it all too easy to ignore the need for psychological and spiritual changes that, she argues in *Three Guineas* and in “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid,” must take place if the age-old “dream of peace, the dream of freedom” is ever to be realized (*TG* 143).¹⁴ In the final section of *The Years*, the “Present Day,” the idea of America as a symbol of the future and of “the unknown territories of the soul” is subsumed and displaced by the song of the caretaker’s children (*TY* 430). In rendering their song “fiercely . . . unintelligible,” Woolf may be trying to dissociate it
from any particular nation, as if to put a name or label of that sort on such a symbol is to
risk its being appropriated or instrumentalized, which means that in time it can be used
to dominate, rather than to emancipate, as has happened with the idea of America and,
arguably, is happening to this day.

Notes

1. Here is a partial but impressive list of notable British authors who traveled to and wrote about America between the early 1830s and the late 1930s: Mrs. (Frances) Trollope; Charles Dickens; William Thackeray; Isabella Bird; Leslie Stephen; Harriet Martineau; Matthew Arnold; Anthony Trollope; Rudyard Kipling; Robert Louis Stevenson; Oscar Wilde; H. G. Wells; Rupert Brooke; Arnold Bennett; G. Lowes Dickinson; D. H. Lawrence; Ford Maddox Ford; G. K. Chesterton; John Galsworthy; and J. B. Priestley. (For additional examples, see Rapson 200 n11.) Many of the British writers and artists who traveled to America in the 1930s, in large part because of the lucrative lecture circuit, were friends or acquaintances of Virginia Woolf and could have provided her with “extra pair[s] of eyes” (an expression she used in 1934 when asking Hugh Walpole, then in California, to tell her all about Hollywood, which to her “seemed over the rim of the world” [L5: 350]). Besides the British writers that Valentine Cunningham mentions who traveled to America in the 1930s—“Alistair Cooke, Malcolm Lowry, Anthony Powell, Aldous Huxley, and MacNeice” (345)—several other members of Woolf’s circle of friends and acquaintances talked with her, wrote to her about their American experiences, or wrote about them for publication over the course of this decade, including H. G. Wells (again), Ford Maddox Ford (again), Elizabeth Bowen, Hugh Walpole, Desmond MacCarthy, Vita Sackville-West, Harold Nicolson, David Garnett, Raymond Mortimer, Rosamund Lehmann, and E. M. Delafield.

2. See Mares, “Woolf and the American Imaginary” (46), for a summary of various reasons Woolf gave for rejecting opportunities to travel to America. See also Ginsberg 348–49.

3. For evidence of Woolf’s aversion to the idea of living in the United States, see Mares, “Woolf and the American Imaginary” (46–47).

4. In “Craftsmanship” (1937), for example, Woolf celebrates the hybridity of the English language, noting that English can incorporate “French words, German words, Indian words, Negro words” (CE2: 250). In “American Fiction” (1925), she welcomes “all the expressive ugly vigorous slang which creeps into use among us first in talk, later in writing . . . from across the Atlantic” (E4: 278). See also Cuddy-Keane, “Flexible Englishness” (8).

5. Simon Carey, who describes himself as a disgruntled former Peacehaven resident, notes that the town “appears in Graham Greene’s Brighton Rock, where Pinkie falls to his death over a cliff,” and adds that this is “an apt choice for a boy without a past.” This is an interesting fate, given the town’s association with the “American” style of town planning, and Simon Schama’s observation that Europeans typically associate America with the idea of “severance from the past” and a “willed rootlessness” (35).

6. Zimring mentions other interpretations of the children’s song, including Bradshaw’s sense that it is “a scrambled allusion to Dante’s inclusive vision of mankind” (Bradshaw 206; qtd. in Zimring 152).

7. Ginsberg comments on this exchange of letters (351), as does McNeillie (47–50). M. E. Foley’s 11 February 2004 contribution to the Woolf discussion list further considers what is at stake in this exchange (VWOOLF@lists.scs.ohio-state.edu).

8. Woolf explained to H. G. Wells that she attributed the excessive formality of James and T. S. Eliot to their being American, that is, “alien to our civilization.” Wells replied that, as the son of “a gardener and a lad[yer]’s maid,” he too was an “alien” (D3: 95).

9. McNeillie further observes that America and American literature were for Woolf “discursive spaces” for “speculations” and “frustrations” related to her work as a “modernist . . . and a woman writer” (45). On Woolf’s attitude toward American literature, see also Cuddy-Keane, “Flexible Englishness”; Ginsberg (351–53); and Mares, “The Strangled, Difficult Music of the Prelude.”

10. See also Cuddy-Keane, “Flexible Englishness”; Garrity (16–17); and Daugherty (11, 16).

11. On the idea of America as “the Great Good Place,” see Conrad (164–65, 167) and Auden (322). Levin notes that the word utopia is itself “both a humanistic paradox and a skeptical Greek pun: the good place (eutopia) was nowhere (outopia)” (48).

12. This idea is also fundamental in H. G. Wells’s work: “Europe is dedicated to the past; America to the
future” (qtd. in Conrad 159). See also Schama’s comment in note 5 above.

13. The only specific reference to America in the “Present Day” section of The Years occurs when the aging Martin Pargiter, who “ought to have been an architect” (157), says that he would like to go to America “to see their buildings” (357).

14. Todd Avery refers to several recent critical “efforts to describe the nuances of the social and political critique in which Woolf was engaged in the 1930s” (21). He cites, among others, Jessica Berman, who claims that Woolf “constructs an alternative model of social organization” in The Waves, one which is “not only without charismatic leaders but also without any totalizing structure like that of state or nation” (Berman 115; qtd. in Avery 20). Avery tries to define the nature of this “alternative model” more precisely, drawing upon the “Deleuze-Guattarian defense of de-individualization” (23) and Chantal Mouffe’s critique of “unqualified liberalism” (24).

Works Cited


On 15 September 1926, Virginia Woolf overcame a strong, early morning bout of depression and feeling of “failure” well enough to read at last the new travel narrative that her friend and lover, Vita Sackville-West, had given her at the end of August. The narrative was to be published by the Hogarth Press, and Sackville-West reported feeling “such qualms” when Woolf “sent it off without even reading it” (Letters 140). The work, called Passenger to Teheran, was partly based on letters Sackville-West had written to Woolf on her journey to Persia to meet her husband, diplomat Sir Harold Nicolson. Woolf had not always been overly complimentary about Sackville-West’s writing, saying, for example, “She is not clever; but abundant & fruitful; truthful too” (D3: 57).

On this day in 1926, however, as Woolf was turning to read Sackville-West’s travel-writing-as-narrative for the first time, the manuscript must have lightened her mood, for Woolf immediately wrote to Sackville-West of Passenger, “I have swallowed [it] at a gulp. Yes—I think its awfully good. . . . I didn’t know the extent of your subtleties. . . . The whole book is full of nooks and corners which I enjoy exploring” (Sackville-West, Letters 139–40). What Woolf seemed to enjoy most about the book was its sense of inward exploration. Her words reveal the personal connection she felt with the text; perhaps Woolf also sensed in it the influence of her own writing style. Certainly, thinking about Sackville-West’s narrative must have had a profound effect on her ability to write, perhaps even inspiring her creatively, for she records in her diary that, on the next day, 16 September, she finally was able to finish her draft of To The Lighthouse (1927).

These interconnected events of inspiration and publication leave us with an important question: What was it about Sackville-West’s travel narratives, these unusual and often overlooked pieces of writing, that so interested Woolf and what impact did they have on Woolf’s own imaginative output, especially during the years that the two women were closest? Certainly, other critics have noted the effect that the two women had on each other creatively. Louise DeSalvo writes of their long friendship, “It was the most productive period of each of their lives; neither had ever before written so much so well” (197). Suzanne Raitt remarks that the two women never collaborated, but wrote “in parallel,” remarking, for example, how in Sackville-West’s 1931 novel, All Passion Spent, one can see the influence of To The Lighthouse (91). However, fewer scholars focus particularly on Sackville-West’s travel writing in examining the influences of the two writers on each other, and it seems important to do so, both because of the way Woolf seemed drawn to the theme of travel throughout her life and because of the similarities that can be traced between Woolf’s ideas about writing and those articulated by women travel writers.

Like many early twentieth-century women, Woolf enjoyed the freedom that travel gave her. As Jan Morris’s collection of Woolf’s travel reflections reveals, Woolf took plea-
sure in local travel, though she seldom traveled for more than a few weeks at a time and only twice ventured out of Europe on visits to Turkey. From an early age, Woolf was captivated by travel, imaginatively entranced by journeys to foreign lands and especially by the writings of Renaissance explorers; she recalled being “enraptured” by Hakluyt at age fifteen or sixteen (D3: 271). When Woolf could not voyage in body, she voyaged in her mind. On a summer holiday in 1899 at Warboys, young Virginia wrote in her diary that she found Huntingdonshire “a melancholy country” (Passionate Apprenticeship 138). To compensate, she imagined:

I am a Norseman bound on some long voyage. The ship now is frozen in the drift ice; slowly we are drifting towards home. I have taken with me after anxious thought all the provisions for my mind that are necessary during the voyage. The seals & walruses that I shoot during my excursions on the ice (rummaging in the hold) are the books that I discover here & read. (Passionate Apprenticeship 138)

In this Whitmanesque moment of becoming another, Woolf imagines herself an adventurer and compares her books to the animals necessary for a hunter’s survival in a harsh climate. Woolf never lost her fantasy of a journey to a foreign land, a concept explored in The Voyage Out (1915) and contemplated briefly for another work years later, as a 29 June 1931 diary entry reveals: “I had an idea for a book last night—a voyage round the world, imaginary, hunting, climbing, adventurous people, shooting tigers, submarines, flying & so on. Fantastic” (D4: 32). Knowing Woolf as the queen of a kind of modernist écriture that highlights subtlety and interiority, we may be baffled to find here a work that sounds curiously like pulp adventure fiction. The key to this puzzle would be to locate a relationship between the two genres: to draw a comparison between the travel narrative and modernist fiction.

First, we might consider how, as Percy G. Adams explores in Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel, the categories of travelogue and fiction are not mutually exclusive. Authors of travel literature traditionally have been notorious for inventing and exaggerating what they observed on their journeys, while authors of fiction may rely heavily on autobiography. As Adams suggests, the genres are very close: the novel itself owes its development, in part, to the travel narrative and its structure, and there is a marked relationship between travel accounts and the “amorphous early novel” (278). But what, we might ask, is modernist about the travel narrative genre? Certainly, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, writers of both genres were searching for something new to write about and new ways to articulate it. Additionally, for women of this period, travel allowed a freedom of movement and expression that was carefully restricted at home. A traveling woman in a foreign land could become a kind of flâneuse, a modern meanderer in an exotic space. Certain travel narratives of this period, especially those by middle- or upper-class women with the leisure to wander, witness, and write, draw attention to a new kind of language and expression inspired by this type of movement and observation.

As early as 1883, W. H. Wynn in his introduction to Mrs. Lucy Yeend Culler’s travel narrative Europe Through a Woman’s Eye writes in praise of Culler’s work:
There is a certain rapidity of narrative, free-flowing, conversational. . . . The
details of daily observation are infinite, and the woman’s art consists in instan-
taneously catching at the events and sights which out of the great throng of
impressions, will best secure for herself, and convey to others a vivid realization
of the time and place. (viii)

Wynn’s words suggest that there is something innately feminine about a narrative that is
“free-flowing” and “conversational.” As he states that “the woman’s art consists in instan-
taneously catching at the events” from “the great throng of impressions,” his words eerily
anticipate ideas about modernism later articulated by Woolf in her essay “Modern Fic-
tion” (1925). There, she seeks a kind of literature that can capture the “luminous halo” of
life, catching the “atoms . . . as they fall” just as the mind “receives a myriad impressions”
(212), akin to Wynn’s “throng of impressions,” which he already sees Culler “catching” in
her 1883 narrative.

A decade before Woolf was formulating her theories about modern fiction, Louisa
Jebb was writing, in By Desert Ways to Baghdad (1908), that in the middle of the desert
“[What is] almost unnoticed in the ordinary routine of daily life, becomes out there of
enormous importance” (15). She remarks that as you travel in an unfamiliar country,
“Your pores are wide open to receive passing impressions” (16). Again, we might compare
this to Woolf’s words: like Woolf, Jebb is celebrating the way the mind “receives a myriad
impressions.” When traveling in a large, open space away from home, Jebb emphasizes,
the mind becomes open to “the little details of life” (15). This, in turn, affects her writing
style. Similarly, Woolf discusses how, in the works of those she terms the “materialists”
of fiction, “life escapes; and perhaps without life nothing else is worth while” (“Modern
Fiction” 211). Many of these women travel writers thus anticipate Woolf and her quest
for a narrative that catches the “atoms . . . as they fall.” There is something about the act
of travel that encourages this attention to the everyday, the “trivial,” which becomes so
important.

In Alone in West Africa (1912), Mary Gaunt complains that when she tried to read
travel books on Western Africa, “Every traveler . . . told nothing of the thousand and one
trifles that make ignorant eyes see the life that is so different” (7). Similarly, Lady Dorothy
Mills begins the introduction to The Road to Timbuktu (1924) by suggesting her yearning
for more writing of this kind in the travel narrative: “When reading the travel books of
other people I always feel a sneaking curiosity to know the things they have not told one;
the purely personal things, the little jokes and mistakes and tiny tragedies of every day; . . .
all the little trivial things that help to bring the writer before one as a live human being”
(11). As Woolf says in “Modern Fiction,” “life escapes.” If Woolf had read Mills’ narra-
tive when it was published in 1924, she might have been reminded of what she currently
was trying to achieve in Mrs. Dalloway (1925), her portrait of one day in a woman’s life.8
While it is unlikely that Woolf knew the works of these travel writers, it is significant
that she and these women were pursuing parallel quests; this suggests that Woolf saw and
wrote as a kind of travel writer herself, similarly inspired to observe and transcribe the
undescribed details of life around her.

Dorothy Mills’ call for the inclusion of “all the trivial things” is, in a sense, a call for
modernism in the travel-writing genre. While Woolf was busy revising the form of the
novel, Sackville-West began reinventing the form of the travel narrative, producing \textit{Passenger to Teheran} in 1926 and its sequel \textit{Twelve Days} in 1928. In the latter text, which I will mention only briefly here, she describes her own writerly initiative, in homage to Woolf’s ideas about language: “It is necessary to write, if the days are not to slip emptily by. How else, indeed, to clap the net over the butterfly of the moment? For the moment passes, it is forgotten; the mood is gone; life itself is gone” (9). To capture “the moment” in her texts, Sackville-West utilizes an unusually free-flowing, experimental style. Her descriptions of the land around her and her reactions to it become modernist in her stream-of-consciousness approach or, to use Sackville-West’s term, “mental pilgrimage” (\textit{Passenger} 120).

\textit{Passenger to Teheran} and \textit{Twelve Days} are the only two works of travel writing Sackville-West ever produced, and they come at a curious moment in her career as a writer. In 1924, when Sackville-West was already a well-known author, her fifth novel, \textit{Seducers in Ecuador}, became her first work published by the Hogarth Press. Sackville-West soon saw her work moving in a new direction. In a letter from 29 January 1927, Sackville-West describes to Woolf her view of the “crossways” she has recently come to: a rough sketch of two roads and a signpost showing “Bad novels” to the left and “Good poetry” to the right (Letters 165, 166). There is no path marked “travel narratives,” despite the fact that \textit{Passenger} appeared that autumn and Sackville-West would soon return to the genre, an indication that she enjoyed the travel-writing form. This suggests that Sackville-West did not consider these more personal and spontaneous works to be in the same category as her other writing; perhaps, to extend Sackville-West’s own metaphor, they were off the beaten track. The arrival of \textit{Passenger} was eclipsed by Sackville-West’s well-received but more traditional work \textit{The Land}, which she was also writing in Teheran and which appeared in late September of 1927.\textsuperscript{7} Woolf did not greatly admire the poem and defended Edith Sitwell’s critique of it by reminding Sackville-West in a letter on 24 June 1927 that she was a “natural traditionalist” while Sitwell was a “natural innovator” (Sackville-West, Letters 213). There is nothing about Sackville-West’s travel writing that shows her to be a “natural traditionalist,” however, and when Woolf punningly complained of Sackville-West’s poetry and intellect in her diary, “she never breaks fresh ground” (\textit{D3}: 146), she was neglecting to mention the “fresh ground” Sackville-West had been able to cover in her foreign travels and in writing \textit{Passenger to Teheran}.

\textit{Passenger}, gleaned partly from the letters she wrote to Woolf, is a pleasantly loquacious description of her journey to Persia, which includes a discussion of her passage through nearby geographical regions, beginning in Egypt and ending in Russia. The book seems to have originated as an exercise in freewriting. In her first mention of the text to Woolf, Sackville-West writes on 8 February 1926, “But by the time I come home I shall have written a book, which I hope will purge me of my travel-congestion, even if it serves no other purpose. The moment it is released, it will pour from me as the ocean from the bath-tap” (Letters 99). Sackville-West also describes herself as “a sponge, just drinking things up” (Letters 100). Her language nicely depicts the fluid nature of her writing; as well, the mixed image of the ocean and the bath tap suggests a grand adventure combined with a very personal one.

Beneath Sackville-West’s narrative lies the palimpsest of her letters to Woolf. Sackville-West was a novelist and poet, yet she believed that “letters certainly deserve to be approached as good literature, for they share this with good literature: that they are made
out of the intimate experience of the writer, begotten of something personally endured” (Passenger 11). The “personal” nature remains in the published travel narrative. In her “Introductory” to Passenger to Teheran, Sackville-West writes, “Travel is the most private of pleasures. There is no greater bore than the travel bore. We do not in the least want to hear what he has seen in Hong-Kong” (9). Sackville-West has hit upon the problem of the travel narrative, of publicizing a private experience: to the writer there is “pleasure” in the original experience, but to the reader there may be none. As well, the reader must struggle to recreate accurately the traveler’s experience in his or her mind: “It is a fine and delicate form of mental exercise to reconstruct a landscape . . . from the indications given; rather, reconstruction and capture are words too gross for the lovelier unreality that emerges, a country wholly of the invention” (11–12). Here, Sackville-West speculates that the reader’s job is not to sit idly back but to “reconstruct” and “capture” the landscape that the author transmits through language. She stresses that a true relationship between writer and reader must be achieved: “The link between two persons must indeed be close before one of them is really eager to visualize the background against which the other moves; to see with his eyes, hear with his ears, be transplanted to the heat of his plains or the rigours of his mountains” (11). This sensual description, which aligns the traveler’s body with the body of his manuscript, reminds us of Sackville-West’s intimate connection with her original reader. In this moment of eros, she offers herself as the vehicle through which Persia may be experienced, moving the travel book genre away from its traditional guise of more impersonal, objective reality.

Sackville-West soon found herself at odds with the travel writer’s task of describing the people and customs of a country. Sackville-West complains to Woolf in a 9 March 1926 letter from Teheran, “Only imaginary things can be communicated, like ideas, or the world of a novel; but not real experience” (Letters 112). Observation abroad must be subjective, she realizes, and remarks that any foreigner’s claim that he is seeing “the life of the people” is “a great deal of nonsense” (Passenger 100). The communication of “real experience” in her travelogue must be colored by fantasy, consciously revealing the connections between travel writing and fiction. This, too, is a new kind of pleasure. Sackville-West writes, “It seemed to me that, since I had embarked on this journey, I had shed everything but the primitive pleasures of sensation,” which involves reporting objects “not as I knew them to be, but as they seemed to me—and to read into them, I might add, a great many attributes they could not really possess” (Passenger 39, 40). Sackville-West reveals an invested interest in the difference between landscapes imagined before the journey and those actually observed by the physical eye. Imaginative preconceptions of a region melt away “when later on we tread with our mortal feet that place which for so long served as the imaginary country of our wanderings,” she writes, comparing this change to how the memory of “a place that we knew in childhood” is “dispelled . . . now wrongly remembered in colour and size, under the fresh but not necessarily truer impression of our actual beholding” (Passenger 12). Sackville-West champions imaginative construction, noting that there is no necessary “truth” in an outsider’s first-hand observations. Indeed, she acknowledges that the excitement of the journey stems from her own imagination. Going to see the pharaohs’ burial ground, she hangs back, well-knowing that “never again would that delight [of speculating] be in my reach; for the pleasures of the imagination I was about to exchange the dreary fact of knowledge” (Passenger 30–31).
To Sackville-West, Persia is “a country made for wandering onward; there is so much room, and no boundaries anywhere, and time is marked only by the sun” (Passenger 99). Like other travel writers who have come before her, she is a flâneuse; Passenger to Teheran revolves around this notion of “wandering,” whether on land, in the mind, or on paper. Her text is similarly adventurous in form, ridiculing its own genre. It is full of digressions: “But all this is irrelevant,” Sackville-West announces, realizing she has reached page 22 without yet discussing any details of her voyage. She grapples with a means of expression that can grasp the world around her and finds that ordinary words are not adequate:

Crudely speaking, the plain is brown, the mountains blue or white, the foothills tawny or purple; but what are those words? Plain and hills are capable of a hundred shades that with the changing light slip over the face of the land and melt into a subtlety no words can reproduce. The light here is a living thing, as varied as the human temperament and as hard to capture; now lowering, now gay, now sensuous, now tender. (89)

The phrases she does employ to give a sense of her surroundings are modernist in style. The feeling of immediacy transcribed in her present participles and her repetition of the word “now” may remind us of Woolf’s own writing style which Sackville-West so deeply admired.9

It is not surprising that Woolf felt so moved by Passenger to Teheran that day in September 1926, likely envious not only of Sackville-West’s travels, but also of the work she had produced.10 Sackville-West’s narrative used Woolf’s ideas about how to capture an image in writing to create a new form of literature inspired by the experience of travel. Most significantly, Woolf was seeing not only Persia but also Passenger as a space of exploration when she wrote of its “nooks and corners which I enjoy exploring.” A new relationship was coming into being—not only between two women, but also between these women’s writings. One can only wonder whether passages near the end of Woolf’s To The Lighthouse, a novel focused around the anticipation of a journey, might have been inspired partly by Sackville-West’s narrative. The last scenes of that novel revolve around the idea of an imaginative construction of a place in the mind. When James and Cam at last reach the lighthouse, it is not what they had imagined: “So it was like that, James thought, the Lighthouse one had seen across the bay all these years; it was a stark tower on a bare rock” (203). Comparing it to his preconception, he thinks, “No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other Lighthouse was true too” (186). This may remind us of Sackville-West’s comment that “a place that we knew in childhood can be “dispelled . . . under the fresh but not necessarily truer impression of our actual beholding” (Passenger 12). Cam similarly sees how the island, too, becomes changed when viewed from the sea: “It was like that then, the island. . . . She had never seen it from out at sea before” (188). Suddenly, Cam’s imagination inspires her to travel, lighting up the geographies of her mind:

What then came next? Where were they going? . . . And the drops falling from this sudden and unthinking fountain of joy fell here and there on the dark, the slumbrous shapes in her mind; shapes of a world not realised but turning in
Although Cam has never seen these foreign places, they suddenly become real for her. Woolf was similarly inspired by Sackville-West’s journey, able to finish *To the Lighthouse* after visualizing her journey’s end, just as imagining the Ramsays reaching the lighthouse finally gives Lily the imaginative drive to finish her painting.

The one criticism of *Passenger to Teheran* that Woolf confided to Sackville-West was that it had “one or two dangling dim places” and “sometimes one wants a candle in one’s hand” (Sackville-West, *Letters* 140). Despite the fact that the text is not called “Passage to Teheran” but “Passenger to Teheran,” highlighting the voyager rather than the voyage, there is something “dark,” hidden about Sackville-West in her own text. In her “Introductory,” Sackville-West writes, “Who amongst us could boast that, transplanted into the mind of another person, even though that person be his nearest, he would not find himself in a strange country . . .?” (16). Sackville-West might have meant this as a challenge to Woolf, presenting her mind as a “strange country” for exploration. Woolf perhaps responds to this in her 15 September 1926 letter to Sackville-West, where she remarks, possibly only partly in jest, that as she read *Passenger* she was thinking to herself, “‘How I should like to know this woman’ and then thinking ‘But I do’, and then ‘No, I don’t ——— not altogether the woman who writes this’” (Sackville-West, *Letters* 139). It is not surprising that the next novel Woolf began was about Sackville-West herself, writing it as she awaited letters from Sackville-West’s second trip to Persia.11

Critics have suggested numerous reasons for Woolf writing *Orlando* (1928), but one of the most compelling is Suzanne Raitt’s suggestion that, “in writing Sackville-West’s life, she established her own claim to it. By writing Sackville-West’s life for her, Woolf recaptured Sackville-West” (34). Woolf subtitles *Orlando* “a biography” and even includes several images of Orlando that are actually photographs of Sackville-West.12 What becomes especially interesting about *Orlando* is how Woolf tries to pin down Sackville-West in a way that *Passenger to Teheran* does not. In the original 1926 text of *Passenger*, there are a number of photographs scattered throughout of buildings, Persian rugs, and Middle Eastern people, but an image of Sackville-West herself is not among them.13 She does not make a choice for her own self-decoration. Instead, she writes that the more she sees of Persia, the more “the life of England falls away” and she finds herself asking “What am I? and where am I?” (*Passenger* 106). Woolf takes it upon herself to answer these questions for Sackville-West in *Orlando*.

Perhaps we can see something of Sackville-West’s influence in the structure of *Orlando*, which does not fit neatly into the category of either novel or biography. We might connect her attempt to recreate the form of the travel narrative to Woolf’s attempt to revise the biography. Woolf writes in Chapter 3 of *Orlando*, the chapter in which Orlando leaves to become ambassador to Constantinople, that sometimes, when facts are lacking, it is “necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even to make use of the imagination” (119). Certainly, the idea of recreation through imagination is central to *Passenger to Teheran*. Perhaps most significantly, the text approaches a form of travel narrative; like Sackville-West, Orlando travels, and these excursions take him/her into foreign spaces enlarged by fantasy and colored by *eros*.14 We are reminded of Sackville-West’s insight in *Passenger* that
“the link between two persons must indeed be close before one of them is really eager to visualize the background against which the other moves” (11). Woolf’s intimate textual connection to Sackville-West and her wanderings allow her to visualize her own version of the East and of Sackville-West herself.

When we look closer, too, we can see how Orlando is not only a parody of the biographical form but also, on occasion, a parody of Sackville-West’s own writing. In Orlando, we find the young poet wrestling with description in a manner similar to Sackville-West in Passenger to Teheran, where she writes, “the plain is brown, the mountains blue or white”:

“The sky is blue,” he said, “the grass is green.” Looking up, he saw that, on the contrary, the sky is like the veils which a thousand Madonnas have let fall from their hair; and the grass fleets and darkens like a flight of girls fleeing the embraces of hairy satyrs from enchanted woods. . . . And he despaired of being able to solve the problem of what poetry is and fell into a deep dejection. (102)

Woolf is having a little laugh at both the poet’s visionary ability (which is floridly exaggerated) and his “dejection,” a poet who sounds remarkably like Sackville-West. Thus do we find a complex cycle of Woolf parodying Sackville-West imitating Woolf, until it is impossible to tell where one writer’s influence starts and the other’s ceases.

In the end, we must see these two women writers as equally exploratory, making parallel adventures. Although Woolf’s writing is better known today, something new can be gained by reading these women’s works in tandem. Passenger to Teheran is essentially modernist in nature, moving away from the limitations of literary realism by exploring the landscapes of the mind; Woolf’s fascination with the text likely stems from its unique engagement with a subjective experience of travel and its modernist style, which is as exploratory as one of Woolf’s own novels. The close connections between these women’s works remind us that the pathways to creation of new forms of art are rarely linear. I believe that Sackville-West’s words speak for both women’s quests when, in Passenger to Teheran, she draws a connection between the exploration of unknown geographical space and literary space, saying, “So one is drawn onward, over miles of country as over reams of paper, and still there is a hill to climb, and still a sentence to write, and no reason why either should ever come to an end, so long as something remains to be discovered beyond” (98–99).

Notes

I would like to thank Helen Southworth and Suzanne Raitt for their helpful comments on this essay.

1. Woolf writes in her “Wednesday 15 September” diary entry, subtitled “A State of Mind,” of her early morning fight against a “wave” of horror enveloping her (D3: 110).

2. This is included in Woolf’s 28 September entry, where when she notes parenthetically of To the Lighthouse, “(finished provisionally, Sept 16th)” (D3: 111).

3. Although Raitt’s study does not specifically look at Sackville-West’s travel narratives, there are a few critics who have examined her travel works alongside Woolf’s works. See especially Louise A. DeSalvo’s “Lighting the Cave.” DeSalvo includes Sackville-West’s travel narratives in her overview of the interrelationships of the women’s works from the time of their meeting until Woolf’s death. See also Susan Bazaragan’s “The Uses of the Land: Vita Sackville-West’s Pastoral Writings and Virginia Woolf’s Orlando,” which looks specifically at the influences of Passenger to Teheran, Twelve Days, and Vita’s poem The Land on Woolf’s Orlando (1928).
4. Most of the selections in Morris’s book are extracts from letters and from Woolf’s diary, but Morris also includes several short travel pieces Woolf published in magazines.

5. For a discussion of the impact of Elizabethan travel narratives on Woolf’s work, see Alice Fox’s *Virginia Woolf and the Literature of the English Renaissance*.

6. Perhaps *Mrs. Dalloway*, too, can be seen as a kind of travel narrative, but one, like Sackville-West’s, that explores more interior spaces than exterior ones. The threads between travel narrative and modernist novel grow tighter, too, when we consider Clarissa Dalloway as a kind of flâneuse wandering through London. Sackville-West seems to have visualized Woolf’s novel as a journey with Woolf, for she wrote of it, “the first surprise of following you along an unknown road is over” (*Letters* 59).

7. *The Land* became the text that, as Victoria Glendinning writes, “out-Bloomsburied Bloomsbury” (141), being reviewed more favorably and enjoyed more widely than Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and winning the prestigious but conventional-minded Hawthornden Prize in 1927. Woolf satirizes *The Land* in *Orlando*, where it becomes “The Oak Tree.”

8. For additional thoughts on Sackville-West’s travel narrative, especially as one comprised of imaginary spaces, please see my article, “Increasingly ‘Imaginative Geographies’: Excursions into Otherness, Fantasy, and Modernism in Early Twentieth Century Women’s Travel Writing.”

9. For instance, Sackville-West read *Mrs. Dalloway* in May of 1925 and later expressed in admiration of Woolf’s novel: “There is 100% more poetry in one page of Mrs. Dalloway (which you thought I didn’t like) than in a whole section of my damned poem” (*Letters* 64).

10. In a later diary entry on 12 February 1927, Woolf criticizes Sackville-West’s prose in *Passenger* as “too fluent,” remarking that she would have devised a clearer “method of attack” (*D*3: 126). I agree with DeSalvo who remarks that there seems a “hint of envy at Vita’s ability to toss off books so quickly and effortlessly” (202).

11. This timing is noted by Karen Lawrence in “Orlando’s Voyage Out.”

12. See Talia Schaffer for an analysis of these photos.

13. This fact was apparently so unsettling to Sackville-West’s friends and family that a 1990 reprint of *Passenger* by her son, Nigel Nicolson, includes photographs of Sackville-West that were not originally part of her narrative.

14. For an extended look at the idea of travel in *Orlando*, see Karen Lawrence’s “Woolf’s Voyages Out” in her *Penelopes Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*.

**Works Cited**


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THEY CAME TO BAGHDAD: WOOLF AND SACKVILLE-WEST’S LEVANT

by Joanna Grant

“W

ho knows what it is that draws one person to another?” Nan Astley muses upon meeting fellow Tom Florence Banner in the BBC version of Sarah Waters’ period lesbian romp Tipping the Velvet. In the case of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West, one factor in their increasing intimacy in the 1920s was a vision of “Vita stalking in her Turkish dress, attended by small boys” (D3: 125). Sackville-West, like her fictional counterpart Orlando, embodies an eccentric blending of the masculine and the feminine, the domestic and the exotic, one signaled by Vita’s assumption of her Turkish garments.

References to the alternately gorgeous and squalid Middle East, from North Africa to the Persian Gulf, recur with astonishing regularity in the fictional and nonfictional worlds of both Virginia Woolf and her friend and lover Vita Sackville-West. The two women writers share this preoccupation with many other modernist writers, although they experience it and express it in their own ways. My central contention is that the concept of the Middle East—its architectural and geographical features, the bodies and fashions of its natives—becomes a means of figuring the pull of same-sex desire for Woolf, Sackville-West, and other of their queer contemporaries. Woolf and Sackville-West’s orientalist fantasies typify the range of intellectual and emotional bonds with the Middle East that can be seen in the works of modernist writers; while Sackville-West explored much of the Levant and the Persian Gulf, Woolf remained much more of an armchair traveler, encountering the East primarily through its representations in travel writing, fiction, and other forms of literature and art.

Much work has been done on modernism and orientalism since the release of Edward Said’s seminal text of the same name in 1978. Although that volume had much to say about Western constructions of and involvements in the Middle East, to a large extent “orientalism” as a critical term has largely confined its focus to the Far East, just as postcolonial studies of Empire and its subject populations has focused primarily on India, Africa, and the territories of the New World. Less attention has been paid to modernist fascination with the Middle East and the Levantine/Arab Other. I argue for the importance of Arabist fantasies in the modernist imaginary, and for the necessity of situating individual authors’ “takes” on this body of texts and received images in the historical and ideological contexts of contemporary discourses of civilization, its pleasures and its discontents.

The Anglo-American prose writers I examine in the larger study from which this present piece is excerpted—authors including D. H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, Richard Aldington, T. E. Lawrence, Paul Bowles, and Lawrence Durrell—partake of narratives of the rigors and regenerations to be found in desert spaces going back to the writings of the Desert Fathers. Those ascetics inaugurate a genealogy of eccentrics, explorers, madmen, philosophers, archaeologists, poets, painters, and novelists sharing the conviction, albeit often an uneasy one, that the path to true rebirth and regeneration for a Western civiliza-
tion seen as degenerate or even inimical lies in communion with what is often construed as its opposite, the desert wastes of the Middle East. My authors, I argue, view their conceptions of the Middle East with a mixture of fear and fascination.

Just as seductive visions of noble Bedouins and of domes and minarets out of the Arabian Nights can tip over into nightmare visions of flies, sores, and ruins, acts of identification with the Other—“the detour through the other that defines a self,” as Diana Fuss describes it (2)—can devolve into annihilation of the self. Thus we see that modernist involvements with the figure of the simultaneously superhuman and the subhuman-becoming-inhuman Arab Other transcend mere primitivism and cliché, becoming a means of working out solutions to the old problem of how to live in the world. This problem was rendered all the more pressing due to the traumas of war and social unrest scarring early twentieth-century culture.

A consideration of Woolf’s and Sackville-West’s personal and professional relationships and their shared interest in the Middle East that finds its way into their writings provides a point of entry for an exploration of these writers’ involvements in discourses of civilization and orientalism, degeneration and regeneration. Their works, especially Woolf’s Orlando (1928) and Sackville-West’s Passenger to Teheran (1926) and Twelve Days (1928), demonstrate how the woman writer can utilize identification with an exotic Other as a means of escaping stultifying Western gender roles and social conventions, which are seen as symptoms of a sick civilization, and as a way to revel in a Sapphic intimacy both private and public. The kind of hiding-in-plain-sight performed by texts such as these is enabled both by strategic reticence and confession in the texts themselves as well as the half-mainstream, half-coterie nature of the image of the Middle Eastern Other in the 1920s, the decade of what has been termed the “chic of Araby” (Melman, Women and the Popular Imagination, 90-1). The Levant emerges in the writings of these two women as a kind of eroticized fantasy space, one in which they can take on the kinds of indeterminate, sex-changing, race-changing roles embodied by figures like Rudolph Valentino, the Italian “tango pirate” turned “Sheik of Araby.”

I think it would be a mistake, though, to read Woolf and Sackville-West’s Levant as purely an escapist fantasyland or subject territory appropriated for their own purposes by two female imperialists. A more subtle, nuanced reading of this imaginary geography is required, one enabled by work such as Phyllis Lassner’s Colonial Strangers, a text that traces the hesitations and ambivalences marking British women writers’ encounters with the primarily male institutions of Empire on the one hand and the alien, difficult to access subjectivities of “native” populations on the other. Lassner also argues for the importance of reading British women authors’ Middle Eastern fictions back into the record of critical narratives of literary history and theory, although her focus is on the literature of World War II and not on modernism per se. The extent to which the writing of World War II constitutes an end of or an intensification of the primary attributes of the various modernisms deserves to be dealt with in greater depth elsewhere. In the meantime, her work on the novels of Olivia Manning and of Muriel Spark adds another theatre, as it were, to our literary responses to the long goodbye to Empire. Lassner does not write about Woolf’s or Sackville-West’s Middle Eastern writings in Colonial Strangers, as I do in this piece, but her realization that British women writers’ fictions of the Middle East, their records of the cultural encounters resulting from conflicting interests, reward us “with newly expanded
meanings of ‘in-between’” underwrites my own project (10).

In the case of the shared topos of Woolf’s and Sackville-West’s Middle East, the pleasures and perils of identification with the “Arab,” disavowal of European origin, and investment in Empire turns on the question of civilization. The negative view of civilization as a compendium of stultifying conventions enabling the institutionalized oppression of women fires the urge to opt out, to identify with a purer, nobler being and a way of life more conducive to real civilization, an ascetic kind of contemplation and purification of the self. But what, then, of Englishness, of tradition, of history, of the pageant of English literature that both women wished to become part of? These are the issues at stake in Woolf’s and Sackville-West’s returns to the origins of Western civilization.

The socio-intellectual context enabling such identifications has been illuminated by the work of Billie Melman and Kathryn Tidrick. Tidrick’s *Heart-Beguiling Araby* remains a foundational text for scholars in this area. She concerns herself with two related phenomena: the fascination exercised upon certain Englishmen by the Arabian desert and its inhabitants, and the development of the notion that Englishmen possessed an intuitive understanding of Arabs which gave them a special right, even an obligation, to interfere in their affairs. (1)

Her cartographies of affinity and exploitation guide all subsequent investigations of Western representations of the Middle East and its inhabitants. Billie Melman’s work also remains an invaluable point of origin; her *Women’s Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718–1918* complements Tidrick’s chronicle of male penetration of the desert wastes, retelling the distaff side of this history. Her review essay on “The Middle East/Arabia: ‘The Cradle of Islam’” in the *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* underlines the dynamic of attraction and repulsion animating this discourse, one I trace in my close readings of my selected modernist texts.¹

I should acknowledge some of the difficulties inherent in making generalizations about reading women’s fashions as declarations of lesbian self-identification.² However, as Kirstie Blair argues in an article on Woolf, Sackville-West, and Violet Trefusis’ identifications with the figure of the female gypsy, such pledging of allegiances to a favored type or character can function as “a hint of same-sex desire . . . one means of blurring the boundaries between same and other, familiar and strange . . . feed[ing] into an emerging homoerotic discourse” (1–2).

Blair concerns herself with the figure of the female gypsy; I submit, however, that her conceptual framework holds true for the figure of the Middle Eastern Other as well. Indeed, the signifiers gypsy and Arab, Levantine, Turk, and Egyptian bleed into each other in curious ways in this cultural field. Blair points out that the word gypsy was thought to have evolved from the word Egyptian, a belief used as evidence to substantiate the “much-discussed myth that the Romany race descended from an ancient Eastern tribe” (2). This linkage of the gypsy and the Egyptian is typical of a tendency towards what we might call a pastiche of primitivisms in modernist cultural productions. For example, the infamous first performance of Igor Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* featured Nijinsky and the other dancers of Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes dressed as Red Indians. Diaghilev’s dancers also performed the ballets *Cléopâtre*, choreographed by Michael Fokine, and *Schehérazade*, with
They Came to Baghdad

music by Nicholai Rimsky-Korsakov. We see here further evidence of what we may call the synthetic primitivism of Modernism, the tendency to layer primitive landscapes and characters like transparencies. Of course, this tendency is abetted in the above example by the geographical proximity of Russia to the contested territories of Asia Minor.

Evelyn Haller has described the impact of the Russian dancers and their gorgeous displays of oriental pageantry on Virginia Stephen, who “attended artists’ revels dressed as Cleopatra in the summer of 1909” (“Her Quill” 183). By dressing as Cleopatra, the young Woolf proclaims her kinship with the exotic, sensual, defiant Egyptian queen and the Russian dancers who performed her story. As Haller states, “to respond to the Russian dancers was to emerge from ossified forms of Victorian and Edwardian artistic and cultural constraints into a new sensibility” (“Her Quill” 182). The image of Cleopatra lingers in Woolf’s mind and work from her youth to her swan song, *Between the Acts* (1941), in which Mrs. Swithin says to the playwright Miss La Trobe that “you’ve made me feel I could have played . . . Cleopatra!” (114). Here we can see the productive tensions between models of civilization that I alluded to before.

One of Bloomsbury’s core principles was the rejection of prudery, of hypocrisy, of any habit of thought or being resulting in the hampering of free intercourse and the exchange of ideas. Of course, the extent to which the Bloomsberries managed to achieve this goal is debatable, and we might assert that the Bloomsbury commitment to civilization defined as the refined discourse and productions of a mandarin class seemed to recapitulate the kinds of social and sexual divisions the Bloomsberries were ostensibly against. For the moment, however, let us content ourselves with the observation that identification with the Eastern Other serves the young Woolf as a means of crystallizing her thinking about the question of self and other, domestic and foreign, which I have been discussing. It is fascinating to compare Woolf’s donning of the Cleopatra costume with the young Sackville-West’s assumption of Eastern garb for her performance as a “young Caliph with a blacked-up face in the ‘Persian Play’” performed as private theatricals for an aristocratic audience in 1913; Violet Trefusis played her slave girl (Glendinning 53).

We may interpret this role-playing as a dress rehearsal of Sackville-West’s for a role she would play both on and off the page. Victoria Glendinning describes this role as that of “the V. Sackville-West hero, who was to reappear in almost all her fiction” (89). One of the first of a long line of the Sackville-West heroes was Rawdon Westmacott of *Heritage*; although he is from Kent, like Vita herself, he is “a Bedouin in corduroy, with a thin, fierce face, the grace of an antelope, and the wildness of a hawk” (qtd. in Glendinning 89). The Sackville-West hero, a transgendered version of Vita herself, has much in common with the Byronic hero, another avatar of the brooding, cruel, “defiant, swashbuckling” hero who refuses to bow to the dictates of polite society, whatever the cost (Glendinning 89). We should recall that Byron had himself painted in Eastern dress; according to Christine Kenyon Jones, “the Phillips Albanian portrait . . . reflected the identification with the East in which Byron had . . . invested heavily” (131).

Emily W. Leider reveals that a later avatar of Byron’s “lustful Turk” (national borders are porous in this context) was Rudolph Valentino, the devastatingly sexy Sheik of Araby, who claimed to have psychically channeled Byron (242–43). The bisexual Byron and the possibly bisexual Valentino provide ambiguously sexed role models for Sackville-West, ones whose orientalism provides a figure for the pull of same-sex desire and whose particu-
lar brand of masculinity provides the template for a kind of female masculinity permitting
the inclusion of feminine characteristics. While I have been unable to find any evidence of
Woolf’s or of Sackville-West’s having read E. M. Hull’s “Sheik” novels (The Sheik [1919]
and The Sons of the Sheik [1926]) or watching the Valentino films made from them (The
Sheik [1921] and The Son of the Sheik [1926]), some of Sackville-West’s comments to
Woolf in a letter of 15 March 1926 nonetheless make us wonder. Sackville-West writes
that Persia (where she is working on what will become Passenger to Teheran), “this ancient
country . . . this is the place for you. Indeed, if you won’t come by kindness, I shall have
to make you come by main force . . . carry[ing] you off in the little blue motor” (Letters,
116–17). In The Sheik, of course, Ahmed Ben Hassan, who happens to be the son of an
English lord, kidnaps the boyish yet beautiful Lady Diana Mayo and subjects her to his
smoldering passions. Sackville-West certainly seems to be positioning herself to play what
Melman describes as the role of “a virile, sensual male, a priapic, violent lover who masters
females by sexual prowess and physical force” (Popular Imagination 89). We shouldn’t
ignore the element of play acting here, of campy, tongue-in-cheek humor.

Of course, Woolf also famously disguised herself as a Middle Eastern man—an Abys-
sinian, to be precise—as part of the infamous Dreadnought Hoax of 1910. The exploit
ridiculed the establishment, obsessed as it was with anything relating to the security and
smooth functioning of British concerns to do with the crucial Suez Canal, Persian Gulf
oil reserves, and spheres of influence. As we see in her short story “A Society” (1921), her
part in the Dreadnought Hoax was undertaken as a kind of performative protest against
the current state of her civilization. Woolf’s experiments with Eastern female masculinity
do not seem to have stretched to as uncritical an acceptance of “Byromania” as Sackville-
West’s; in The Waves (1931), Woolf holds Bernard up to gentle ridicule for his Byronic
affectations. Neville knows Bernard well: “You have been reading Byron. You have been
marking the passages that seem to approve of your own character” (TW 86). Identification
with Byron is rendered here as undergraduate affectation, which has its attractions but
which cannot be accepted wholeheartedly after a certain age.

Woolf’s own particular attraction to desert discourse derives from an association of
that arid zone with the tradition of pilgrimage and exploration and the leitmotif of eccen-
tricity embodied and espoused by the singular individuals who tramped through the des-
erts of the Middle East on their own esoteric mission. In a 1905 review of Gilbert Watson’s
The Voice of the South, “A Description of the Desert,” Woolf remarks that the “vast desert
appears to soothe the mind into a state of philosophic calm, and from the serene height of
a camel’s back you behold all things dispassionately and yet with a humorous sense of their
incongruities” (72). In her imagination, the desert becomes a fitting arena for the quixotic
and quirky feats of “The Eccentrics” (1919), those who “are persuaded—and who shall say
that they are wrong?—that it is the rest of the world who are cramped and malformed and
spiritually decrepit” (38). These glorious failures have “invariably been worsted” by the
“triumph of civilization” (“Eccentrics” 38), yet their examples gratify and inspire Woolf,
especially the example of desert traveler Lady Hester Stanhope:

Lady Hester indeed kept her white horse perpetually in readiness for the Messiah
in her stable. How often, sitting alone in her castle at the top of Mount Lebanon
. . . puffing blue clouds of smoke from her hookah, did she not . . . enjoy in fancy
the consternation with which Lord Palmerston and Queen Victoria received the news! (“Eccentrics” 40)

Lady Hester Stanhope seems to have become part of the shared space of the East for Woolf and Sackville-West; Sackville-West writes to Woolf from Teheran in 1927, “I think Lady Hester Stanhope must have had a good life” (Letters 187).

Stories of female eccentricity and voluntary self-displacement to the deserts of the East supplement and inform the bonds of love and friendship joining Woolf and Sackville-West. The texts coming out of this period of their greatest intimacy—Passenger to Teheran, Orlando, and Twelve Days—evidence the women writers’ disaffection with their shared construction of contemporary civilization and a sense that the desert wastes might provide a means of redress. Additionally, the half-concealed, half-revealed Sapphic sexuality associated with the East in their writings, a web of orientalist reference and metaphor built up over the course of their careers, facilitates their shared negotiations of intimacy and stardom—an example of coded/coterie gay literature going mainstream, as it were.

For example, when Sackville-West writes to Woolf that she has “worn a silk dress one day, and a sheepskin and fur cap the next” (Letters 112), that she has been “blinded by diamonds [and] been in Aladdin’s cave” (Letters 120), and that she wishes to “recite Hafiz to you, bring you silks and scents, and make myself generally agreeable,” and when Woolf responds, “How odd it is—the effect geography has in the mind!” (Sackville-West, Letters 123), we see the extent to which Orientalist rhetoric and role-playing is braided with same-sex desire. This network of reference is also present in Sackville-West’s The Land (1927), which she completed in Persia. Snippets from this poem are quoted in Orlando, their authorship ascribed to the female Orlando of the nineteenth century. The joke of double authorship, as well as that of a hero(ine) of both sexes, simultaneously draws attention to and away from the novel’s lesbian themes. Same-sex desire is alluded to in the persons of the Egyptians described in the quotation. Orlando/Vita writes of a field of “snaky flower[s]” “scarfed in dull purple, like Egyptian girls—” (O 265). Orientalist androgyny as a means of figuring same-sex desire may be found in the novel’s lingering glimpses of the “Turkish trousers” (O 153) worn by both sexes of the gypsies living outside of Constantinople and by the Russian Sasha in her “cloak and trousers, booted like a man” (O 59).

This erotic thrill is inseparable from the fantasy of escaping the negative construction of civilization I have alluded to above, one that looms large for Sackville-West as she contemplates the provincial pettiness of tourists and diplomatic personages, “foreigners with the whole complexity of civilisation seething in their brains” (Passenger 39). This nightmare vision of Empire finds its dark apotheosis in the rising damp of Orlando’s vision of the nineteenth century and the “excrescences” of the “indecent . . . hideous . . . monumental” (O 232) pile of bric-a-brac that seems to force the “sexes [to] dr[a]w further and further apart,” the antithesis of life on the hills outside of Constantinople (O 229).

Such a shared distaste for convention also finds its way into Sackville-West’s moonlight encounter in the ruined Temple of Karnak at Luxor on her way to Persia in Passenger to Teheran. In this strange, magical atmosphere, Vita encounters an apparition:

Piled on fantastic ruin, obelisks pricked the sky . . . out of the awful shadows, came suddenly a human voice, insistent, clamant for recognition. “I am a twin,”
it said. I turned, and beheld a figure in noble draperies standing beside me in a patch of light. (45)

In the contexts of civilization, regeneration, orientalism, and identification I have been discussing, this set piece scintillates. The Other has appeared and seems to be claiming the white subject in a gesture of affinity, one duplicated in Orlando after the ex-ambassador quits the budding Empire and takes to the hills with her gypsies (O 140). Seamless identifications would seem to have been effected.

However, difficulties soon raise their ugly heads. The mysterious Bedouin turns out to be Sackville-West’s servant, one who doesn’t have his mistress in mind as his new twin at all; he’s speaking of his own twin brother back home (Passenger 46). This non sequitur, one difficult to make sense of for Sackville-West, symbolizes the utter difference separating her from the natives she encounters, just as Orlando’s clumsy efforts to speak of beauty in the gypsy tongue arouse first the derision and then the distrust of her would-be brethren. The problem of civilization is a thorny one, and Woolf and Sackville-West both find themselves unwilling to give up Western civilization’s more positive attributes: art, literature, and philosophy. The hope remains that convention and culture can be separated, but this process remains fraught with difficulty, as both writers realize. For all of the persistence of her desire to abandon England, “to start afresh; unprejudiced; untaught” (Twelve Days 79), Sackville-West feels this estrangement as well when she contemplates the distance of experience, origin, and education separating her from the native Persians. When Sackville-West tries to photograph a beautiful young native girl, her subject “utter[s] a piercing scream . . . and fle[es] for her life” (Twelve Days 94). Sackville-West shrinks from the thought that, to the girl’s eyes, she is a foreign invader. In her own defense, she writes of her real, empirical knowledge of the country “whose contours I have learnt, whose clefts I have contemplated, enviously, running up into the mountains and had no leisure to explore” (Twelve Days 82).

Weirdly enough, possession of this eroticized landscape seems to have been wrested from Sackville-West by the Empire-builders, the politicians and businessmen pursuing Britain’s interests in the gulf. At the end of the journey across the Bakhtiari Mountains in Twelve Days, the writer encounters a nightmare vision of “the Company,—the smoke of the oil-fields—civilisation” (97). The oil drill “probes and bores” the land, a violation of its integrity (123). This vision finds an echo to its horror in the conclusion of Woolf’s Between the Acts, another evocation of the sexual impulse gone wrong: “[Their] enmity was bared; also love. . . . But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night” (160). Sackville-West ends her own narrative with a Cassandra-like prediction of Britain’s imperial decline. Standing amid the ruins of Persepolis, she contemplates this “dead world, as befits the sepulchre of an imperial race” (Twelve Days 134). Both the aristocratic Sackville-West and the mandarin Woolf would go on from the 1920s to forge their own uneasy compromises with Britain’s imperial legacy, compromises and negotiations rewarding scholarly attention in our own complex historical moment.
Notes

1. The longer works by Tidrick and Melman that I have just cited have been complemented in recent years by shorter studies of great relevance to my own chosen topic. See Evelyn Haller’s “Alexandria as Envisioned by Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster: An Essay in Gendered History,” Julia Briggs’ “Constantinople: Virginia Woolf at the Crossroads of the Imagination,” and David Roessel’s “The Significance of Constantinople in Orlando.”

2. As Laura Doan’s work on masculine dress and lesbian identity in Fashioning Sapphism (2001) tells us, before the “public exposure” of the Well of Loneliness obscenity trial in 1928, “when gender deviation became entangled with chic . . . lesbianism in any formulation was not yet generally connected with style or image” (xiv).

3. In his Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age (1990), Modris Eksteins describes the excitement felt by a generation of artists and aesthetes who experienced the spectacle of the Russian dancers’ interpretations of the gorgeous Middle East:

   In 1911, to escape from the perpetual problems of borrowing dancers from their regular companies and to achieve some independence, Diaghilev formed his own company, the Ballets Russes de Diaghilev, and over the next years, 1911 to 1913, the ballet toured Europe—Monte Carlo, Rome, Berlin, London, Vienna, Budapest—and left a trail of excitement, incredulity, and rapture. Many young aesthetes recorded their exuberance. . . . Harold Acton described that production: “. . . the heavy calm before the storm in the harem: the thunder and lightning of negroes in rose and amber; the fierce orgy of clamorous caresses; the final panic and bloody retributions: death in long-drawn spasms to piercing violins, Rimsky-Korsakov painted the tragedy; Bakst hung it with emerald curtains and silver lamps and carpeted it with rugs from Bokhara and silken cushions; Nijinsky and Karsavina made it live. For many a young artist Schéhérazade was an inspiration equivalent to Gothic architecture for the Romantics or Quattrocento frescoes for the pre-Raphaelites.” (Eksteins 26)

4. The “sons” of Hull’s title were condensed into one role in the movie version of the novel. Valentino played both an older Sheik Ben Hassan and Ahmed, that Sheik’s son, with Diana Mayo.

5. In his essay “The Significance of Constantinople in Orlando,” David Roessel argues that, for Woolf, “Constantinople was a multivalent symbol encompassing three of the most significant forces in her life, Sapphic love, death and war” (1). The case for Orlando as an example of coterie literature with a lesbian subtext “passing” as mainstream can be made if we consider the importance of self-conscious playfulness in Woolf’s text:

   The fact that Woolf does not make plain the implications of her literary game [the setting of Orlando’s sex change scene in Constantinople, a city Woolf associates with Sackville-West and the transgendered Sackville-West hero Julian Davenant of Challenge, her autobiographical novel chronicling her love affair with Violet Trefusis] or make direct mention of Challenge should come as no surprise. For while the biographer could loudly announce the truth, in actuality Woolf could only offer it in a cryptic way, because the social forces which prevented publication of Challenge and The Well of Loneliness were still a common concern (Knopp 27–28). The connection between Orlando and Challenge had to remain an inside joke, so that the tribe of the respectable would find nothing to excite them. The popularity of Orlando shows that they did not. (Roessel 401)

Works Cited


Part Six:
Exploring Art and Empire
It is almost an axiom that books take on inflated value in English travel literature. In addition to providing entertainment, the books a traveler reads abroad serve to signal education and socioeconomic status to fellow vacationers. Virginia Woolf’s first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), details gender and class struggles fought by English vacationers in a South American town with the weapons of book titles and literary references. Instead of sailing down the Amazon with her father, businessman Willoughby Vinrace, inexperienced twenty-four-year-old Rachel Vinrace opts for an extended vacation with her aunt Helen and uncle Ridley Ambrose in the imaginary colonial town of Santa Marina, where she gets engaged, falls ill, and eventually dies. In the months before her death, several vacationers make efforts to induce and shape her intellectual and sentimental growth, devoting particular attention to her afternoon reading. Due to their inflated value, books also serve Rachel’s would-be mentors as tests of her progress and capabilities. Before her death, Rachel turns away from literature and questions the criteria by which her peers judge her. This rejection of literature, frequently lauded as subversive, entails a personal death that both precedes and shadows her physical demise. Rachel’s end is the result of a willful blindness toward the possibilities of reading, a blindness that, I argue, Woolf would not endorse.

Edward Gibbon’s mammoth *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is one of a cluster of pointed intertextual references in *The Voyage Out* that serve to dramatize the complexity of class and gender politics in Edwardian culture. Early in the novel, Richard and Clarissa Dalloway appear briefly on the *Euphrosyne* and make the first endeavor to mold Rachel’s values and attitudes through illicit kisses (Richard) and the gift of Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* (bequeathed by Clarissa but endorsed by both). However, Helen calculatedly dismisses the Dalloways’ manners and strategically cancels the effects of their appearance on Rachel, who values Helen’s opinions as those of a “mature person” (82). Alarmed by Rachel’s naïveté, Helen asks Willoughby to let his daughter stay with her and Ridley in Santa Marina. Helen decides that Rachel needs a mentor, but suspects that a man would do a better job. Although not particularly fond of women, she pays Rachel an understated compliment when she recognizes that she is “more or less a reasonable human being” and therefore worthy of both concern and cultivation (97).

The position of mentor is quickly filled. Shortly after the *Euphrosyne* lands in Santa Marina, fellow vacationer and young Cambridge scholar St. John Hirst bluntly questions Rachel about her education while casually conversing at the hotel party: “About books now. What have you read? Just Shakespeare and the Bible?” (156). When Rachel admits that she hasn’t read “many classics,” he instructs her to read Gibbon, implying that it is essential reading for the modern woman (156). He voices doubts that she will understand the multivolume eighteenth-century classic, yet makes her appreciation a test of her intellectual capabilities and perhaps those of her gender as well: “He’s the test of course . . .” (156).
Ultimately, Rachel’s attempt to read *Decline and Fall* measures her commitment to empire, class, and gender roles as her fellow vacationers follow her progress with the first volume. She dies as a woman who “reached the age of twenty-four without reading Gibbon,” and is thus associated with bad taste and ignorance (156). Christine Froula has argued that Rachel’s failure to appreciate—indeed, to get beyond a single page of—the *Decline and Fall* indicates resistance to literary standards drawn by the male upper class and qualifies her as an unwitting social critic. She claims that Rachel’s rejection of Gibbon represents “not a single woman’s initiation but the prospect of Rachel/Woolf’s augmenting the books of the world” (151). More recently, Andrea Lewis has sought to qualify Rachel’s resistance by investigating her complicity with the cultural world she is ostensibly rejecting: “How are we to read the politics of race and class in the work of a white English woman writing about an essentially white English experience in an historical moment when England enjoyed the status of global authority?” (106). When answering Lewis’ question, we must refrain from identifying Rachel’s response to Gibbon and to literature in general as either a transparent endorsement or a transparent rejection of masculine hegemony and cultural and political imperialism. Rachel’s position, as well as Hirst’s, is decidedly more ambiguous.

Nearly every vacationer takes an interest in Rachel’s growth as a woman, be it a maternal, didactic, or sexual interest, or some combination of the three. Rachel’s education—both sentimental and scholarly—is clearly something that begs to be remedied. After a typically harsh initial evaluation of her looks and intelligence, she is excused as a naïve woman, young for her years. In many ways, she appears to the Santa Marina vacationers like the Enlightenment wild child, the hypothetical youth raised without human contact on whom philosophers hoped to test pedagogical theories. But Rachel, the narrator instructs us, comes from the Elizabethan era, not the *Urwald*. Her mind is in “the state of an intelligent man’s in the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth,” her cursory knowledge coupled with extreme gullibility, “by dreams and ideas of the most extravagant and foolish description” (29). Throughout the novel, her education is a point of departure for debates about women’s rights, women’s education, sexuality, and suffrage. Clarissa Dalloway, Helen, Hirst, and Terence Hewet—Hirst’s friend and Rachel’s eventual fiancé—all harbor visions of ideal contemporary womanhood, and each attempts to mentor and supervise her.

Incappable of dancing with Rachel at the hotel party, Hirst directs their conversation to books, curing his discomfort with pious-seeming outrage. Claiming at the hotel dance that “few things at the present time matter more than the enlightenment of women,” he apparently seeks to remedy Rachel’s spotty education with his offer of Gibbon (166). His recommendation is accompanied by a more general question about women: “It’s awfully difficult to tell about women, I mean, is due to lack of training and how much is native incapacity?” (156). It is unclear at this point if Rachel has even heard of the historian. When she asks Ridley about it the following day, she erroneously abbreviates the title as “Gibbon’s History of the Roman Empire” (174). At the party, Hirst does not explain the significance of the eighteenth-century writer. His own social awkwardness, in addition to his admiration for the equally Untutored Helen, makes it difficult to determine how seriously he takes his own test. Rachel, angered, takes it seriously indeed. But Hirst firmly believes in the power of learning, and he expresses optimism when...
The following day, Rachel undertakes the project of reading Gibbon in a romantic fashion, taking Hirst’s copy into the most beautiful part of the forest in anticipation of “a surprising experience” (178). Her expectations are influenced by the emotions of the previous night’s party, her interest in Gibbon linked to her infatuation: “Slowly her mind became less confused and sought the origins of her exaltation, which were twofold and could be limited by an effort to the persons of Mr. Hirst and Mr. Hewet” (178). She reads giddily, with high expectations. Opening to a page about the expansion of empire, she is struck by the unusual beauty of Gibbon’s writing. Overwhelmed by “excitement at the possibilities of knowledge,” she stops reading after the first page (178). Her interest in Gibbon wanes along with her post-party exhilaration. After a second attempt, she gives up as she is unable to invest in a book that “goes round, round, round, like a roll of oil-cloth,” leaving her “infernally, damnably bored” (204, 216). The Decline and Fall disappoints Rachel’s fantasies and “unreasonable exultations” (176).

Hirst’s perceived condescension and criticism cannot motivate Rachel to read. Yet, at tea the following day, she is ashamed and humiliated because she cannot appreciate Gibbon and wonders if her “value as a human being was lessened” (204). She senses herself “silly” and “open to derision” (205). When Hirst defends the style as “the most perfect style,” she counters his claim by silently repeating the ad hominen retort she had earlier voiced to Hewet at the party: “ugly in body, repulsive in mind” (204). Rachel’s response to Hirst anticipates Woolf’s own response to Gibbon in her essays “The Historian and ‘The Gibbon’” (1942) and “Reflections at Sheffield Place” (1942), both of which read his historical writing against the vagaries of his own life. In those essays, Woolf draws attention to Gibbon’s disfigured and unattractive body, much as she mocks the twisted bodies of old Oxbridge scholars in A Room of One’s Own (1929). Indeed, skinny Hirst first appears in The Voyage Out as the synecdochal pair of legs Rachel and Helen espy in the hotel window; his appearance ushers in the species of “creased and crushed” male scholars who stumble awkwardly through Woolf’s oeuvre (AROO 8).

Pindar-translating Ridley scoffs at Rachel’s desire to read Gibbon and casually draws up his own reading list before questioning the value of her reading altogether: “But what’s the use of reading if you don’t read Greek? After all, if you read Greek, you need never read anything else” (174). Reading lists come to Rachel with instructions and caveats and doubts. For Ridley, naming books serves as a kind of jocular and possibly insincere invitation to an alien world of which he is a privileged citizen. Like the misshapen scholar, the Woolfian topos of the formidable and often off-limits male scholar’s library first appears in The Voyage Out. Ridley’s portable library is an early avatar of the imagined Oxbridge library in A Room of One’s Own. It is the architectural and institutional sibling of the equally exclusive “man’s sentence” (158).

Rachel bombs the Gibbon test, spiritedly rejecting Hirst’s mentorship just as she rejects the education of sensibility proposed by Helen. Her last quarrel with Terence finds her contemptuous of scholarship, “in a position where she could despise all human learning” (304). Yet, as her illness and death approach, she appears nagged by the question of books. Progressively ambivalent about her engagement, she contemplates Clarissa Dalloway’s gift of Persuasion and the way in which she has “looked at it occasionally, as some medieval monk kept a skull, or a crucifix to remind him of the frailty of the body” (313).
This passage, casting Austen’s novel as a prescient *memento mori*, hints at Rachel’s ambivalence about her rejection of literature. Her anxiety indicates a neglected imperative and a failure on her part; her “frailty” is associated with her unwillingness to read.

Froula identifies Mrs. Dalloway’s endorsement of “conventional womanhood” in her gift of *Persuasion*, and certainly the dedicated flyleaf is an implicit invitation to decorum and tradition (145). But *Persuasion* also offers Rachel the opportunity to recognize the conventions embodied in the Dalloways’ marriage and, consequently, the possibility of rejecting or reworking this endorsement. “Is it true,” Rachel asks Terence after glimpsing the book, “that women die with bugs crawling across their faces?” (314). Turning away from the book on her table, Rachel seeks authority in a human source, not the printed page. As in her conversations with Richard Dalloway, Rachel misdirects her personal quest for answers by seeking authority from an older, university-educated man. The books she did not read might have proffered her more tools for her eventual appraisal of marriage. Rachel’s refusal of literature anticipates the death that ends her education and foils the expectations traditionally associated with a *bildungsroman*. Like the frustrated would-be poets in *A Room of One’s Own*, Rachel has no outlet for her intelligence and talent; she stunts the potential that both she and her would-be mentors acknowledge.

Rachel questions the obligations imposed on her as one of what Woolf in *Three Guineas* (1938) calls “the daughters of educated men,” yet she obfuscates her complicity with their aspirations and agendas (4). She repeatedly opposes music to literature, freeing it from the associations of social hypocrisy and male hegemony: “It appeared that nobody ever said a thing they meant, or ever talked of a feeling they felt, but that was what music was for” (32). But it is from this very cultural world that she draws her music and her other weapons of refusal: her shiny, modern books, her leisure to reflect at length, and the comfortable room in which she sequesters herself. She embraces opacity instead of meaning, prefers music to literature, and substitutes piano practice for afternoon tea. The shape of her rebellion is already scripted into the master plot of bourgeois female adulthood. Her own education and resistance—and indeed the piano with which she travels—are themselves prizes of privilege connecting her to the history and culture of her male peers.

Although Woolf had never been to South America and had anxieties about writing about an imaginary place, she sets *The Voyage Out* in an atmosphere of colonial languor. Rachel lives and dies in the world of the six-month vacation, a world in which the diversion of books is so significant that Hewet jestingly likens the presumed loss of a volume of Wordsworth to the murder of a child (145). The only work in *The Voyage Out* is performed by natives, domestic servants, or constituents back in England; Ridley’s Pindar translations are the product of passion, not labor. Few of the vacationers have a clear purpose for vacationing at such length in Santa Marina, and any hobbies they might pursue have little or nothing to do with their location. Many of the vacationers, including Hirst and Hewet, seem bemused to find themselves abroad. Rachel’s discoveries and conclusions about literature originate in a state of leisure so extreme that her fellow vacationers fear that she will exert herself playing Bach.

When the elegant Dalloways, with their commitment to traditional class and gender roles, board the *Euphrosyne*, they alert Rachel to the complexion of her own social world. Their carefree glamour highlights Rachel’s possibilities as well as her limitations; they oc-
casion desire for unknown experiences, but they also alert her “that her face was not the face she wanted, and in all probability never would be” (37). Embodying the defamiliarizing world of another class, they precipitate a painful but short-lived self-reflection on her part.10 Her initial fascination with the Dalloways is supplanted by disillusion and critical evaluation, but not self-knowledge. She devotes only “an hour’s discomfort” to Persuasion and notices it only when her own marriage plot disappoints her expectations (313).

Many commentaries on The Voyage Out have pointed out the subversive nature of Rachel’s rejection of the intimidating tomes that her male peers, skeptical of her critical capabilities, lend her—always lending, never giving. Although she symbolically resists the hegemony of these university-educated men, she remains at an impasse when she shuts Gibbon. Her vehement refusal to read recommended books demonstrates strength of character but also results in a missed opportunity. Her unread books indicate a larger unwillingness on her part to acknowledge her class position, the plotted character of her behavior, and the complexities of resistance and identification.

I have commented on the Woolfian figure of the young woman lost and disoriented in the male scholar’s library. Woolf does not suggest that the young woman leave the library, and unless we assume that Rachel’s behavior illustrates a prescriptive model of conduct, we need not identify a prescribed agenda in Rachel’s behavior.11 Carolyn Heilbrun has noted emphatically that Woolf counseled “experience and interchange” for the female artist; “she never advised withdrawal” (179–80). I propose that Woolf advocates the kind of polemical engagement and spirited one-upmanship that she later demonstrated in the essay “On Not Knowing Greek” from The Common Reader (1925).12 In that essay, Woolf carries on the nuanced scrutiny of scholarship implicit in The Voyage Out and mocks the proprietary attitude of Victorian classical scholars. She rereads classical Greek literature against the grain of almost exclusively male scholarship while questioning the prevalent sentimental view that made Victorian England the legitimate cultural inheritor of ancient Greek culture.13 “On Not Knowing Greek” offers a model of reading as a creative act; the reader is free to embrace or reject, to determine “relevance or irrelevance” for herself (185).14 Stephen J. Ramsay has argued that the essay is “as much a declaration of the New Greece as of the New Woman” (9). It is certainly an ex post facto implication of scholars such as Ridley and Mr. Pepper.

Edward Gibbon, master of the “man’s sentence,” is a metonym for male scholarship, male style, and male themes in Woolf’s work, but also a figure of tangible ambivalence. Critics have almost universally understood the Gibbon episode in The Voyage Out as an unambiguous act of gender aggression in which both Hirst and Gibbon stand for a set of beliefs as well as a tendentious, masculinist way of reading.15 A Room of One’s Own certainly lends credence to this view by identifying authors such as Kipling and Galsworthy, whose works portray characters and emotions that are “to a woman incomprehensible” (102). Yet Woolf’s Gibbon essays illustrate how easy and yet how tragic it would be to dismiss Gibbon, precisely because he offers readers an exemplary personal engagement with history. Woolf illuminates Gibbon’s active engagement with Roman history and the way in which personal concerns, such as his objection to religious zealotry, inform his work: “He is not merely a master of the pageant and the story; he is also the critic and the historian of the mind” (87). In Woolf’s account, the Decline and Fall is also a critique of the present, its relevance palpable in that it “still excites abuse” (“Historian,” DM 82). Not merely a cluster
of facts for memorization, it is history made Gibbon; it is “six autobiographies” (89).

Critics have credited Rachel Vinrace for her intuitive rejection of suggested books. Had she lived and explored the literature she set aside as irrelevant or boring, she might have found her own way to read and appropriate the material in question, as Woolf advises. Woolf’s literary essays provide a belated cure for Rachel. Reading with an eye to interpretation, not merely identification or rejection, Rachel might have reopened the gate that “clanged shut,” assessing books with her characteristic bluntness and honesty (158). Critical reception of The Voyage Out cannot ignore that the novel (as well as the 1910 manuscript Melymbrosia) ends with the figure of “ill-tempered and vituperative” St. John Hirst (Lewis 114). In the final paragraph, prickly Hirst, erstwhile agent of Gibbon, a character singled out by fellow vacationers and Woolf critics for particular derision, mourns Rachel’s death in a chair. Humanized through grief, he recognizes the misfortune of Rachel’s forfeited Bildung.

Notes

1. A comparison of The Voyage Out with Melymbrosia, its 1910 avatar, reveals that Woolf worked extensively on the constellation of literary references. Both Louise DeSalvo and Beverly Ann Schlack have noted that the Rachel of The Voyage Out is much less well read than the Rachel of Melymbrosia. In Virginia Woolf’s First Voyage, De Salvo is particularly attentive to this growing web of allusions, including Woolf’s ultimate inclusion of Milton’s Comus into the scenes of Rachel’s illness and death. She demonstrates how Woolf often inserted books she was reading into the manuscript of The Voyage Out as she revised the novel over the years.

2. Willoughby Vinrace’s reasons for allowing his daughter to stay with the Ambroses in Santa Marina show a very different interest in Rachel’s education. He is considering a run for Parliament and wants a more presentable daughter, one who can “take part in more things” (VO 86).

3. Future work might look at the way in which Woolf historicizes Rachel’s limited ken. Much like the indigenous people the vacationers encounter on their trip up the river, Rachel’s knowledge is represented as belonging to another stage in history. We should also note that Woolf devotes particular attention to the status (and lack of poetic output) of women in the Elizabethan era. In A Room of One’s Own (1929), she wonders why there was so little poetry by women during an era “when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet” (41).

4. In her discussion of literary allusions in The Voyage Out, Schlack offers a compelling reading of the ways in which this exclusionary practice takes place in the very text of The Voyage Out. She notes the scene in which the scholar William Pepper’s use of ancient Greek is reproduced in the text (42). She argues that this is not ostentation on Woolf’s part; rather, Woolf is demonstrating the way in which knowledge can be used in an exclusionary fashion:

   Her use of the original Greek rather than a transliteration stresses the alien form, not the communicable content, of the Antigone quotation. It is an aesthetic decision serving to make the sort of social, intellectual, and psychological points that could not have been made otherwise, for Pepper would not seem so enviable, and Clarissa Dalloway would not be so impressed, if mere understandable English had been chanted at her. (11).

5. Susan Stanford Friedman has observed the way in which The Voyage Out both invites and frustrates the readerly expectations of self-development associated with the traditional bildungsroman, noting that readers “may anticipate the end but nonetheless feel cheated out of the narrative resolution that the text insistently leads us to expect” (“Spatialization” 109).

6. In A Room of One’s Own, Woolf explicitly ties women’s frustration to financial and social conditions. A stifling lack of self-sufficiency destroys Shakespeare’s hypothetical sister who “would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty” (49). Likewise, without personal savings, Charlotte Brontë was unable to live up to the promise of her genius: “She will write in a rage where she should write calmly. She will write foolishly where she should write wisely” (69). Although Rachel Vinrace comes from a com-
fortable family, she has neither financial independence nor the skills to achieve it.

7. Lewis has eloquently articulated these contradictions:

Her father, Willoughby Virance, trades in South American rubber and other goods. He . . . through the exploitative economic practices of colonialism, has been able to acquire substantial wealth—wealth which has allowed Rachel privileged access to music and literature, significant social status, and an inheritance. Rachel fails to recognize the working-class neighborhood of Santa Marina, and later the native village, as the sites of production in the colonized world and, by extension, the separation of her “civilized” world from the “shabby” world of Santa Marina (115).

8. Mark Wollaeger suggests that Rachel's piano playing is potentially subversive in that she "makes a habit of sequestering herself in her room to play the piano and thus threatens to subvert the social value of the cultured young woman by removing herself from the market in which her musical ability counts as an asset" (39-40). But we must not read too much into this; the piano is in her room and she must practice in private in order to perform publicly. Wollaeger does suggest, however, that Rachel individuates herself by the style of music she plays when she does perform. As the hotel party breaks up, for instance, she releases "Dionysian energies from the Apollonian confines of the social" and "transforms a dance that began as if lifted from Austen into a raucous approximation of modern eurythmics" (40).

9. Woolf’s diaries and biographies suggest that her writing roused similar fears among her family, friends, and doctors. Writing was strictly proscribed during her bouts of illness.

10. Lewis has also identified this reaction on Rachel (and Helen’s) part as a class reaction: “Helen and Rachel’s awareness of their bodies as less refined than Mrs. Dalloway’s results in a dissatisfaction that stems from the fear of being associated with the physical crudity of the lower classes” (109). Carey Snyder notes another crucial moment of defamiliarization and self-recognition for both Rachel and her fellow vacationers when they travel up the river to visit a native town. Snyder describes their sighting of a group of native women on shore as a disruption of the “conventional dynamic of a colonial encounter” (81). She offers a Geertzian reading of the way in which this vision destabilizes personal and national identities, “defamiliarizing English culture and turning English characters into ‘natives’” (82). Rachel is both disturbed and stimulated by this voyage—which leaves her mortally ill—yet, as with the Dalloways, her self-reflection does not last.

11. Woolf’s essay “How Should One Read a Book?” instructs the reader to persist in reading despite initial misgivings: “If you hang back, and reserve and criticize at first, you are preventing yourself from getting the fullest possible value from what you read” (235).

12. Melba Cuddy-Keane lauds Woolf’s literary essays for their exhortative function. Not only, she claims, do these essays “locate reading in a context of historically and ideologically variable standards,” they also “outline a model for active, self-reflexive reading practices” (1).

13. Artemis Leontis has argued that Woolf’s early travels to Greece, like those of many European travelers, lead to a break with this sort of philhellenism (106).

14. Rowena Fowler has demonstrated the uniquely personal relationship Woolf maintained with the Greeks throughout her career: “Modernism is often perceived as an elegy for the classical tradition, a gathering of fragments in a last-ditch stand against barbarism. But Woolf’s Greece neither mourns the old myths nor attempts to shore them up. With ingenuity and precision, she conjures past into present . . .” (239). David Adam’s Colonial Odysseys provides an excellent discussion of Woolf's evolving Hellenism, describing her transition from an early “earnestness” to ambivalence and a “liberating laughter” (190). He argues that her pronounced attraction to ancient Greek literature and culture was increasingly troubled by questions about its “continuing relevance” and demonstrates how, in The Voyage Out, various characters reflect the different stages of her relationship to classical culture (182).

15. Schlack suggests that Gibbon is “ritually invoked” by Hirst (12). She likens Hirst’s commitment to Gibbon to an ideological stance:

The masculine claim that factual truth is reality; the rationalist belief that the life of one person or the history of a country can be ascertained with certainty; the assumption that the march of external events reveals more than does the mysterious inner life—these are the beliefs behind Hirst’s admiration of Gibbon. They are beliefs that Virginia Woolf, along with many of the female characters in her novels, does not share. (11—12).

Gabrielle Dane likens the behavior of Hirst during the Gibbon episode to “Henry Higgins sounding out initial vowel sounds for Eliza Doolittle” (19). Wollaeger suggests that by reading Gibbon, Rachel “risks losing her distinctively female perspective by becoming implicated in a masculine form of knowledge that she finds seductive yet abhorrent” (44). It is no doubt true that Hirst's admiration of Gibbon involves an
ideological stance. However, the nature of this stance is by no means transparent. Hirst clearly identifies the advancement of women as the most critical issue of his era. Also, the *Decline and Fall* offers an encyclopedic account of an empire rotting from within and, for this reason alone, is exceedingly relevant. It could be argued that Hirst’s admittedly awkward recommendation of Gibbon betokens a quite different agenda than those suggested by the scholars cited above. At the very least, it is certain that Hirst shares Woolf’s dismay about women’s education.

16. Froula describes Rachel as “unknowingly loyal to feelings to which literature gives no voice” (145). She interprets Rachel’s refusal to read Gibbon as a creative gesture, with Rachel “in her not-reading, potentially writing into history what Gibbon . . . has left out: among other things, women’s history” (151).

17. Friedman suggests that *The Common Reader* (1925) offers a worthwhile model of reading that develops and improves on Rachel’s method in *The Voyage Out*:

Unlike Rachel, the ‘common reader’ can take on the classics and the canonical literature of England without danger. The essays that Woolf selected or wrote for *The Common Reader* assert her right and ability to discuss the great masters from the position of one who was not educated at Oxbridge, who was not elected to the Apostles, as so many of her male Bloomsbury friends had been (“Pedagogical Scenes” 119).

The *Common Reader*, like much of Woolf’s critical writing, encourages readers to read despite academic scholarship, promoting a “dialogic rather than an authoritarian relation between writer and reader” and serving a “transformative social function” (Cuddy-Keane 2, 121).

18. Wollaeger suggests that Hirst’s response to Rachel’s death is a reflection of “the community’s secret satisfaction in reestablishing the normal way of the world after Rachel’s death” (39). This seems incompatible with the description of a visibly shaken Hirst entering the hall of the hotel before he takes a seat: “But the shock of the warm lamplit room, together with the sight of so many cheerful human beings sitting together at their ease, after the dark walk of the rain, and the long days of strain and horror, overcame him completely. He looked at Mrs. Thornbury and could not speak” (386). It seems less of a stretch to interpret the “profound happiness” Hirst feels when he finally sits down as a natural response to the comfort of human presence sounding “gratefully” around a person who has just witnessed the protracted death of a friend (387, 388).

**Works Cited**


——. “Reflections at Sheffiel Place.” The Death of the Moth and Other Essays. 94–103.
Critics often have underrated *The Voyage Out* (1915). The novel at first seems to portray the heroine's development into maturity in a “traditional” style and appears to resemble a typical *bildungsroman*, culminating in marriage for the heroine. But this expectation is severely disappointed by the actual conclusion of the novel. This plot twist, together with some of the other narrative peculiarities, such as the interest in subjectivity and fragmentation of traditional continuities, has been considered evidence of Woolf’s modernist experimentation. While most critics agree that it is an important first novel that exhibits many of her later narrative characteristics, it is nevertheless generally regarded only as an apprentice work lacking unity of theme and style: its modernist peculiarities seen as confusing and disrupting the smooth flow of the novel’s “realistic” narration.¹

Yet, if we consider the hotel, the novel’s main setting, as the major theme of the novel, we can better appreciate the book’s disrupted structure as parallel to its setting and predictive of Woolf’s later modernism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the hotel was developing rapidly in response to the advance of the railways.² It was not only the main attraction of the burgeoning tourism industry, but also an exceptional social space, a novel “home from home” used, frequented, and often lived in on a more permanent basis. Although the guests meet and stay under the same roof, their physical proximity does not lead to the close relationships of the home or neighborhood communities. Their lives intersect with each other at random, and chances are that they share neither each others’ pasts nor futures. Similarly, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in society itself, fleeting, urban relationships were rapidly replacing the close relationships of rural communities.³ Understandably, the hotel drew people’s attention not simply as a temporary place for accommodation intrinsically related to traveling but also as a quintessentially “modern” habitat prematurely manifesting the concerns of a society that was then in the making.⁴

The affinity between the hotel and modernity drew many writers of the period to this space.⁵ For instance, George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1874–1876), Henry James’s *The Ambassadors* (1903), and E. M. Forster’s *A Room with a View* (1908) all open with scenes in hotels.⁶ After World War I, literary interest in the hotel space became even more acute:⁷ Noël Coward’s *Semi-Monde* (1926), Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Hotel* (1927), Henry Green’s *Party Going* (1939), and Leonard Woolf’s *The Hotel* (1939) are all set almost exclusively in these protomodernist spaces.⁸

It was in this context that Woolf embarked on her novelist career with *The Voyage Out* using the hotel as its main setting. Much like *The Ambassadors* and *A Room with a View*, *The Voyage Out* tells the story of the emotional awakening of a protagonist abroad and similarly places the hotel at the threshold of this new experience that it then sets out to explore. Yet, while Woolf uses this familiar framework, her novel focuses more closely
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on life in the hotel and anticipates the increasingly common, in-depth explorations of this cultural space in the literature of the 1920s and 1930s. In so doing, she sets about her modernist exploration, searching for novel themes and appropriate forms and styles with which to render them.

The novel follows the twenty-four-year-old Rachel Vinrace’s trip from her restrictive London home to an imaginary South American resort. On the boat, Rachel and her Aunt Helen, who hardly know each other, make each other’s acquaintance rather coldly. Guileless and inexperienced for her age, Rachel arouses the interest of her aunt, who takes upon herself the education of her niece. Helen invites her to stay with her in Santa Marina, a resort on the South American coast. The novel then goes on to depict their installation in a villa and their stay. Significantly, the novel completely ignores the first few months of their stay in the resort. Instead, it takes up the narration when they first visit the hotel. From this point on, their relationships with the English hotel residents become the novel’s main concern.

Despite its centrality, the important role the hotel plays in the novel has been largely neglected. Some criticism does discuss the hotel setting, but most acknowledges it as a little piece of English society, thereby neglecting its significant narrative function as much more than a mere devise to assemble characters. As Joanne S. Frye argues, the hotel is a peculiarly fluid, impersonal, and transient space, and being such, displays all the important characteristics of modern society itself. Woolf’s awareness of the “modern” characteristics of the hotel is confirmed by her initial juxtaposition of the hotel and the villa:

It was now the height of the season, and every ship that came from England left a few people on the shores of Santa Marina who drove up to the hotel. The fact that the Ambroses had a house where one could escape momentarily from the slightly inhuman atmosphere of an hotel was a source of genuine pleasure not only to Hirst and Hewet, but also to the Elliots, the Thornburys, the Flushings, Miss Allan, Evelyn M., together with other people whose identity was so little developed that the Ambroses did not discover that they possessed names. By degrees there was established a kind of correspondence between the two houses, the big and the small, so that at most hours of the day one house could guess what was going on in the other, and the words, “the villa” and “the hotel” called up the idea of two separate systems of life. (208)

By setting up the contrast between the villa and the hotel, Woolf effectively illuminates the cold, impersonal atmosphere of the hotel; importantly, however, this atmosphere also permeates the resort, and even the villa. The villa, compared with the hotel, is a more homely space, assembling a society of English people; but in reality, it does little to shelter its occupants from the cold and modern relationships endemic of the whole resort. Woolf goes on to explicitly state this:

Acquaintances showed signs of developing into friends, for that one tie to Mrs. Parry’s drawing-room had inevitably split into many other ties attached to different parts of England, and sometimes these alliances seemed cynically fragile,
and sometimes painfully acute, lacking as they did the supporting background of organised English life. One night when the moon was round between the trees, Evelyn M. told Helen the story of her life, and claimed her everlasting friendship; on another occasion, merely because of a sigh, or a pause, or a word thoughtlessly dropped, poor Mrs. Elliot left the villa half in tears, vowing never again to meet the cold and scornful woman who had insulted her, and in truth, meet again they never did. It did not seem worth while to piece together so slight a friendship. (208)

The residents of the villa, too, are there only for the season, and this “small house” is not completely free from the resort’s transient and impersonal atmosphere. Woolf further emphasizes this by having the villa belong not to Helen and Ridley Ambrose, but Helen’s brother. It is not a “home” for a family, but somebody else’s house, where Rachel, Helen, and Ridley are staying for the first time. What Woolf portrays in the resort, in the juxtaposition of the hotel and the villa, is not a sample of “organised English life”; rather, it is a more chaotic “modern” life full of chance encounters and fleeting experiences. Woolf’s choice of setting, an imaginary resort so far away from home, only enhances the transient, anonymous, and impersonal qualities so important to the novel.

While, as we have seen, the whole resort is pervaded by these modern characteristics, it is really Woolf’s representation of the hotel that houses her vision of modern experience. She does this using Rachel’s seemingly traditional Bildung. Rachel finds herself amidst a bustling mass of anonymous strangers, out of which she gradually notices signs of individuality and develops some friendships. Ultimately, however, she departs, leaving hardly a trace.

Woolf’s exploration of this space starts with Rachel’s first visit to the hotel. During the first few months in the resort, Rachel and Helen have been exploring the resort’s social climate by strolling through the village. One evening, Rachel decides to go to the hotel to “see life” (88). To observe the “different section[s] of the life of the hotel” (90), they peer into one room then another. The windows are all open, all “uncurtained” and “brilliantly lighted,” and they can “see everything inside” (90). However, on this first visit, their impressions are remote and indefinite. The hotel residents can be distinguished only by their physical characteristics or the activities they happen to be performing. The brightly lit hotel rooms assume a rather theatrical unreality in which people’s identities seem less important than their performances. Woolf’s text here reads like a scene-setting stage direction, just a catalogue of impressions. In one room, Rachel and Helen see a “thin woman” “flourishing up and down the piano” (90), while in another, “a lean, somewhat cadaverous man” is playing a card game with “a highly-coloured girl, obviously English by birth” (91). They see also “people . . . scattered about in couples or parties of four,” “gentlemen lounging in chairs” and “couples leaning over coffee-cups” (91); in yet another room, “two men in shirt-sleeves playing billiards with two young ladies” (90).

The reiteration of the number two here and elsewhere in the novel emphasizes the loss of identity in the space of the hotel. Except for gender and age, these nameless pairs of men and women are without apparent differentiating features. Rachel and Helen can barely distinguish the guests’ words either, for collectively they produce “an even sound”
that resembles that of “a flock of sheep pent within hurdles at dusk” (91). Inside the hotel, even Rachel and Helen lose their identities. Among this anonymous flock, Helen spots an acquaintance, but this recognition is immediately suppressed. When she inadvertently exclaims his name, desiring not to be identified herself, she “duck[s] her head immediately, for at the sound of his name he looked up” (91). Once their presence is detected from inside the hotel, it is acknowledged simply by “a melancholy voice issu[ing] from above them. ‘Two women,’ it said” (92). Here, significantly, Rachel and Helen, too, become anonymous from the perspective of the hotel occupants: “A scuffling was heard on the gravel. The women had fled. They did not stop running until they felt certain that no eye could penetrate the darkness and the hotel was only a square shadow in the distance, with red holes regularly cut in it” (92). All the while they have been observing the hotel, the narrator has placed them as the observing subjects and assumed their perspective. Here, however, the narrator swiftly shifts perspective and accepts the logic of the hotel: the individual identities that she has been portraying are dissolved.

As Rachel and Helen begin to spend more time at the hotel, these anonymous twos gradually become distinguished. Among the many scenes of introduction, we find one in which the two women, and two men, reveal their identities. Woolf identifies the moment of revelation for the main protagonists in the following manner:

“Do you remember — two women?”
He [Hirst] looked at her sharply.
“I do,” he answered.
“So you’re the two women!” Hewet explained, looking from Helen to Rachel.
“Your lights tempted us,” said Helen. . . .
“It was like a thing in a play,” Rachel added.
“And Hirst could not describe you,” said Hewet. (121)

While Rachel shows her confusion at the strange theatricality of the hotel space, Hewet, for his part, expresses his puzzlement at the indefinite identity of the intruders. Although Rachel and Helen and the hotel occupants gradually get to know each other better, these discoveries constitute an incomplete and confusing process. In these initial encounters, the narrator endeavors to convey the chaotic nature of the hotel that surrounds Rachel and Helen by reproducing its confusion: “Haven’t we met before?” (118); “You’ve never told me your name . . . Miss Somebody Vinrace” (129). She does this also on the level of narration, by referring to the characters by their different names, which at times baffles the reader who has yet to learn which names belong to whom. Although this textual confusion may at first seem a sign of the young author’s immaturity (Rev. of *The Voyage Out. Morning Post* 51), it is, in fact, Woolf’s deliberate handling of the text.

Confronted with this confusion of myriad identities, Rachel decides to further explore the hotel. Woolf tells us that the hotel was once a monastery and, in so doing, prefigures Siegfried Kracauer in her use of the church and the hotel to contrast traditional and modern societies. Clearly, she presents the hotel as a representation of modernity, and moreover has Rachel embark on her exploration after getting upset by a chapel service. Now, already familiar with the brilliantly lighted public “front” of the hotel, Rachel explores hotel life from the inside. She finds herself first in the kitchen, not only on the
inside, but on “the wrong side of hotel life” (238). Here, she finds bare ground, tins scattered about, a heap of rubbish, and a pile of dirty dishes. She also finds waiters busying themselves and two large women plucking birds. When a chicken tries to escape, it is caught and decapitated right in front of her. This crude reality of the brutal mechanics that support the hotel’s elegant exterior “fascinates” Rachel (239), but she seems still more interested in the guests themselves. When Miss Allan invites her to her room, she goes with her, hoping to learn more about the hotel and imagining that “each new person might remove the mystery which burden[s] her” (239). While Rachel notes the uniformity of the rooms themselves, she still recognizes the capacity of the guests to make their rooms their own. She sees here a promise of individuality, the warm humanity absent from the public spaces of the hotel. Yet, although Miss Allan offers Rachel a glimpse into her life and of her “massive homely figure” (242), she shows “no signs of breaking the reticence which ha[s] snowed her under for years” (242). Rachel has to conclude that there is nothing to be done but “drift past each other in silence” (242). As she walks along the corridor, she finds people once again “aimless masses of matter” (244), reminiscent of her first visit to the hotel. Feeling an acute sense of alienation, Rachel cries.

In the chance, fleeting encounters, people crisscross each others’ lives only momentarily before going their separate ways. Rachel’s exploration of life in the hotel—her attempt to reveal the identity and personality that the anonymity of the hotel erases—only ends in disappointment and frustration. It symbolizes her experience at the resort and foreshadows its conclusion. Rachel finds that she has been “tantalized and put off” by the promise of intimacy which the hotel cannot provide (244). Her growing intimacy with Hewet, one of the confusing couple Hewet and Hirst, and their ultimate engagement only encourage her. Yet, after their engagement, their relationship is plagued with communication difficulties. They feel increasingly distanced from each other until they are finally separated forever by Rachel’s sudden death.10

The story of Rachel expresses Woolf’s critique of modern experience, characterized by transience and alienation, but there is more to this novel than just Rachel’s story. Woolf seems determined to portray the humanity in this “inhuman” space. While disappointing Rachel’s search for the personality within the anonymity of the hotel, Woolf still finds in it a rich reservoir of life. Her attempt to retrieve the lost identity and lost personality from the modern world seems to represent her endeavor as a modern writer and stimulates her use of novel narrative techniques.

We have already seen some of the ways in which Woolf represents the impersonal and anonymous nature of the hotel and how they distort her seemingly conventional narration. On Rachel’s first visit, for instance, the narrator assumes the perspective of a stranger and, with this, her protagonists suddenly recede into the background, deprived of their individualities. We have also seen how Woolf’s faithful depiction of the initial anonymity of the hotel guests through her jumbled use of their names confuses her reader.

However, it is Woolf’s depiction of the isolation of the hotel guests that is most interesting. In order to expose their separate lives and to represent the detached quality of this space, the narrator often goes into secondary characters’ lives much more than seems appropriate in a story that otherwise looks like Rachel’s bildungsroman. This explains why the subsidiary characters in the hotel often get treated very importantly at the cost of
narrative coherence. This is vividly demonstrated when they withdraw into their private bedrooms, even into themselves, as well as when they are engaged in common activities. For instance, immediately after Rachel and Helen’s first visit to the hotel—once they had fled into the background of the story—the narrator shifts her focus to the hotel residents. She then visits their private bedrooms, one after another, to reveal the identities of the residents of this anonymous space and to delineate their separate worlds concealed behind its impersonal façade.

In order to dig deeper into the lives and realities of the individual guests, each alienated both from the others and from the hotel space, the narrator also goes into the fluid workings of their minds. Woolf’s depiction of the dissolution of Rachel’s relationship with Hewet provides an illustrative example. As Hewet feels increasingly distanced by Rachel’s descent into delirium, he desperately attempts to reclaim something from his engagement. Cruelly alienated from his fiancée, his mind revolves unceasingly around her, striving to remember her and the days gone by. In order to represent both his isolation and his warm humanity despite it, Woolf makes a full exposition of his subjective mind and juxtaposes it with Rachel’s own disturbed mind along with a few other subjectivities and some objective descriptions of external reality.

Depicting the people in the hotel in this way, Woolf’s narrative moves back and forth between different minds, memories, and times. The result is the shifting of authorial perspectives and the exploration of subjective minds juxtaposed with outward reality. The fragmented, disconnected nature of the novel also results from the alienating and detached characteristics of the space and the potential for redemption of its isolated inhabitants. And all these are, needless to say, central to the modernist art that Woolf later develops.

We may now say that the narrative peculiarities in the novel can be largely attributed, quite naturally, to the depiction of the dominant setting of the hotel. The ending, which famously defies traditional narrative expectations, also can be considered a consequence of Woolf’s determination to represent the transience of modern relationships within this space. With Rachel’s death, the engagement of the young couple dissolves, just as an “everlasting friendship” in a hotel dissolves with the end of the season. Woolf thus chooses to pursue the modern logic of the hotel, refusing to accept the aesthetics of the more traditional, communal society.

However, the traditional marriage ending for the female bildungsroman is not the only narrative expectation that Woolf frustrates at the close of the novel. Following Rachel’s death in the villa, the narrator depicts its effect on the guests. Although it has seemed that Rachel had grown to know the hotel residents, her death does not affect them any more than provoking a courteous sorrow. The memory of Rachel has already begun to fade from the guests’ minds, and they continue to go about their lives as if nothing has happened. Hirst finally returns from the villa to find the rest of the hotel inhabitants just “so many cheerful human beings sitting together at their ease” (352). The narrator does not mention the sorrow of Rachel’s family or even that of her aunt. Instead, she continues to depict life in the hotel. It is this modern, impersonal reality of the hotel that prevents Woolf’s narrative from turning into tragedy, another traditional narrative formula fostered in communal society. At the end of the novel, Rachel seems to have once again become one of the “two women”: “Miss Vinrace dead? Dear me . . . that’s very sad. But I don’t at the moment remember which she was” (341).
It should be emphasized again, though, that Woolf does not simply dismiss either the hotel or modern society. To close her novel, Woolf once again plunges into the perpetual workings of the guests’ minds. The final sentiment in *The Voyage Out* is that of Hirst, who is glad that all is over but still ponders what has happened. He is left alone slumped in a chair downstairs when all the others withdraw to their rooms. Speechless and dazed, he is comforted by “a procession of objects, black and indistinct, the figures of people picking up their books, their cards, their balls of wool, their work-baskets, and passing him one after another on their way to bed” (352). While soothed by these anonymous figures and despite his relationship with Rachel being fleeting, there is still something of it left. Rachel’s life has been inscribed into his, and the patchwork of such impressions is the biography of the new age, where people do not really know each other, and yet still know something.

Woolf’s exploration of life in the hotel thus causes her narrative to deviate from the traditional narrative formulae. It demands new methods and helps Woolf to grasp novel, modern themes and styles. Woolf’s narrative is at once personal and impersonal, capturing the realities of the minds in this alienating space. The hotel in *The Voyage Out* nurtures Woolf’s departure from the traditional narrative formulae and her fascination with modern concerns. It shows her determination to capture the reality of the transient, impersonal modern world, which nonetheless never stops being human.

Notes

1. See, for example, Joanne S. Frye, Jean O. Love, and Frederick P. W. McDowell.
2. For the history of the hotel, see Mary Cathcart Borer, Norman S. Hayner, S. Medlik, and Jack Simmons.
3. For the rapid urban growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Jose Harris (41–45).
4. For the social condition of the period in general, see Jose Harris and Janet Roebuck.
5. In the 1930s, Norman S. Hayner speculated on what he called “hotel life” in his book of the same title and concluded that the hotel was “a symbol of changes that [were] taking place . . . in the manners and morals” of society as a whole (182).
6. European pensions appear frequently in early-twentieth-century British literature. In general, a pension is smaller than a hotel and therefore has a homely atmosphere. Such characteristics are reflected in Forster’s pension.
7. Charlotte Bates has provided a fascinating study of the proliferation of the hotel in the 1930s literature in which she focuses on the importance of the hotel as a metaphor of the transience and deracination of modern life.
8. The use of the hotel is not limited to British literature. Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice* (1912) and Vicki Baum’s *Grand Hotel* (1929), which was turned into a successful Hollywood film, are some of the examples.
9. Winifred Holtby and Hermione Lee also consider the characteristics of the hotel a significant element of the novel, although they hold that the hotel is an emblem of “human reality and indifference” (Holtby 79) rather than that of modern life.
10. Although this impossibility of understanding another and the alienation that develops from it have been discussed as an important theme of the novel, this needs to be understood in relation to Woolf’s acute awareness of the alienating effect of modern society, in which people move perpetually and fleeting relationship occur relentlessly. From the very beginning, Hewet is afraid that Rachel might be gone tomorrow. For a discussion of this theme, see Hermione Lee.
11. The juxtaposition of the subjective and objective realities is also the dominant narrative feature of Vicki
Baum’s *Grand Hotel*. See my article “It Is Movie, Movie, and Again Movie” for a discussion of the novel’s film adaptation and how the hotel could help bring about new forms and styles, new possibilities for cinema as well as literature.

12. Woolf’s narrative exploration of transient experiences had started early in the novel on board Rachel’s father’s cargo boat (Woolf’s demystifying version of a then-thriving commercial “floating hotel”), and it offers an interesting prelude to Rachel’s experience in the hotel in the New World. Here, Woolf had introduced the characters of the Dalloways, but despite the impressive introduction of these characters, so pregnant with possibilities, they were suddenly dropped altogether midroute, leaving behind only Rachel’s lingering memory of her first kiss with Mr. Dalloway.

In relation to Woolf’s treatment of the boat, Leonard Woolf is interesting. In his autobiographical volume *Growing* (1961), he recounts his own version of “second birth” (11), at the age of twenty-four, in Ceylon, a place as completely removed from his homeland as Woolf’s fictious Santa Marina. In the opening chapter, “The Voyage Out,” he describes his voyage aboard a ship and reveals the fascination he developed of “explor[ing]” fellow passengers’ minds (14) and discovering unique individuals “beneath the façade of John Smith and Jane Brown” (12). He sees the ship, and the hotel, by the same token, as a microcosm of a larger society—an apprenticeship for him.

**Works Cited**


DISCOVERING THE READERLY MIND:
WOOLF’S MODERNIST REINVENTION OF THE NATIONAL POET

by Mollie Godfrey

When Septimus Smith first courts his Italian wife, Rezia, he establishes between them a pedagogical relationship, at the center of which lies his favorite poet: “Being older than she was and being so clever . . . [he wanted] her to read Shakespeare before she could even read a child’s story in English!—being so much more experienced, he could help her” (MD 146). But, by giving Shakespeare to Rezia, what exactly does Septimus wish her to learn? Certainly, for the man who fell “in love with Miss Isabel Pole, lecturing in the Waterloo Road upon Shakespeare” (MD 85), Shakespeare stands in as a sign of romance and courtship. But equally so, he stands in for Septimus’s language and culture; what better way for Rezia to become English than to read the country’s national poet? In addition, Shakespeare—whom Rezia recognizes as a potentially “difficult author”—represents Septimus’s intellectual maturity; by reading Shakespeare, Rezia might become as “serious” and “clever” as her husband (MD 89).

If, in this one passage, we see a constellation of the many purposes to which Shakespeare is put in Mrs. Dalloway (1925), then we may be inclined to agree with Diana Henderson that “the figure of the Bard becomes, for . . . Septimus as for his female creator, both an alternative source of British authority and a fluid construct destined to reflect his interpreter’s needs” (154). On the other hand, as Lisa Haefele has argued, much of the novel seems to critique such ideologically motivated uses of the Bard; in particular, certain characters’ “nationalist appropriation of Shakespeare” would seem to fall under the banner of “conversion,” which, the novel argues, stifles both art and the human soul by “impress[ing]” its “own features” on everything it encounters (Haefele 210; MD 100).

How, then, are we to reconcile Woolf’s critique of “conversion” with the fact that she herself converts Shakespeare to suit her own particular needs?

Woolf once quite famously claimed that “every critic finds his own features in Shakespeare” (“The Reader,” 431), a statement that suggests not only the impossibility of ever arriving at a single, authoritative reading of Shakespeare, but also that every critic’s reading is, in fact, a measure of him- or herself. It is thus unsurprising that, in Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa and Septimus not only produce multiple readings of Shakespeare throughout their lives, but that we are asked to understand their intellectual and emotional development according to their development as readers of Shakespeare. I will argue that, much as the “Oxen of the Sun” section James Joyce’s Ulysses portrays the development of English writing and its maturity into Modernism as the gestation of a human embryo, Woolf depicts the development of English reading by way of the personal growth of her principal characters, a development that likewise matures into and is subsumed by a distinctly Modernist aesthetic. Thus, as rereaders of Shakespeare, Clarissa and Septimus highlight the particular limitations of nineteenth-century modes of reading, while simultaneously representing Woolf’s own readerly ideal. In contrast to Joyce, who placed his emphasis on the evolution of writing, Woolf’s version of literary progress presents reading as the process on which
the Modernist literary object depends. In this way, Woolf seems to advocate an alternative model of “conversion” that is capable not of stifling but of expanding literature by defining it as that which is limitless. Indeed, if the “one peculiarity which real works of art possess in common” is that they “must have the power of changing as we change” (E2: 27), then books only become “art” by virtue of their contact with an endless stream of readers and rereadings. However, if we are to critique Woolf for forcing Shakespeare to reflect these principles of her own design, we must ultimately recognize our own complicity—as literary critics—in the model of reading and interpretation that she advocates.

Clarissa’s and Septimus’s first encounters with Shakespeare are simultaneous with their first discoveries of love: Clarissa while “in a kind of ecstasy” with Sally Seton (MD 34); Septimus when lit by “such a fire” that his beloved lecturer asks, “Was he not like Keats?” (MD 85). Reading Shakespeare through the eyes of Keats, Clarissa and Septimus reproduce the literary mode that, as Jonathon Bate argues in The Genius of Shakespeare, came to dominate the early nineteenth century due to the influence of Fuseli, Goethe, and, later, Coleridge and Keats (Bate 36–40, 265–78). According to Bate, Fuseli imagined the artist to be “stale when he did not write from his own emotions. . . . Authentic artistic creation comes only from a massive investment of personal feeling” (267). Indeed, it was to such Romantics that Woolf herself first turned in search of rewarding Shakespeare criticism, claiming that it was “the Keats, the Coleridge, the Lamb, the Flaubert who get to the heart of the matter” (CE 1: 316). It is with their insights that her characters’ intellectual education begins as well.

The Romantic period is thus portrayed as a kind of literary adolescence, both for Britain and for Woolf’s hero and heroine. Septimus, like a young Byron, is driven by “vanity, ambition, idealism, passion, loneliness, courage, laziness, the usual seeds” (MD 84). Like Clarissa, whose excitement over Sally leads her to “read Plato in bed before breakfast; read Morris; read Shelley by the hour” (MD 33), Septimus is inspired by “a fire as burns only once in a lifetime” (MD 85) and turns this emotional stimulation immediately into intellectual stimulation, “fasting one day, drinking another, devouring Shakespeare” (MD 85). Both find in Shakespeare the inspiration to write “reams of poetry” (MD 75), but their work is torn up with as much gusto as it is produced (MD 85). Ironically, Clarissa and Septimus find their romantic ideals in two of Shakespeare’s tragedies—Septimus in Antony and Cleopatra and Clarissa in Othello. Though their readings may already be “at the heart of the matter,” their understanding of the bigger picture remains deficient. Clarissa feels herself to have a direct connection to Othello’s passion and excitement; like Othello, she thinks,

“If it were now to die ‘twere now to be most happy.” That was her feeling—Othello’s feeling, and she felt it, she was convinced, as strongly as Shakespeare meant Othello to feel it, all because she was coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton! (MD 35).

However, Clarissa does not foresee the tragedy that any rereader of the play would recognize in the line. She thus fails to take seriously the “catastrophe” of marriage (MD 34), and is shocked when her idealistic love of Sally is dashed to bits by Peter’s “horrible” interruption (MD 36). Similarly, Septimus is motivated by his love of Isabel Pole to go off
Discovering the Readerly Mind

It is in marriage and in war, respectively, that Clarissa and Septimus emerge from their Romanticism and enter a model of interpretation best characterized by the morality and nationalism of the Victorian age, by which time, as Gary Taylor has argued in *Reinventing Shakespeare*, the Bard had been “wholly institutionalized” by a combination of “university instruction, examinations, the civil service, and the philosopher [A. C.] Bradley” (226). Both Richard Dalloway and Septimus’s boss, Mr. Brewer, are concerned with curbing the romantic excitement Shakespeare has caused. Richard believes that Shakespeare’s sonnets violate his code of decency—“it was like listening at keyholes (besides the relationship was not one that he approved)” (*MD* 75)—while Mr. Brewer worries about “the danger” of Septimus’s newfound passion and “advised football, invited him to supper” with the hope that these distractions will make him less “weakly” (*MD* 85).

Clarissa’s passion is curbed by replacing her youthful romance with a more mature marriage to Richard and thus to an interpretation of Shakespeare that “would ‘stifle her soul’ . . . [and] make a mere hostess of her” (*MD* 75). Septimus, on the other hand, transforms the romantic idealism of his youth into a naive nationalism, going “to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square” (*MD* 86). In the defense of this idealized Englishness, “the change which Mr. Brewer desired when he advised football was produced instantly” (*MD* 86). Like Clarissa, Septimus has matured into a more restrained relationship with the national poet, hers marked by a moralistic domesticity, his by a nationalistic war.

With this emphasis on moral restraint and British nationalism comes an emotional restraint that haunts the novel’s present day. Both Bate and Taylor have observed that, as the British Empire became the dominant concern of the nation and its education system, so the critics of the day expounded a corresponding reading of the national poet. In fact, as late as 1918, only seven years before the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Sir Walter Alexander Raleigh gave a lecture on “Shakespeare and England,” in which he “celebrated the National Bard as the guardian of all that England was fighting for against the philistine Hun” (Bate 193). Such nationalism demands the cooling of any passionate excess that would threaten the nation and Empire at war. Thus, Septimus’s prewar romanticism becomes a postwar stoicism: despite the loss of a close comrade, he “congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably. The War had taught him” (*MD* 86).

An identical ideal of stoicism is reflected in Clarissa’s first encounter with the *Cymbeline* dirge. Reading “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun / Nor the furious winter’s rages” through a shop window, Clarissa immediately reflects that “this late age of the world’s experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears. Tears and sorrows; courage and endurance; a perfectly upright and stoical bearing” (*MD* 9–10). Shakespeare is no longer a romantic poet, but rather a symbol of British nationalism and stoicism that is reminiscent, for Clarissa, of “Lady Bexborough, who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed” (*MD* 5). Clarissa thus transforms the *Cymbeline* lines from “fear no more” to *feel no more*, just as Septimus returns from the trenches only be struck with the ironic fear that “he could not feel” (*MD* 87). The counterpoint to romantic excess is a pride and stoicism that has its logical end in female
frigidity and male callousness, neither of which seem to stem directly from the playwright previously claimed by the Romantics as their own.

The extent to which Septimus reads Shakespeare according to his own state of mind becomes clear upon his return from war, as he reads in “Dante the same. Aeschylus (translated) the same” (MD 88). But this misreading is not straightforwardly maligned by the novel, as Haefele suggests;5 rather, for Woolf, such appropriations are the inevitable consequence of reading, not to mention one of the primary tools that she uses to link her two heroes—her two readers—together.6 For, just as Septimus’s wartime stoicism erupts in a reading of Shakespeare that is marked by despair and disgust, Clarissa’s stoicism turns inward towards thoughts of death and frigidity, both of which she ascribes to the Cymbeline dirge: “Fear no more,” said Clarissa. Fear no more the heat o’ the sun; for the shock of Lady Bruton asking Richard to lunch without her made the moment in which she stood shiver” (MD 30). The reality of death and war has punctured through the former ideal of stoicism and nationalism, and Clarissa and Septimus now misread Shakespeare’s romance as tragedy.

That these readings—tragedy as romance, and romance as tragedy—clearly depart from the original content of Shakespeare’s work would seem to support Haefele’s claim that the novel objects to such ideologically motivated misuses of art. Lady Bruton, for example, certainly demands such a critique: “For she never spoke of England, but this isle of men, this dear, dear land, was in her blood (without reading Shakespeare)” (MD 180). As Haefele points out, the fact that this line is actually a significant misquotation from King Richard II indicates Woolf’s disapproval of such nationalistic misreadings of the Bard: “Far from building up a nationalistic fervor for a virile and robust England, as Bruton would seem to have it, Gaunt’s speech actually goes on to describe England’s immanent ruin” (Haefele 211). However, the parenthetical emphasis of the passage indicates that Lady Bruton’s mistake follows from the fact that she is not a reader of Shakespeare, like Clarissa and Septimus, but rather only an inheritor of his cultural capital. As Michael Dobson has argued, as early as the 1760s Shakespeare had become “a ubiquitous presence in British culture [whose] fame [was] so synonymous with the highest claims of contemporary nationalism that simply to be British [was] to inherit him, without needing to read or see his actual plays at all” (Dobson 214). The real problem is not that Lady Bruton, Richard, and, along with them, Dr. Holmes misread Shakespeare, but that they are all content to read (or not read) Shakespeare in only one way. Whether he is imagined to be indecent, a symbol of Empire, or a “hobby,” as Dr. Holmes suggests, Shakespeare remains a commodity that can be “opened” or “pushed . . . aside” as need permits (MD 91). Woolf opposes Clarissa and Septimus to this; in returning to Shakespeare again and again, they promote the individual intellect over any singular pursuit of morality, the nation, or behavioral norms. However similar their singular misreadings may look to Lady Bruton’s failure to read, it is in their insistence on rereading that we begin to see the critical method advocated by Woolf herself.

Linked as they are as rereaders of Shakespeare, Clarissa and Septimus next arrive at a cathartic interpretation of the Cymbeline dirge that can be understood best in terms of repetition and renewal. Clarissa, recovering from Lady Bruton’s affront while sewing her dress and thus putting herself back together again, meditates on the greater cycle of life: “Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively
for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets fall. And the body alone listens to the passing bee; the wave breaking; the dog barking, far away barking and barking” (MD 39–40). Similarly, Septimus finally arrives at a peace of mind that is intricately linked to Clarissa’s by associated imagery: “His hand lay there on the back of the sofa, as he had seen his hand lie when he was bathing, floating, on the top of the waves, while far away on the shore he heard dogs barking and barking far away. Fear no more, says the heart to the body; fear no more” (MD 139). Both find in the line the same repeated sounds and the eternally breaking waves, and thus mimic Woolf’s own understanding of the cyclical, perpetual process of reading and interpretation. As she argued in her unpublished essay “The Reader,” “One reading always supercedes another. Thus the truest account of reading Shakespeare would be not to write a book with a beginning middle and end; but to collect notes, without trying to make them consistent” (432). In Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa and Septimus offer just such an account by producing multiple readings of Shakespeare that are each superceded by the next. As Bate observes, the modernist “breakthrough was not a new interpretation; it was a new style of interpretation. . . . The problem . . . stemmed from the difficulty of choosing between readings. The way round the problem was to admit the simultaneous validity of contradictory readings” (Bate 302). The imagery that Clarissa and Septimus’s most recent reading offers, of repetition and collection as the route to multiple layers of meaning, suggests that such a “style of interpretation” depends as much on the skill of the writer as it does on the imaginative efforts of its reader.

For Septimus, as for Woolf, this modernist literary mode constitutes a moment of truth: “He was not afraid. At every moment Nature signified by some laughing hint like that gold spot which went round the wall—there, there, there—her determination to show . . . Shakespeare’s words, her meaning” (MD 139). Septimus no longer appears to be reading himself in Shakespeare’s words; rather, through the very process of rereading, “Nature” promises to reveal a deeper truth. In A Room of One’s Own (1929), Woolf described this “Nature” (with a capital “N”) as the source of an eternal, collective truth that is revealed to the vigilant reader by artistic genius alone:

What one means by integrity, in the case of the novelist, is the conviction that he gives one that this is the truth. . . . Nature, in her most irrational mood, has traced in invisible ink on the walls of the mind a premonition which these great artists confirm; a sketch which only needs to be held to the fire of genius to become visible. (AROO 72)

As Septimus learns to read the meaning written on the walls of his mind by following “that gold spot” around and around, we must conclude that this mode of rereading stands, for Woolf, in a privileged relationship to Shakespeare. Woolf argues in “The Reader” that the Johnson S[hakespeare] the Coleridge S[hakespeare] the Bradley S[hakespeare] are all contributions to our knowledge of what Shakespeare looked like, if you see him through a certain vision. But there always remains something further. It is this that lures the reader. And it is this quality that finally eludes us, gives him his perpetual vitality. (431–32)
That which “lures the reader”—in fact, that which “brings the reader into being”—is Shakespeare’s apparent “conscious[ness] of the play as a work of art” (“The Reader” 432, emphasis added)—a thing deserving of being reread. By making the modernist mode of rereading both encompass and surpass its literary predecessors, while making the interest in art as such the motivation behind that mode, Woolf marks her version of “conversion” as the exception to the rule—one capable of expanding rather than stifling the soul.

Once Septimus’s artistic epiphany is cut short by Dr. Holmes’s alternative model of “conversion,” it is left to Clarissa to sort through the layers of her prior readings. In considering Septimus’s suicide, Clarissa recalls first her romantic reading of _Othello_, and then her tragic reading of _Cymbeline_, before concluding with an interpretation of the dirge that not only renders these conflicting readings simultaneously valid, but at last recalls the line’s original context: just as Imogen is reborn out of the symbolic death of her male alter ego Fidele, so is Clarissa renewed by the passing of her other self. This fact alone suggests that the novel understands Clarissa to have matured as a reader; in addition, Clarissa claims that Septimus’s suicide “made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun” (MD 186), poetically recalling that once elusive “heat of the sun.” Given that just before the publication of _Mrs. Dalloway_, in 1924, Woolf referred to Shakespeare himself as “the sun” that brings light to all literature (E 3: 463), it seems that what Septimus finally makes Clarissa feel is not only the joy of life, but the intangible “truth” behind Shakespeare’s words—the artistic genius that has enabled her multiple rereadings.

It must be noted that this concept of artistic genius and the practice of rereading are both deeply indebted to the Romantics, namely Hazlitt and Keats. For Taylor, it is with Keats’s 1818 sonnet “On sitting down to read King Lear once again” that “Shakespeare’s plays . . . become the objects of repeated readings” for the “pilgrim tourist, returning to a favorite shrine” (153–54). Bate also notes that “for Hazlitt, the key to Shakespeare’s genius was his open-mindedness” (330), the very trait that came to underwrite Woolf’s characterization of Shakespeare’s mind as “resonant and porous, . . . incandescent and undivided” (AROO 98). This link between Woolf and Keats may explain why _Mrs. Dalloway_ seems so much more sympathetic toward its romantic youth than it does toward its Victorian semi-maturity, as well as why Haefele sees the novel engaging in a critique of the latter alone. In fact, if a distinction must be drawn between the romantic and the modernist model of artistic genius and rereading, it can only be that, for the Romantics, rereading enabled a direct access to the artist’s genius, whereas for the modernists, artistic genius enabled the act of rereading.

In _Mrs. Dalloway_’s reimagination of Shakespeare, then, communities are no longer built out of passion or politics, but out of poetry itself. The ideological motivations of the Romantic and Victorian periods are thus subsumed by what Woolf argues is the more appropriate ideology of literary rigor for the sake of the literary object. As Taylor argues, however, this distinctly modernist rereading of Shakespeare says “good-bye to all that mass literacy which the Victorians had so industriously cultivated. Real Literature, important literature, belonged to, and could only be preserved by, a cultural elite” (245). In the novel, Septimus is, in fact, disgusted by the thought of what the average reader would make of his poet: the thought of human nature himself, “Holmes[,] reading Shakespeare” makes Septimus “roar with laughter or rage” (MD 140), and his “frivolous” wife’s interest in the Bard is likewise mocked: “Could she not read Shakespeare too? Was Shakespeare
a difficult author? she asked” (MD 87, 89). While Clarissa and Septimus may join one another across barriers of gender, class, and age, they also constitute a new intellectual elite that would leave those who do not or cannot appreciate Shakespeare as an artist somewhat in the lurch.

On the other hand, the novel does much to undermine Septimus’s Portrait of the Artist–esque “conversations with Shakespeare” while hinting that Rezia’s aesthetic sensibilities give her great potential as an artist (MD 147), two facts that suggest that Woolf’s reader is more democratically conceived than, say, Joyce’s.9 In the “Scylla and Charybdis” chapter of Ulysses (Joyce 176–209), for example, former scholar and aspiring poet Stephen discusses his theory of Shakespeare with three men: another poet, an essayist and a librarian— the very “critic[s] and . . . scholar[s]” who read “to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others,” as distinct from “the common reader” with whom Woolf identifies, who “reads for his own pleasure” (CR1: 11). Just as Woolf rejects the restriction of her community of readers to those who can claim to be a “specialist or . . . authority” (E2: 55), she also seems reject any association of readerly prowess with birth or social standing. Having defined a “highbrow” as a person “of thoroughbred intelligence who rides his mind at a gallop across country in pursuit of an idea” (CE2: 196), Woolf claimed that she herself had “known Duchesses who were highbrows, also charwomen” (CE2: 199). Thus, as Melba Cuddy-Keane argues in her book on Woolf’s “pedagogy of reading,” Woolf’s common reader is identified by a “self-selected . . . mode of reading rather than a social being” (118).

Woolf’s newly formed community of readers is thus determined by its elevation of literature along with its “great fineness of perception” and “great boldness of imagination” (CR2: 284), factors that are all typified by the poetic interests and active, interpretive skill of Septimus and Clarissa. Having moved through readings that characterize Shakespeare first as a romantic and then as a stoic, Clarissa and Septimus finally arrive at a vision of Shakespeare as artistic genius precisely because of his capacity to be reread. While this latter view may seem expansive rather than reductive, we must recognize that it is no less guilty of converting Shakespeare to suit its author’s ideological needs than are those of its literary predecessors. However, as literary critics who no doubt invest seriously in forming intellectual communities on the basis of rereading literary texts, we must think twice before rejecting such a conversion out of hand. Whether or not we subscribe to Woolf’s concept of artistic genius, the method by which she arrives at this “truth”—or, rather, the method that this “truth” enables—is that which has formed the basis of our own profession. Even more so than Joyce, who reportedly remarked that Ulysses would “keep the professors busy for centuries” (qtd. in Ellmann 535),6 Woolf has made reading into an art itself as productive as the art that motivates it. Do we, as critics, in returning again and again to texts, see ourselves as doomed to reproduce ourselves in our readings, or do we see some value in chasing that “gold spot” around the room?
Notes

1. Along with Henderson, Christine Froula insists that, “if Johnson, Bradley, and Coleridge invented autobiographical Shakespeares, [Woolf] too projected her writer’s self upon Shakespeare” and made “self-reflexive use of this Shakespeare in the forking of her own artistic authority” (“Virginia Woolf as Shakespeare’s Sister,” 123; see also pp. 228–29 in Briggs and pp. 721–23 in Schwartz). Shakespeare thus not only authorizes Woolf’s literary and feminist project, but “supplies” Mrs. Dalloway with its “central structure” (Wyatt 440). How Woolf justifies a critique of particular uses of Shakespeare alongside her own varied use of his imagery and cultural capital will be the subject of this paper.

2. Similarly, Susan Stanford Friedman argues that “reading functions in [The Voyage Out] as a trope for education, itself a figure for initiation into the adult world of the social order” (Friedman 109). Even in Woolf’s own words, one’s reading of Shakespeare invariably reflects one’s personal development: “To write down one’s impressions of Hamlet as one reads it year after year, would be virtually to record one’s own autobiography, for as we know more of life, so Shakespeare comments on what we know” (E2: 27).

3. Melba Cuddy-Keane blames Septimus’s mistake on Isabel Pole’s lectures by likening this pedagogical method to “conversion” (81–92)—an interesting suggestion that nonetheless seems to miss the specific import of Septimus’s (and Clarissa’s) romantically motivated learning process.

4. For more on Woolf’s opposition to Raleigh’s literary values, see Woolf’s ‘Walter Raleigh’ (CE1: 314–18) and Cuddy-Keane (92–99).

5. “In the conversion of the epitome of human creativity and artistic achievement into the embodiment of vulgar patriotism or latent misanthropy, Woolf underscores the vulnerability of complex artistic creations to the sapping and violent work of state ideology” (Haefele 212). It is precisely this characterization of Shakespeare as the “epitome of human creativity and artistic achievement” that I am refusing to take for granted here, instead questioning Woolf’s active role in shaping Shakespeare to fit those terms.

6. For Henderson, Woolf’s choice of Cymbeline to link Clarissa to “her double” evokes “the memory of Thoby, by then Woolf’s own dead sibling” (see Woolf, “An Introduction to Mrs. Dalloway” 11; Henderson 140). As Briggs notes in her biography, Woolf’s close relationship with her brother was based largely on “their intellectual compatibility, in particular their pleasure in Shakespeare” (363). Woolf even wrote to her brother “about the first of Shakespeare’s plays to catch her interest—Cymbeline” (Fox 6). See Woolf’s 5 November 1901 letter to Thoby (L1: 45–46) and Fox (94–95).

7. For more on the elegiac quality of this use of the dirge, see Henderson (140, 152). For a reading that focuses on Woolf’s sister Sylvia rather than Thoby, see Froula’s Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde (87–128).

8. According to Bate, the Romantic period conceived of “poetry as autobiography” and thus began to view Shakespeare’s poetry and plays as a way of accessing Shakespeare the man (74). Woolf, on the other hand, insists that while “the first process” of reading is to befriend the writer, “the second part of reading” depends on judgments and comparisons that allow you “to continue reading without the book before you, to hold one shadow-shape against another, to have read widely enough and with enough understanding to make such comparisons alive and illuminating” (CR2: 290–92). This emphasis on continued, comparative reading marks a departure from the Romantic mode, as it suggests multiplicity rather than singularity of meaning, as well as critical distance rather than intimacy.

9. Rezia’s aesthetic sensibility is suggested both by her hat-making craft and her appreciation of Septimus’s poetry—“Some were very beautiful” (MD 148). In fact, her character was modeled after the Russian dancer and actress Lydia Lopokova, who married John Maynard Keynes in 1925 and was a friend of the Woolfs for many years (see D2: 265). On the other hand, Woolf was ambivalent about Lopokova’s performance in a 1933 production of Twelfth Night: in her review of the play, Woolf argued that, while Lopokova “could make the moment . . . one of intense and moving beauty, . . . she was not our Olivia” (CE1: 30–31). Still, she writes, this failure is not to be mourned, as it “has made us compare . . . our Olivia with Madame Lopokova’s; our reading of the whole play with Mr. Guthrie’s; and since they all differ, back we must go to Shakespeare. We must read Twelfth Night again” (CE1: 30–31). In other words, Lopokova has successfully offered one interpretation of Shakespeare in an endless cycle to come.

10. Cuddy-Keane, in fact, insists that Woolf’s pedagogy of active reading is motivated by a democratic project. For more on Woolf’s involvement in the class debate, see Cuddy-Keane (13–58).

11. Ellman’s source for the famous remark was a 1956 interview with Joyce’s French translator, Jacques Benoist-Méchin, who recalled a conversation that took place in October 1921.
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In the interludes of The Waves (1931), the sun rises “as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp” (7), signaling imagery popularly associated with Florence Nightingale, also known as “The Lady with the Lamp,” and signaling, too, Virginia Woolf’s critique of women’s complex relationship with the imperial project. Light was commonly associated with the reach of the Empire, as evidenced in the popular nineteenth-century expression, “the sun never sets on the British Empire” (Roth). This saying encapsulates the established association of the sun with the scope of the Empire and with the mission of British imperialism. In fact this “mission,” as Jenny Sharpe explains, “is primarily a story about the colonizing culture as an emissary of light” (100). Women are often portrayed as the bearer or source of this light; in particular, the common incarnations of Nightingale in both her and Woolf’s contemporary cultures clearly connect women with light and empire. Woolf employs these images in The Waves to illuminate the complicity of women in the imperial project and to criticize and expose imperialism’s subsequent violence, particularly on women. Ultimately, in the final interludes of The Waves, Woolf proposes an alternative to this figure of the Lady with the Lamp: a female subjectivity positioned outside of the light of empire in the language and space of darkness, no longer complicit in the imperial project.

Woolf introduces imagery evocative of Nightingale in the first interlude of The Waves as the sun rises over the horizon: “as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow, spread across the sky like the blades of a fan. Then she raised her lamp higher and the air seemed to become fibrous and to tear away from the green surface flickering and flaming in red and yellow fibres like the smoky fire that roars from a bonfire” (7).

As the light from the lamp spreads, it adds texture and color to the air, signifying the light’s shifting and transformative powers in continual redeployment of itself and in its alteration of everything it encounters. The sun continues to be represented as a woman’s lamp later in the first interlude: “Slowly the arm that held the lamp raised it higher and then higher until a broad flame became visible; an arc of fire burnt on the rim of the horizon, and all round it the sea blazed gold” (7–8).

Through these passages, as the image of the rising sun is conflated with the image of a Lady with a Lamp, the text invokes the figure of Florence Nightingale, popularized in Longfellow’s 1857 poem, “Santa Filomena”:

Lo! in that house of misery
A lady with a lamp I see
Pass through the glimmer gloom,
And flit from room to room,
A lady with a lamp shall stand
In the great history of the land,
A noble type of good,
Heroic womanhood. (ll. 21–24, 40–44)

In addition, this image of Nightingale as The Lady with the Lamp was commonly reproduced in such pictures as the painting from 1855 shown in Figure 1, which depicts her holding a lamp above a wounded soldier at Scutari during the Crimean War, the Union Jack hanging in the dim background.

Figure 1: Painting by Henrietta Rae, 1855. Courtesy of Florence Nightingale Museum, London.
The numerous popular images of Nightingale reveal the intricacies of women’s relationship to empire through their various portrayals of Nightingale as either an angelic or administrative figure, embodying women’s service as both figureheads and facilitators of the imperial project. As an angel of light, Nightingale personifies the role of empire in enlightening and ministering to the fallen, associating, too, the ministering Victorian woman with the enlightenment of the British Empire. In Figure 1, Nightingale is presented as a kind of Virgin Mary, wrapped in a flowing shawl, contemplating the plight of the injured soldier. Although she carries a lamp, the light seems to emanate as much from Nightingale herself. Yet, despite the presence of the Nightingale angel, the hospital is still in chaos: the soldiers are still wearing their tattered and blood-soaked uniforms and sitting or lying on the floor. The hospital is in dire need of the Nightingale administrator to organize and supply the needs of the soldiers of empire that still await her salvation.

A second painting from the same year (Figure 2) portrays Nightingale the organizer. Here, the image again focuses on Nightingale tending a single patient, but unlike the previous painting, she is not the source of light, but the bearer of it. The lamp she wields illuminates the dark world of the Crimean hospital, revealing her efficiently attired body

Figure 2: 1855. Courtesy of Florence Nightingale Museum, London.
and evidence that she and her nurses have already been at work: the soldier is wrapped in clean bandages and blankets and is sleeping peacefully. Even after the cleansing and organizing of the administrative Nightingale, the image of Nightingale with the lamp reasserts the place of women as the angelic caretakers maintaining the purity and efficiency of an empire at war.

A third sketch from 1855 (Figure 3) reveals further complexity in Nightingale’s image: both the angel and the administrator are at play simultaneously. The Lady with the Lamp, posed alone in a sea of soldiers’ beds, examines the results of her organization of the hospital at Scutari. Portrayed in the foreground, Nightingale looms brighter than any of the surrounding images and figures, and the light emanates from her as much as from the lamp she carries. Here, the angel is at work in the world the administrator has created, both Nightingales being required and signaled simultaneously.

A final image of Florence Nightingale in the hospital at Scutari (Figure 4) further complicates the image of the famous nurse. Here, the role of ministering angel is replaced entirely by Nightingale’s administrative function in the Empire and war. In this image, Nightingale holds aloft a lamp that illuminates its immediate surroundings, but this light is augmented by the hanging lamp above her that illuminates the entire room. Soldiers are seen bandaged and in beds, being ministered to by other soldiers and by nurses, and Nightingale figures as supervisor rather than deliverer of these ministrations. As administrator, she is no longer providing the care; she is providing the vision. Nightingale is no longer the nurse; she is the governor and director of the nursing.
By invoking this multifaceted image of Florence Nightingale, Woolf ultimately seeks to reconcile and provide alternatives to women’s complex relationship to the imperial project as both ministering angels and administrative agents. Through the referencing of The Lady with the Lamp, the interludes of *The Waves* immediately draw attention to the complicated relationship between women, imperial enlightenment and war. As historians P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins observe,

Elite women acted as influential adjuncts to the masculine empire, whether as missionaries, doctors, managers of emigration societies, founders of the Girl Guides, or as propagandists. The gentlemanly elite was to this extent strengthened by its lady-like complement; both had their roles shaped by the empire they were trying to civilize. (13)

Women’s role in the imperial project, then, was in “complement” or as “adjuncts” to the “gentlemanly elite” who were trying to “civilize” the Empire. Florence Nightingale, in her efforts to improve the state of hospitals in the Crimea and after, is just such a participant. Therefore, when Woolf sketches Florence Nightingale imagery into *The Waves*, she not only summons the nursing angel in the hospital, she also invokes other incarnations of Nightingale: forceful administrator, fierce negotiator, and determined servant of empire.
Nightingale’s administrative work conflicted with the idealized image of her as a ministering angel. According to biographers such as Lytton Strachey, the development of modern nursing and management of hospitalization consumed Nightingale for the rest of her life after the Crimean War. In *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey describes the administrative Nightingale as a “tigress” who “absorbed” and “dominated” Sidney Herbert to help her in her cause (139), and as a woman who worked with a “mania” (144), as if a “Demon possessed her” (111, 149). This aggressive portrayal of Nightingale, which Woolf referred to as “very amusing” (*L2*: 3), unmasks the ferocity of Nightingale’s character in achieving her administrative agenda.

The image of the light in the interludes of *The Waves* undergoes a similar juxtaposition of angelic and aggressive qualities, contrasting the beatific Lady with the Lamp in the first interlude to the increasingly violent and androgynous sun. The sun in the interludes is likewise complicated by its movement from lady to girl to androgyne and by the interludes’ shift of imagery from feminine light to feminine darkness. These progressions of the sun’s characterization in *The Waves* reveal Woolf’s critique of women’s ambiguous relationship to the work of empire.

The association of women’s bodies with imperial ideology begins with the rising of the sun, “as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp” (7). Significantly, the etymology of *couch* reveals additional violence. Although in *The Waves* it denotes to “lie or lay down,” its use there also hints at its other definitions—“to lie in ambush” and “to lower a lance into position for an attack”—further suggesting the ambiguity of women’s involvement in empire and war in the interludes. In her germinal essay, “Britannia Rules the Waves,” Jane Marcus refers to the women’s limb as “the mighty white arm of empire and civilization” (159), placing the agency of empire in the body of the woman and extending the symbolism of geographical enlightenment to imperial activity. Although the relation between the sun and the light of empire is clear, I contend that the lamp itself, not the woman’s arm, contains the light. The woman’s arm, only a tool for holding the lamp, telegraphs the use of the woman’s body for spreading the light of empire and situates the body of the woman as a figurehead lacking agency of her own. Furthermore, as Jane Garrity points out, in *The Waves* the collaboration of women and women’s bodies in the work of empire “acknowledges that women’s quest for linguistic inclusion is legitimized by and embedded in the doctrine of expansion and rule” (271). Woolf presents a counter argument to this collaboration through her shift to imagery of shadow and darkness in the ninth interlude.

The essential journey of the sun in the interludes, from rising in the east to setting in the west, both fixes and moves the reader’s gaze from the east, a site of expansion and empire making, to the west, the site of the homeland. Here, I take issue with Marcus’s argument that *The Waves* “emphatically dramatizes the very historical moment in which the sun does set” (155). Historically, the light of empire even now is not extinguished by any means. Nicole Roth reminds us that the British Empire was actually at its height in the 1930s, that India and Pakistan did not become independent nations until 1947, remained “Dominions” for some time thereafter, and are still considered “Protectorates.” As the interludes reveal through their portrayal of the continuous solar and oceanic cycles, rather than diminishing, the imperial impulse remains active in its enlightenment even in its new focus on the homeland. In fact, just as “the attitudes that determine the peck-
ing order at home also fix the hierarchical oppressions of the Empire” (Phillips 182), the
equation also works in reverse: the same attitudes, hierarchies, and, one could say, stories
are repeated at home as they have been played out in the colonies. The imperial project
that, as Cain and Hopkins argue, “was enfolded in a grand development strategy designed
by Britain to reshape the world in her own image” also “remained a dynamic, expanding
force long after decline, as measured by British comparative industrial performance, is
conventionally thought to have set in” (57).

The Waves, then, portrays not any true end of empire, but rather the heightened anxi-
eties about both British “industrial performance” in the Empire in the 1930s as well as the
inescapability of empire’s “dynamic, expanding force” and its consequences.

Just as the images of Nightingale are deployed to represent the light of empire,
in The Waves, Woolf also deploys images of women and their labor to show how the
 imperial project included the domination of women. The interludes use the image of
the sun as the Lady with the Lamp, and its summoning of Florence Nightingale, to
demonstrate these implications of imperialistic demarcations for women. Personal and
national identities mark women’s bodies in particular; as Jane Garrity explains, British
women’s identity “arose from the ability to reproduce conventional models of British
womanhood—models which, whether generative or purely sexual, are dependent on
some valorization of an essentialized female body” (260). The demarcation of women
as signifiers of nation and empire plays out in the interludes of The Waves through
the imagery of the Lady with the Lamp, but this imagery becomes complicated by the
tension created in the progression from the Lady with the Lamp to the sun as violent
androgyne.

The woman bearing a lamp from the first interlude becomes a girl briefly in the
fourth interlude “who had shaken her head and made all the jewels, the topaz, the aquama-
rine, the water-coloured jewels with sparks of fire in them dance” (73), then settles into an “it”
in interludes six through nine (165, 208). The text may appear to present an androgynous
space with the developing gender neutrality of the sun, but in its increasingly violent
“daggers of light . . . driving darkness before it” (165–66), this androgynous sun proves
destructive, negating the recuperation of the language of the sun and the situation of the
interludes as a space of androgynous language, writing, and subjectivity. The interludes
reveal not only the appropriation of women’s bodies for the uses of imperialism through
the imagery of The Lady with the Lamp, but also the inherent violence involved in the
practices of imperialism and war as even these images are cloaked in the language of mili-
tary violence, which “replay[s] ruling-class expectations of mastery and fears of turbaned,
armed warriors assaulting their shores” (Scott 31).

Throughout the interludes, this language of military violence extends from the sun to
the waves and birds, eventually encroaching on the domestic spaces of the house and gar-
den. In the fourth interlude, the sun, now part of the violent project of the waves, extends
the military impulse beyond the shore and onto the cultivated mainland as “[The waves] fell
with the concussion of horses’ hooves on the turf. Their spray rose like the tossing of lances
and assegais over the riders’ heads” (108). In the fifth interlude, the sun enters the garden
to “beat on the orchard wall, and every pit and grain of the brick was silver pointed, purple,
fiery as if soft to touch, as if touched it must melt into hot-baked grains of dust.” (149). Here,
we begin to see the negative possibilities of the sun as the harshness of the light implies
the effect of its change through its imperial activity—it is now a scorching sun that might be seen and felt in the colonies. The extension of the light of empire onto the homeland continues to prove destructive in the sixth interlude, where the sun catches “the edge of a cloud and burnt it into a slice of light, a blazing island on which no foot could rest” and burns the trees, whose “topmost leaves . . . were crisped in the sun” (165). By the end of the interludes, everything from the horizon to the hearth has been touched by the light of empire and changed, deformed, and destroyed in the process.

In the closing interludes, the image of the Lady with the Lamp, tainted with imperialist ideology and practice, is revealed as no longer useful for women. Woolf instead reclaims the ideology of women as dark or unenlightened (primitive) by here refiguring the imagery of shadow to encompass the entire landscape. Darkness replaces light as the moving force in the final interludes, traveling inland and covering everything, both human and natural:

As if there were waves of darkness in the air, darkness moved on, covering houses, hills, trees, as waves of water wash round the sides of some sunken ship . . . Mounting higher, darkness blew along the bare upland slopes, and met the fretted and abraded pinnacles of the mountain where the snow lodges for ever on the hard rock even when the valleys are full of running streams and yellow vine leaves, and girls, sitting on verandahs, look up at the snow, shading their faces with their fans. Them, too, darkness covered. (237)

Here, the antithesis to Florence Nightingale, the “girls, sitting on verandahs . . . shading their faces with their fans,” emerges as an alternative to embracing the light and work of empire. Instead of being invaded by the militaristic sun, the girls are protected by darkness and shield themselves from the imperial solar gaze; instead of being light bearers, emanating or carrying the light themselves, the girls are shadow seekers, refusing to participate in the work of enlightenment. The language of darkness, with its implied femininity and subjection of the feminine inherent in the ideology of empire, changes in the interludes to a language of possibility and freedom, defying the trope of darkness as savagery or ignorance and converting it instead into a means of protection from the light of empire. Like the house in the interludes, which is shuttered away from the light—containing “still denser depths of darkness” (150)—the girls are posed to see a world without the harsh light of empire, free from the violence and inhabitation of the imperial sun. It is in this space of shadow that the interludes offer another possibility for women outside of the work and light of empire.

In the face of the oncoming darkness, the imagery of the girls shading themselves from the light, rather than triggering ignorance or danger, presents a conscious refusal to be touched by or to be bearers of the light of empire. Through these girls, the text suggests that future generations may not embrace the light of imperialism, may not engage in the work of empire. Additionally, the girls “look up at the snow” (137), focusing on an element that resists the potency of the imperial sun and directing their own gaze upon a symbol of resistance. Whereas Nightingale and the “woman couched” (7) emitted light, these girls refuse to look at it, and in turning from it, turn also from the inscriptions of imperial enlightenment on female subjectivity.
As the sun sets in *The Waves*, Woolf temporarily extinguishes the light of empire and its use of the imagery and labor of women. In doing so, she proposes the darkness as a place of possibility for a new female subjectivity to emerge. Just as Woolf proposed removing the Angel in the House, described in *The Pargiters* as “the woman that men wished women to be” (qtd. by Hussey 219), she here proposes removing the woman as bearer of imperial enlightenment, the Lady with the Lamp. As the cyclical nature of the sun promises that it will rise again, Woolf prepares for a new image of woman, resistant to the light of empire, its war and violence, to replace The Lady with the Lamp.

**Works Cited**


Part Seven:  
Exploring Cultural Origins and Contexts
LILY THE ETHNOGRAPHER:  
DISCOVERING SELF IN TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

by Meg Albrinck

T
o the Lighthouse (1927) has often been read as Virginia Woolf’s most personal novel, and her own admissions of familial portraiture have led many scholars to explore it biographically. While this approach has clearly proved fruitful for understanding the emotional politics of love and loss within the Stephen family, it limits the scope of the novel’s meaning in ways that Woolf herself resisted later in her life. While Woolf was certainly commenting upon her own family dynamics in this narrative of memory, mourning, and aesthetic production, her focus was broader than her immediate family. I would go so far as to suggest that our understanding of To the Lighthouse can be deepened by an investigation of the intersections between the context of Lily’s creative process and the budding science of ethnography.

Ethnography and its parent field of anthropology were beginning to gain academic acceptance in England at precisely the time Virginia Stephen was coming of age. Anthropology was first recognized as an official section of the British Association of the Advancement of Science in 1884 (Stocking 72). The field itself had gained respect and regularity with its movement from missionary work to scientific inquiry throughout the nineteenth century. However, even though it had strong academic roots in the rise of classical studies in the Victorian period, anthropology remained at that time an “armchair discipline.” Artifacts were gathered and studied, with theories of ancient culture developing from the cross-referencing of literary and historical texts with archaeological materials.

Classical scholar Jane Harrison, who was a leading anthropologist of this earlier period, records in her memoir one moment where she realized the limitations of these anthropological methods. One evening, while she was attempting to complete an article, her friend Francis Darwin stopped by. Darwin asked about one of her references to a vannus, asking what the object was. Harrison replied that it was a fan, “used in ceremonies of initiation.” Darwin challenged this notion, saying that it had a very different connotation as an agricultural implement in Virgil. He then asked her, “Have you ever seen one?” to which she confessed that she hadn’t. He pressed on: “And you are writing about a thing you have never seen?” Darwin then tracked down a specimen of the vannus and sent it to Harrison, who investigated its possible uses and checked them against her hypotheses. The episode ended in this way: Harrison writes, “Three months later I dispatched a paper to the Hellenic Journal on what I had seen and did understand. It was a lifelong lesson to me. It was not quite my fault. I had been reared in a school that thought it was far more important to parse a word than to understand it” (57–58). Harrison, with her colleagues, placed more emphasis on material culture than their predecessors, but still had not taken the next step in this analysis—the step toward living with an active culture.

The ethnographers, in contrast, took the ideal of direct observation as their starting point. In Argonauts of the Western Pacific (1922), the unofficial ur-text of the new field of ethnography, Bronislaw Malinowski emphasized that social contact and communica-
tion between the anthropologist and the culture observed were absolutely essential to the development of a sound interpretation of cultural practices. No longer could a researcher confidently draw conclusions about cultures from the safety of his or her university study; now the researcher must live with the people studied, eating their food, learning their language, observing their behaviors, viewing their rituals, and faithfully recording all detail.

Woolf would have been familiar with the field of anthropology and the developments in ethnography through a variety of contacts. Her relationship with Jane Harrison connected her with one of the leading classical scholars of the age. Harrison’s influence on Woolf was not merely social, but intellectual as well. The Woolfs’ library contained two of Harrison’s studies of ancient Greek art and ritual, one of which Harrison had given to Woolf as a Christmas gift in 1923. Furthermore, the Woolfs’ Hogarth Press had published Harrison’s memoir in 1925. Harrison’s influence has been traced in relation to several of Woolf’s writings, and in the case of To the Lighthouse, critics like Tina Barr and Martha Carpentier have illustrated the manner in which Harrison’s renderings of Greek matrilineal myth informed the representations of Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay.

If Woolf’s personal connections to Jane Harrison oriented her to the methodologies of Victorian Cambridge, then her connections within the Bloomsbury Group would have introduced her to the innovations of the Cambridge School of modern ethnographers, a group that included Malinowski, W. H. R. Rivers, and Alfred Cort Haddon. Although there is no smoking shard that would definitively indicate that Woolf had read Malinowski’s Argonauts, her connections with Harrison and with Cambridge economist John Maynard Keynes may have brought her into a closer working knowledge of the Cambridge School’s methods than may be otherwise traceable.

More convincing than this remnant of a connection, however, are the traces of what I call Woolf’s ethnographic sensibility, traces that emerge throughout her œuvre. Woolf’s ethnographic sensibility stems from a fascination with individuals and their often fraught relationships to culture. She is equally adept at painting a portrait of a specific person or a social group, in part because of her attentiveness to behavior, emotional response, and external detail. As Carey Snyder has argued, this method can be seen in Woolf’s first novel, The Voyage Out (1915), and, as Jed Esty has suggested, it is equally present but differently focused in Between the Acts (1941). Snyder and Esty demonstrate that Woolf’s ethnographic sensibility persists throughout her middle years as well, a sensibility that is as obvious in essays such as “Street Haunting” (1927) and “Thunder at Wembley” (1924) as it is in her novels. However, it has not been explored in regard to the figure of Lily Briscoe in To the Lighthouse.

In this novel, in particular, Woolf’s familiarity and comfort with ethnographic methods can be seen most clearly in the character of Lily and the setting of the novel. In this portion of the paper, I juxtapose the reflections and proscriptions of Malinowski’s 1922 Argonauts to Woolf’s novel, suggesting, as Clifford Geertz and James Clifford have, that the relationship between the professed objectivity of anthropology and the subjectivity of art are often closer than we acknowledge. Although Lily’s project is unquestionably aesthetic, the island setting, the subject of her painting, and her methods reflect many of the values of the new ethnographers.

Let’s begin with location. The Cambridge ethnographers were conducting most of their research in the 1910s and 1920s in the islands around Papua New Guinea. Ma-
linowski, for example, spent more than two years living in a tent in the villages of the Trobriand Islanders, while Haddon and Rivers were working with the peoples of the Torres Straits. Thus, the quintessential image of the British ethnographer required a remote, tropical, island location.

Although Woolf’s inspiration for the novel’s setting is indisputably St. Ives in Cornwall, the Hebrides Islands in northwest Scotland serve as the fictional setting for the Ramsay summer home. Woolf specifically identifies the Ramsays’ home as remote, some “three hundred miles from [Mr. Ramsay’s] libraries . . . lectures and . . . disciples” (26). The retreat is on the waterfront, some distance from the clearly marked “fishing village” (10). Although this setting is British and northerly, the island location and the proximity to a fishing village are typical of sites for ethnographic research of the time, research that is further referenced as Mrs. Ramsay reflects on the books that line her shelves. Among the volumes that she has been given is one called *The Savage Customs of Polynesia*, a text that remains on the shelf, unopened (27).

There is clearly a sense that the visitors to the Ramsay summer home see it as a remote and isolated refuge. For example, the Ramsays often imagine themselves to be explorers in uncharted territory; Mrs. Ramsay calls a trip to town for supplies “a great expedition,” and Mr. Ramsay uses the same language to describe the long-awaited journey to the lighthouse (10). However, they are not there to document their surroundings, but merely to escape from the pressures of university life. Lily, in contrast, seems to be the primary figure who comes to the island to work. She is diligent, methodical, persistent, and focused, as William Bankes notes. She stays at rooms in town, but is very “orderly,” “up before breakfast and off to paint” (18). She is clearly not on holiday, and in this capacity appears to be the character at this remote island location most easily identified with the ethnographers.

As Malinowski fought to gain respect for ethnography as a true science, he postulated three key principles that should inform the ethnographer’s method. First, the ethnographer had to have scientific aims, meaning that the observations were to yield knowledge about the observed culture instead of imposing outside knowledge upon it (as would have been the case in the earlier missionary days of anthropological studies). Second, he had to live “without other white men, right among the natives” (*Argonauts* 6). Third, he had to be meticulous in his collection of data, which required taking copious notes and transforming the data into “a diagram, a plan, an exhaustive, synoptic table of cases” (*Argonauts* 14), thus firmly “fixing” the impressions in an objective manner.

Lily’s fulfillment of the first of these dicta is obviously a bit dicey. She’s not a scientist, nor has any intention to be. Unlike Rivers and Malinowski, who shared a common interest in kinship patterns and genealogy, she is not explicitly visiting the Ramsays to ascertain any unknown truths about the late-Victorian family. Nevertheless, she is intensely interested in this family as a family. Indeed, she is attempting to paint a portrait of Mrs. Ramsay and James, an effort to study the relations between mother and son that is constantly disrupted by the intrusion of the father, Mr. Ramsay. She is constantly measuring her own sense of purpose and meaning against that which she sees in Mrs. Ramsay, at times attracted to Mrs. Ramsay’s model of marriage and maternity and at times repelled by it. Therefore, although she is not a scientist by any means, she does share with her ethnographer colleagues an interest in family structure and social roles.
She also shares a common method. As Malinowski argues, the true ethnographer must eschew the comforts gained by living apart from a native culture in favor of an embedded practice. He records his daily activities, which seem remarkably similar to Lily’s:

As I went on my morning walk through the village, I could see intimate details of family life, of toilet, cooking, taking of meals; I could see the arrangements for the day’s work, people starting on their errands, or groups of men and women busy at some manufacturing tasks. Quarrels, jokes, family scenes, events usually trivial, sometimes dramatic but always significant, formed the atmosphere of my daily life, as well as theirs. It must be remembered that as the natives saw me constantly every day, they ceased to be interested or alarmed, or made self-conscious by my presence, and I ceased to be a disturbing element in the tribal life which I was to study. (Argonauts 7–8)

Malinowski recommends that at times “it is good for the Ethnographer to put aside camera, note book and pencil, and to join in himself in what is going on” (Argonauts 21). So, too, is Lily incorporated into the life of the Ramsay family, breakfasting with them, dining with them, providing conversation, social comfort, and, in the cases of Mr. Ramsay and Charles Tansley, sympathy. She interests the Ramsays and they her, using a mutual curiosity to shape their daily interactions.

From this proximal perspective, Malinowski argues that the ethnographer is responsible for documenting as many of his observations and conversations as possible, using a meticulous system of transcription that moves from notes to draft to final product. He argues that effective ethnography requires thorough representation of a culture. Malinowski’s language is interesting, for he relies upon a vocabulary of visualization as a means of identifying the end effect of the copious note taking. Indeed, Malinowski argues that the “final goal” of ethnography is a perspectival one: “This goal is, briefly, to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world” (Argonauts 25). But ethnography is not just about seeing through the native eye: it also about painting a picture using that perspective. All along the way, the ethnographer’s notes should “[draw] up all the rules” (Argonauts 11), present a “true picture of tribal life” (Argonauts 6), attempt a “preliminary sketch” (Argonauts 13) of the culture observed. This initial “sketch” must then be fleshed out more fully, for initial observations can only gain coherence and concreteness with the intervention of time—what Malinowski calls the “laborious years between the moment when [the ethnographer] sets foot upon a native beach, . . . and the time when he writes down the final version of his results” (Argonauts 4).

There is an obvious connection to Lily’s work in these directives. As a painter, Lily is also attempting to construct a visual representation of the relationship she sees in the window. Using a variety of short, rhythmic spurts, strokes, and movements, she inscribes her canvas with a series of short notes, attempting to use color, light, and form to record the figures she observes. But her first impressions do not yield a coherent portrait. Indeed, Lily’s first draft of her painting must wait eleven years for her to return to the island and to reengage her subject, eleven “laborious years” that present her with the objective distance necessary to accurately represent her figures and to receive her “vision.”
But here is where the tension emerges. As much as Malinowski's method relies upon proximity for observation, it also relies upon distance for solidification. One cannot draw a coherent portrait of one's subjects while one is still living within that culture, for the proximity of daily relations interferes with the objectivity needed for generalizations about cultural habits, customs, and traditions. Indeed, Malinowski's posthumously published *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (1967) reveals more of his emotional ups and downs, more of his personal reactions to his environment and his situation. At moments, he is deeply critical of the Trobrianders and of himself, revealing the subjectivity that naturally attends any observer. As James Clifford notes in *Predicament of Culture*, it is only in reading the more formal *Argonauts* alongside the more personal *Diary* that a fuller picture of the ethnographic experience is achieved.

Likewise, a delicate balance of engagement and withdrawal—“a razor edge of balance between . . . opposite forces”—must be achieved for Lily’s portrait to be completed (193). In the first part of the book, she takes rooms in town, coming out to the compound for breakfast and staying for the duration of the day. She is brought into conversations with and about the Ramsays, must endure the skeptical misogyny of Charles Tansley, must protect her easel from Cam the rocket, and must protect her independence from the meddling matchmaking of Mrs. Ramsay. She certainly gains some perspective on her subject, but cannot achieve her vision in this environment. Deeply attracted to the Ramsay family, but firmly committed to her own separate set of gendered and professional values, Lily is pulled between the desire to please others and her commitments to her own aesthetic, sexual, and professional goals.

Interestingly, Lily’s success as a painter comes only after she gives up the superficial distance she worked to protect in the first section of the book. In the third section of the novel, she moves into the house (rather than into the rooms in town), but is able to carve out more space around her easel than she had previously been granted. In part, this newfound security has come with temporal and emotional distance; the death of Mrs. Ramsay minimizes a model of gender identity that perpetually denigrated Lily’s aesthetic aspirations in the earlier section. It also comes with the physical departure of Mr. Ramsay and his youngest children, who leave Lily in relative peace to make the trip to the lighthouse. As she watches the Ramsays’ boat sail across the bay, Lily finally realizes,

> Distance had an extraordinary power. . . . So much depends, she thought, upon distance: whether people are near us or far from us; for her feeling for Mr. Ramsay changed as he sailed further and further across the bay. It seemed to be elongated, stretched out; he seemed to become more and more remote. (188, 191)

In this moment, the family is simultaneously near and far—physically, they are remote, but emotionally, they remain present. In this liminal moment, on the liminal space of the beach, in this liminal consciousness as observer and observed, Lily is finally able to establish the balance necessary to draw her mark down the center of the page.

Malinowski acknowledges this liminality of experience, for the ethnographer at once realizes his difference from the population he studies as well as his immersion within that culture. He describes this perspective in the following way: “Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village,
while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight” (Argonauts 4). The ethnographer is between two worlds—his own and that of his subjects. In Lily’s penultimate stance—scanning the horizon for the Ramsay boat—Woolf presents a sympathetic cousin to Malinowski’s ethnographer. Standing on the beach, Lily turns this gaze toward her subjects, asking “Where was that boat now? And Mr. Ramsay?” (202). As she grows more capable of connecting with her subjects, of seeing them and their “vision” of their world, she is able to complete her portrait. “‘He has landed,’ she said aloud. ‘It is finished.’ . . . It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision” (208–09). Lily’s vision requires seeing the world, to use Malinowski’s language, through Mr. Ramsay’s point of view, “to realise his vision of his world.” When she can sympathize, when she can imagine through his eyes, she can complete her work. In doing so, she comes to a better understanding of herself, a greater satisfaction with her efforts, a more comfortable relationship with the world around her.

Woolf’s novel has been richly rewarding for critics, deepening in meaning as the languages of psychology, gender studies, the visual arts, family studies, biography, empire, travel, and ontology have been brought to illuminate the text. While Woolf’s familiarity with specific ethnographic studies of the 1920s remains unclear,5 the language and the postures of ethnographic exploration circulate throughout her fiction, in ways that are alternately explicit and covert. Woolf’s intense curiosity in human behavior manifests itself in an ethnographic sensibility, which allowed her to constantly measure the placement of herself and her characters within a variety of cultural contexts.

Notes
1. Although she readily acknowledged the family likenesses upon the novel’s initial publication, she later wrote that she “disliked being . . . told my people are my mother and father, when, being in a novel, they’re not” (L6: 464).
2. There is some lag time here between the science’s development in England and its more rapid progress under the hand of Franz Boas in the Americas. Nevertheless, as George Stocking convincingly argues in “Ethnographer’s Magic,” Alfred Cort Haddon and W. H. R. Rivers laid some important groundwork for Bronislaw Malinowski’s later advances.
3. I thank Elisa Kay Sparks for reminding me of Woolf’s reference to the Fiji Islanders in A Room of One’s Own.
4. Charles Tansley is also at the site to work; however, the appeal of the location for him is obviously Mr. Ramsay, his mentor, rather than the family, villagers, or environment.
5. One connection, at least, can be traced. In her paper “Virginia Woolf’s Wild England: George Borrow, Domestic Ethnography, and Between the Acts,” which was also presented at the 15th Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf, Helen Southworth directed me to Woolf’s interest in the amateur ethnographer George Borrow, whose late-Victorian work focused on gypsies in England.

Works Cited


There are many different kinds of photographs in *To the Lighthouse* (1927). One of the aims of this essay is to show how Woolf uses the language of photography to reveal how different minds work.¹ If Mr. Ramsay epitomizes a positivist photography associated with biography and the travel genre (a kind of human camera framing and recording different “shots” at the drawing-room window), then Mrs. Ramsay speaks to an experimental photography that combines word and image and is tied to the Surrealist and “automatic” strategies of the avant-garde. The first section of this paper concentrates on Mr. Ramsay’s trek across the terrace in Chapter 6 of “The Window,” with a particular emphasis on the role of the polar snapshot within his totalizing knowledge project. It then turns to Mrs. Ramsay on the beach, where Lily Briscoe describes her as doing the work of the camera: “Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said” (161). Through this life photography, capturing moments of being, Woolf reveals the limitations of a biographical lens that depends on static images produced by a rigid, scientific mind. The essay concludes with Woolf’s attempts at writing an experimental photography in “Time Passes,” which offers an alternative vision of Scott’s Last Expedition.

In the midst of writing *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf delivered a lecture entitled “How Should One Read a Book?” (1926), which is as much a writer’s manual as it is a reading lesson. Contrasting biography and fiction, she presents the following portrait:

The biographer answers the innumerable questions which we ask as we stand outside on the pavement looking in at the open window. Indeed there is nothing more interesting than to pick one’s way about among these vast depositories of facts, to make up the lives of men and women, to create their complex minds and households from the extraordinary abundance and litter and confusion of matter which lies strewn about. A thimble, a skull, a pair of scissors, a sheaf of sonnets, are given to us, and we have to create, to combine, to put these incongruous things together. There is, too, a quality in facts, an emotion which comes from knowing that men and women actually did and suffered these things, which only the greatest novelists can surpass. Captain Scott, starving and freezing to death in the snow, affects us deeply as any made-up story of adventure by Conrad or Defoe; but it affects us differently. The biography differs from the novel. To ask a biographer to give us the same kind of pleasure that we get from a novelist is to misuse and misread him. (E4: 394)²

Hidden within this description, Woolf not only provides a list of key motifs in *To the Lighthouse*—“a skull, a pair of scissors, a sheaf of sonnets”—but also reproduces a scene from it: Mr. Ramsay “looking in at the open window” at his wife and son, contemplating his knowledge project, and imagining himself as Captain Scott. Defying her own pre-
scription on mixing fiction and biography, Woolf uses “facts” and personal biography to write a work of fiction based on memories of her parents and summers spent in St. Ives. The inside joke of the essay “How Should One Read a Book?” seems to be that, embedded within Woolf’s definition of the art of biography, there is a moment from the work of fiction she is in the process of composing. In this new, unnamed form (in her diary, Woolf would wonder, “A new—by Virginia Woolf. But what? An elegy?” [D3: 34]), it seems fitting that no other than Mr. Ramsay—a fictive surrogate for Leslie Stephen, the national biographer—should imagine himself as Captain Scott, whom Woolf posits as the biographical subject par excellence in her essay.

Just as the biographer of “How Should One Read a Book?” stands facing the open window of lived experience, so too does Mr. Ramsay in Chapter 6 of “The Window”; however, instead of collecting facts about those who live inside—his wife and son James—he contemplates the life of “his splendid mind”:

He stopped to light his pipe, looked once at his wife and son in the window, and as one raises one’s eyes from a page in an express train and sees a farm, a tree, a cluster of cottages as an illustration, a confirmation of something on a printed page to which one returns, fortified, and satisfied, so without his distinguishing either his son or his wife, the sight of them fortified him and satisfied him and consecrated his effort to arrive at a perfectly clear understanding of the problem which now engaged the energies of his splendid mind. (33)

As Mr. Ramsay strides up and down the terrace, his thoughts are shot through by images. Although one would presume that the “printed page” Mr. Ramsay reads is not an illustrated weekly, he creates one by taking images from his train window—“a farm, a tree, a cluster of cottages”—and by rendering them into an illustration, a “real” moment, which he understands as confirming the printed page. Framed by the window and analogized to this bucolic picture, Mrs. Ramsay and James are likewise flattened into an illustration; Mr. Ramsay’s glance abstracts them into a stock image, a kind of Madonna and child, which “consecrates” his express train journey of the mind.

One of the ways in which Woolf invites the reader to interpret Mr. Ramsay’s thoughts as a series of photographic stills is her emphasis on the language of sight, seeing, and looking, which she couples with that of arrest, stopping, and standing still. As part of Mr. Ramsay’s photographic series at the window, Woolf reproduces another domestic picture that interrupts Mr. Ramsay’s train of thought. He famously posits thought as the keyboard of a piano or the letters of the alphabet:

For if thought is like the keyboard of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q. He reached Q. Very few people in the whole of England ever reach Q. Here, stopping for one moment by the stone urn which held the geraniums, he saw, but now far far away, like children picking up shells, divinely innocent and occupied with little trifles at their feet and somehow entirely defenceless against a doom which he perceived, his wife
Mr. Ramsay’s mental exercise is disrupted by a family snapshot of “his wife and son, together, in the window,” “but now far far away,” which he compares to children picking up shells on the beach. Although Mr. Ramsay dismisses their activity of gathering shells as trifling, set against his activity of running up and down a metaphorical scale of human thought, it is actually a far more selective process. While Mr. Ramsay’s mind can accumulate serially, note by note, letter by letter, it cannot edit or combine. In his analogy, the mind does not compose by selecting notes and harmonizing through chords, but bangs out the consecutive notes of a scale; rather than evoke the combinatory process of writing or the dynamic rhythm of handwriting, the “ranged” letters of the alphabet suggest the static keys of a typewriter—a writing machine that reveals the mechanical quality of Mr. Ramsay’s “splendid mind.” Furthermore, his rehearsal of the alphabet accompanied by images of children at play exhibit that splendid mind’s regressive tendencies: Mr. Ramsay performs his ABC’s.

When Mr. Ramsay attempts to approach the limits of thought, he abandons the mother-and-son snapshot for images of polar exploration. Using the language of the quest, Mr. Ramsay first weathers the alphabet as if it were rough terrain: “Z is only reached once by one man in a generation. Still, if he could reach R it would be something. Here at least was Q. He dug his heels in at Q. Q he was sure of. Q he could demonstrate. If Q then is Q—R— [. . .]. ‘Then R. . . .’ He braced himself. He clenched himself”(34). This mental struggle produces images of polar exploration meant to assist Mr. Ramsay on his “Alphabet Campaign”:

qualities that would have saved a ship’s company exposed on the broiling sea with six biscuits and a flask of water—endurance and justice, foresight, devotion, skill, came to his help. R is then—what is R?

A shutter, like the leathern eyelid of a lizard, flickered over the intensity of his gaze and obscured the letter R. In that flash of darkness he heard people saying—he was a failure—that R was beyond him. He would never reach R. On to R, once more. R——. (34)

Almost every sentence of this citation borrows from the language of photography. It is as if the ship’s company is “exposed” not only to the weather, but also to Mr. Ramsay’s photographic gaze, which takes on the properties of a camera shutter. Unlike the domestic photograph of mother and child, this photograph is marked as a “beyond,” as a “flash of darkness.”

In Woolf’s conjunction of the open boat with the word “endurance,” she evokes Sir Ernest Shackleton’s famous 800-mile open boat journey from Elephant Island to South Georgia, establishing the reference with a nod to Shackleton’s motto, “By Endurance We Conquer,” and ship’s name, “The Endurance.” Woolf’s next reference to polar expeditions is even more explicit:

qualities that in a desolate expedition across the icy solitudes of the Polar region would have made him the leader, the guide, the counsellor, whose temper, nei-
ther sanguine nor despondent, surveys with equanimity what is to be and faces it, came to his help again. R—

The lizard's eye flickered once more. The veins on his forehead bulged.

(34)

Again, Mr. Ramsay paints an image of himself as a polar explorer in an attempt to further thought, but at the very moment of taking the shot, “the lizard’s eye flickered again,” he draws a blank, registered by the prolonged dash. In Woolf’s ironic repetition of the letter Q, she intimates that Mr. Ramsay is going nowhere, highlighted by the “unstopped” elusive letter “R——,” a typographical mark suggesting that Mr. Ramsay can’t even get to the first letter of his surname, unlike Scott and Shackleton. Woolf introduces and concludes both these polar scenes in the same way; opening both with the word “qualities” (sadistically accenting the letter that Mr. Ramsay is “stuck on”), she goes on to offer an image of a lizard’s eye snapping shut like a camera shutter and presents the letter R followed by that prolonged dash. Through this near repetition, Woolf intimates that, like the photographs they reference, these polar scenes have become clichés and eminently reproducible. Rather than dynamic images, they present the immobility of idée fixe.

The next picture that Mr. Ramsay “sees” among the geranium leaves further ties his act of acquiring the letters of human knowledge to acts of physical endurance performed by “steady goers of superhuman strength who, plodding and persevering, repeat the whole alphabet in order, twenty-six letters in all, from start to finish” (34). Mr. Ramsay’s musings continue as he plods behind those “steady goers,” imagining that he, too, has, “or might have had, the power to repeat every letter of the alphabet from A to Z accurately in order. Meanwhile, he stuck at Q. On, then, on to R” (34). Despite the language of advancement and marching that Mr. Ramsay deploys as he identifies with Shackleton and Scott, “On, then, on to R,” he remains static, “stuck at Q.” Why can’t these images of pluck and nerve help Mr. Ramsay on his journey to the letter R? Rather than celebrate the “qualities” of endurance and purpose that characterize the polar hero, Woolf chooses to highlight another aspect of the polar narrative. Scott’s Terra Nova Expedition of 1910–1913 would result in his death, eleven miles away from a food depot. And, although Shackleton’s Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1914–1917 became a legendary story of survival, the expedition by no means met its goal—to traverse the entire continent of Antarctica. In fact, because the Endurance got stuck, then crushed in the pack ice, Shackleton never set foot on the actual continent. In Woolf’s representation of these “heroic age” expeditions, she underscores how often these journeys are tragic failures.

Indeed, the conclusion of Chapter 6 of “The Window” emphasizes this truncated aspect of polar narratives, highlighting the failure to arrive at the desired goal. As Mr. Ramsay’s identification with Scott intensifies, his relation to the images he invokes changes. He becomes less the agent or operator behind the camera—taking shots of his wife and son in the window, reproducing snapshots of polar exploration—and more the camera’s object; he becomes the photographed:

Feelings that would not have disgraced a leader who, now that the snow has begun to fall and the mountain-top is covered in mist, knows that he must lay
himself down and die before morning comes, stole upon him, paling the colour of his eyes, giving him, even in the two minutes of his turn on the terrace, the bleached look of withered old age. Yet he would not die lying down; he would find some crag of rock, and there, his eyes fixed on the storm, trying to the end to pierce the darkness, he would die standing. He would never reach R. (35)

As Woolf’s narrative moves in and out of Mr. Ramsay’s consciousness, in an uncanny break, the reader watches Mr. Ramsay’s thoughts physically affect his body, rendering him into a photographic corpse: “paling the colour of his eyes,” and “giving him . . . the bleached look of withered old age.” Envisioning his own death scene, Mr. Ramsay’s eyes no longer take in and fix images; “fixed on the storm,” they can only register the darkness and blank of the weather. Furthermore, literalizing this stalled journey, Woolf fixes Mr. Ramsay in the next paragraph, as if caught by the lens of a camera: “He stood stock still, by the urn, with the geranium flowing over it” (35). While nature is “flowing over,” he remains imprisoned, “stock still” in his author’s gaze.

Mr. Ramsay’s conversion into the object of photography marks a shift in the way he mobilizes images of polar explorers; no longer used in the service of advancement and progress, they become lessons on how to die:

It is permissible even for a dying hero to think before he dies how men will speak of him hereafter. . . . Who then could blame the leader of that forlorn party which after all has climbed high enough to see the waste of the years and the perishing of the stars, if before death stiffens his limbs beyond the power of movement he does a little consciously raise his numbed fingers to his brow, and square his shoulders, so that when the search party comes they will find him dead at his post, the fine figure of a soldier? Mr. Ramsay squared his shoulders and stood very upright by the urn. (35–36)

Here, Mr. Ramsay narrates himself into a static image, imitating the gestures of “the leader of that forlorn party,” “squaring his shoulders,” replacing Scott’s frozen body with his own. According to one of the members of the polar search party, Scott’s body was found in a similar position: “He had thrown back the flaps of his sleeping-bag and opened his coat. The little wallet containing the three notebooks was under his shoulder and his arm flung across Wilson” (Scott, Scott’s Last Expedition 596; Voyages 418–19).

While visions of stalwart men plodding and persevering on the march toward the letter Z give way to a series of defensive questions, Mr. Ramsay’s conditional propositions are supplanted by unanswerable questions. Shedding light on what happens once the marching stops, Woolf exposes the ugly side of those unpictured moments at the end of failed expeditions. More precisely, she recasts and radically condenses the final chapters of Scott’s Last Expedition, including “The Last March,” the “Farewell Letters” to the wives of his dying and dead companions, letters of regret to benefactors and friends, and his last “Message to the Public.” In one of these letters to his patrons, Scott writes,

We have been to the Pole and we shall die like gentleman. . . . If this diary is found it will show how we stuck by dying companions and fought the thing out
well to the end. I think this will show the Spirit of pluck and power to endure has not passed out of our race. . . . We very nearly came through, and it’s a pity to have missed it, but lately I have felt that we have overshot our mark. No one is to blame. (*Scott’s Last Expedition* 600; *Voyages* 424)

In Woolf’s rescripting, Scott’s self-exonerating statement, “No one is to blame,” is the implicit answer to Mr. Ramsay’s rhetorical question, “Who then could blame the leader of that forlorn party . . . ?” (35). After metaphorically dying with Scott, Mr. Ramsay both comments on and relives the moments of Scott’s final hours:

Who should blame him, if, so standing for a moment, he dwells upon fame, upon search parties, upon cairns raised by grateful followers over his bones? Finally, who shall blame the leader of the doomed expedition, if, having adventured to the uttermost, and used his strength wholly to the last ounce and fallen asleep not much caring if he wakes or not, he now perceives by some pricking of his toes that he lives, and does not on the whole object to live, but requires sympathy, and whisky, and someone to tell the story of his suffering to at once? Who shall blame him? (36)

Woolf’s insistent repetition of the question—“Who is to blame?” and “Who shall blame him?”—suggests that there just might be someone to blame, and Woolf’s answer isn’t Scott’s—the weather, the sick, the infirm—but a more ideological one.

Mr. Ramsay would not have been the only one quoting snippets from Scott’s diary at the time. An edition of *The Voyages of Captain Scott* introduced by J. M. Barrie and edited for children was published in 1914. Barrie concludes his introduction with his visual memory of Scott as “this fair-haired English sailor boy with the laughing blue eyes who at that early age knew how to sacrifice himself for the welfare and happiness of others” (12). In this image, Scott, like Peter Pan, is the boy who never grows old. Unfortunately, in the real world, the only children who do not grow up are those who die. This lively image of Scott would inspire generations of young men to sacrifice themselves for England; Herbert Ponting’s film *90º South* was used as propaganda to rally the troops during World War I, and, as Beau Riffenburg and Liz Cruwys note, “the King hoped that Britain’s children would see [Ponting’s] film and that it ‘would help to promote the spirit of adventure that had made the Empire’” (107). While Scott was being memorialized in St. Paul’s Cathedral by the nation, “750,000 school children were told his story by their teachers. The *Daily Mirror* commented: ‘What English boy or girl may not gain courage by saying I will be brave as Captain Scott was—as he would wish me to be’” (*South: Race to the Pole* 12). Here, the popular press asks another kind of rhetorical question. In Woolf’s rescaling and parodying of this national tragedy, she poses a larger question: what kind of nation asks its youth to march into death?

A feminist politics is at work throughout Chapter 6 as Mr. Ramsay’s romantic fantasy of manly heroism is undercut by another vision, a counternarrative that punctuates Mr. Ramsay’s trek across the terrace. While Mr. Ramsay sees his wife and son as illustrations, his son James, under the direction of his mother, actively “cut[s] out pictures from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores” (3), the principal image being a refrig-
erator (3). So, as Mr. Ramsay pictures himself on the polar wastes, James cuts out his own mini frozen landscape. With this superimposition, Woolf minimizes and mocks the epic scale of Mr. Ramsay's musings.

Similarly, just at the moment when Mr. Ramsay asserts that he, too, like “the steady goers of superhuman strength,” can repeat the alphabet from start to finish (34), he is forced to acknowledge another class of men, “the gifted, the inspired who, miraculously, lump all the letters together in one flash—the way of genius” (34). Here, Mr. Ramsay unwittingly defines the kind of writing and image making Mrs. Ramsay performs on the beach: “They had all gone to the beach. Mrs. Ramsay sat and wrote letters by a rock. She wrote and wrote. ‘Oh,’ She said, looking up at last at something floating in the sea, ‘is it a lobster pot? Is it an upturned boat?’” (160). If Mrs. Ramsay is most often represented by others (“freeze-framed” in the window by her husband, painted by Lily Briscoe), then, in this instance, she is figured as an artist, writing. What is more, in her misapprehension and defamiliarizing of the object, lobster pot or boat, she creates a surrealist image, or what Maggie Humm has described as a constructivist photography (34–35); indeed, Mrs. Ramsay’s automatic writing partakes of the avant-garde practices of Dada and Surrealism. Unlike Mr. Ramsay’s mind that functions serially like a piano keyboard or a series of photographic stills, Mrs. Ramsay’s combines; she can create chords and/or collages, offering new ways of seeing.

Lily Briscoe, the painter who has the final vision of the book, describes Mrs. Ramsay as a kind of life photographer:

Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs. Ramsay saying ‘Life stand still here’; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent)—this was of the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this external passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was stuck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said. (161)

Here, the epiphanic structure of the photograph is revealed not as isolated figures—Mr. Ramsay’s mother and child, Scott in his tent—but as isolated moments of being, an impossible photography that arrests things while still allowing them to flow. Typographically, Woolf achieves this simultaneity through her use of parentheses. In a diary entry musing about the ending of To the Lighthouse, Woolf writes about resolving “the chop & change” of her prose: “Could I do it in a parenthesis? so that one had sense of reading the two things at the same time?” (D3: 106). Reading this double, spatial, and time-bound prose, one might ask if Woolf achieves the art of writing photography.

Woolf goes even beyond Mrs. Ramsay’s camera work in “Time Passes,” the section she describes in her diary as “all eyeless & featureless with nothing to cling to” (D3: 76). In the “eyeless” center of the novel, Woolf evokes cameraless photographs, or photograms, which hearken back to early photographic practices, such as the cyanotypes in Anna Atkins’ Photographs of British Algae (1843–1854), yet at the same time point to the future of the medium in Man Ray’s photograms or “rayograms.” In the empty house, without an operating agent, “no people’s characters” (D3: 76), light has a character all its own:
Now, day after day, light turned, like a flower reflected in water, its sharp image on the wall opposite. Only the shadows of the trees, flourishing in the wind, made obeisance on the wall, and for a moment darkened the pool in which light reflected itself; or birds, flying, made a soft spot flutter slowly across the bedroom floor. (129)

Here, human structures, the wall, the bedroom floor, functioning as a kind of screen, are marked by nature’s print, but no one is there to read its script.

Woolf foregrounds the nonlegibility and indifference of nature’s imprint in her winter scene, where the last trace of Scott’s tent appears:

Night, however, succeeds to night. The winter holds a pack of them in store and deals them equally, evenly, with indefatigable fingers. They lengthen; they darken. Some of them hold aloft clear planets, plates of brightness. The autumn trees, ravaged as they are, take on the flash of tattered flags kindling in the gloom of cool cathedral caves where gold letters on marble pages describe death in battle and how bones bleach and burn far away in Indian sands. (127)

Uninhabited, the house can represent and occupy the extreme reaches of the globe, the “gloom of cool cathedral caves” and “Indian sands” in one stroke, but the story this image tells is not of boundless empire, but of ruin; nationalist symbols, the “tattered flag” and “gold letters on marble pages,” are the only human traces presented in a world that has no human eyes to read the history of atrocity these imperial symbols convey. In this impossible montage that juxtaposes a fragment from a polar expedition to a possible reference to the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, Woolf suggests that there is continuity between these two histories, scripting her own image of empire’s end. Like the Admiralty Arch Woolf passes through in A Room of One’s Own (1929), the “tattered flags” and “gold letters on marble pages” display “the instinct for possession, the rage for acquisition which drives [the patriarchs, the professors] to desire other peoples fields and goods perpetually; to make frontiers and flags; battleships and poison gas; to offer up their own lives and their children’s lives” (AROO 38).

From nature’s shadow print and Mrs. Ramsay’s noncodified photographic practices to Mr. Ramsay’s fantasy of total knowledge acquisition epitomized by the worn photograph of Scott at the South Pole, Woolf writes another “little history of photography” in To the Lighthouse, and, like Walter Benjamin, shows that “the illiteracy of the future . . . will be ignorance not of reading or writing, but of photography” (Benjamin 527)

Notes

1. I would like to thank Elisa K. Sparks for her insightful comments and incisive edits on this paper, as well as Abby Bender for her help on an earlier draft; I am also grateful to Dermot Ryan for his assistance throughout.


3. A few years after Woolf published To the Lighthouse, Walter Benjamin wrote his “Little History of Pho-
tography,” in which he correlates the limits of the piano keyboard with the “restrictive laws” of the photographic apparatus (517–18).

4. I borrow this phrase from Donald T. Blume’s “‘Because It Is There’: George Mallory’s Presence in Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse,” which argues that Chapter 6 “is filled with material derived from Mallory’s epic struggle on Everest as it was reported in the Times” (262). Blume insists that “Mr. Ramsay’s Alphabet Campaign to reach R, while it may seem to subtly allude to Leslie Stephen’s work on the Dictionary of National Biography, similarly and quite blatantly echoes the mountaineering language used to describe the gradual, step-by-step advance towards Everest’s summit” (262).

5. Leslie K. Hankins presented an excellent analysis on how Scott’s Last Expedition and Ponting’s films were mobilized for nationalist and military ends in her paper “‘My Mountain Top—that Persistent Vision’: Doomed Expeditions in Film & Fiction: Early Everest & Antarctic Films in Woolf’s Fiction from To the Lighthouse to ‘The Symbol.’”

Works Cited


**Sartorial Adventures: Woolf and the (Other-)Worldliness of Dress**

*by Randi Koppen*

Theorists of the modern (Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Benjamin, and others) have made dress, and fashion in particular, attain prominence as an image of modernism, of its temporality, its metropolitan worldliness, its self-reflexive identities. The *look* of the modern is important in defining and living it, as Christopher Reed, among others, has pointed out—and so is the *feel*, the embodiment of the modern, not least the embodiment represented by clothing, occurring at (and constituting) the interface of body and world. Sensing and representing the new, dress styles may be thought of as “forms of aesthetic and ethical adherence to a culture-in-process” (Calefato 29), with fashion often explained as a specifically modern form of dress that at once articulates individuality and preserves anonymity under the omnipresent gaze of the metropolitan crowd (Entwistle 118–19).

This dialectic of *mode* and *modernité* is one with which Woolf (Woolf the writer more than Woolf the consumer, as we shall see) shows herself highly familiar. Exploring how some of her characters negotiate the world through clothing or how items of dress metonymically represent contemporary culture is a way of thematizing the modernity of Woolf’s work. In the process, however, another web of sartorial signifiers attains visibility. Stretching across her writing from text to text, and—by allusion—into a fund of literary topos, this fabric seems to give presence to a temporality other than the present and a domain I propose to designate as *other-worldly*. It is this fuller exploration of the signifying potential surrounding cloth and clothing I want to identify as truly adventurous on Woolf’s part—as a venture beyond the sartorial discourse of her Bloomsbury friends. For the moment, however, to prepare the ground for this adventurous departure, let us stay with *mode* as an icon of contemporaneity and as that mode through which the present asserts itself against the past.

Recent interdisciplinary work—by Reed and Rosner, for example—has shown how Bloomsbury’s cross-over between the fine and applied arts created public and private spaces for the construction and projection of modern identities. What is particularly interesting from the perspective of the present inquiry is that dress was included and promoted by Bloomsbury, represented by the Omega Workshops, as part of this overall “experience” of modernism. In doing so, the workshops were continuing not only the interchange between design and social reform characteristic of the Victorian avant-garde (i.e., Aestheticism and the Arts and Crafts Movement), but specifically the connection that had become established between art, design, and theories of dress reform. A particularly relevant instance of such a connection would be the trajectory of the so-called Pre-Raphaelite “aesthetic” dress as devised and worn most famously by Jane Morris, a deviation from contemporary fashion in its muted colors, flowing forms, and natural waistline. Made on a principle of unadorned simplicity, the aesthetic gown was typically plaied or draped in such a way that its soft fabric was permitted to flow freely along the lines of the body. Mediated by Rossetti paintings and Cameron photographs, and transformed into a market-
able commodity aimed for the aesthetic customer by Liberty’s from the 1880s, “aesthetic” garments were recommended by women’s dress reformers as late as the 1890s. With this background, it is not surprising to find that clothing, as representational mode, embodied practice, and commodity, has a particularly wide signifying range in the Bloomsbury context both as substance with a certain “radical” potential and as symbol of the many shapes of the past.

Dressmaking at the Omega, initiated and supervised by Vanessa Bell, introduced radically new styles to a circle of avant-garde admirers. The first Omega exhibition of garments and accessories opened on 10 June 1915, showing a collection that included dresses, coats, waistcoats, evening cloaks, parasols, and printed and dyed fabrics. Fabrics were hand painted or designed by Omega artists, the garments made by selected dressmakers in sympathy with Bell’s ideas about cut. Besides showing abstract and geometric patterns, the prints and garments also exhibited that playfully allusive iconography of pastoral and myth familiar from Bloomsbury interiors and objects. As such, dress was invested with the same “spirit of fun” that characterized much other work by Bloomsbury artists and thus it incorporated into a modernist project of playful allegorical defamiliarization and reinscription of visual culture a working-through, it might be argued, that in many ways centered on Pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist iconography. Woolf’s inclusion of a contemporary description of an Omega dress in her biography of Roger Fry (1940) captures the nature of this allegorical project: “a radiantly coloured dress of gossamery silk” designed by a French artist. . . . Upon this one the artist had designed ‘a mass of large foliage and a pastoral scene, and maidens dancing under the moon, while a philosopher and a peasant stood by’” (RF 195). The style is allusive and quotational, part of a playful and ultimately defamiliarizing aesthetic, reinventing a traditional symbolic fabric or weave of allusions. With Bloom’s experiments, fabric becomes the site, and dress the performance, of such reinscription.

Woolf’s writing—fiction, diaries, and correspondence—leaves no doubt that she shared Bloomsbury’s interest in dress as an expression of modernity, of modern identity and modern living. She was not herself a wearer of Omega fashion; on the contrary, her dress style seems to have left friends and associates with a decidedly unfashionable impression; always somehow out of synch or anachronistic, it was more nineteenth-century than modern. To Rosamond Lehman, in Joan Russell Noble’s Recollections of Virginia Woolf by Her Contemporaries, her clothes “made one think of William Morris” (62); to Alix Strachey, they “had the appearance of draperies” (Noble 112). Taken together, the various impressions suggest a style that was distinguished and individual: subdued, not noticeable, garments that “seemed merged in her,” “acquiescent or subservient to her forceful personality” (Noble 48, 74). If Woolf to some extent emulated a look suggestive of nineteenth-century aestheticism, however, she was under no illusions regarding the ideals of “artistic dress,” as one of her early sketches of “An Artistic Party” shows. Writing about The Royal Academy Annual Reception in 1903, Woolf supplies a description of the “typical artist’s wife,” complete with “clinging Liberty silks,” “outlandish ornaments,” and “a strange dusky type of face,” which reads like the cartoon version of Jane Morris and the Pre-Raphaelite look familiarized in the pages of Punch (PA 176). In the sketch, Woolf is scathing about the “splendid superiority” of the artists over their “philistine brethren” in the matter of dress: their being “so thoroughly convinced that mankind is divided into
two classes, one of which wears amber beads & low evening collars—while the other follows the fashion” (PA 177). Woolf herself, it seems, prefers dress to be “of no particular description,” at least not part of a self-conscious scheme of “distinguishing oneself” (PA 176).

Woolf’s private “frock-consciousness” apart, the short fiction and novels leave us with ample evidence of the writer’s remarkable awareness of dress as a theory and practice of contemporary culture, as a medium of self-expression, and as regulation of behavior (D3: 12). Several stories reflect on clothing as a means of embodied self-consciousness and of construction and projection of a desired persona. Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street and Rhoda in The Waves are both examples of how the social and gendered economy of dress instills social competence through corporeal discipline. Woolf’s awareness of dress extends from substance to symbol, however, from embodied experience to trope inhabiting virtually every area of cultural expression. “Convention,” whether aesthetic, rhetorical, discursive, corporeal, or social, figures in her criticism and fiction in terms of dress, as envelopment, concealment, overdressing, or as the ill-fitting vestments of the past. Ironic treatment is given in several texts to Victorian draperies, hangings and curtains as signifiers of claustrophobia and concealment, as well as to their literary equivalents: the euphemisms and hyperboles of overdressed, overfigured writing, and to “symboli[sm] in loose robes,” which is Woolf’s unofficial term for conventional allegory (D3: 230).

Both as substance and symbol, dress and dress-related tropes (clothing and cloth) serve as a cultural shorthand in the Bloomsbury interart dialogue, a shorthand that Woolf employs to farcical effect in Freshwater (1935), where certain familiar items of clothing are sufficient to conjure up, and parody, a whole aesthetic. Already overburdened with symbolic meaning through Watts’s paintings, Cameron’s photographs, and Tennyson’s poems, Ellen Terry as a character in Woolf’s play is required to pose for Cameron as the muse to “Poetry in the person of Alfred Tennyson” (FW 10) by standing on a chair, throwing out her arms, lifting up her eyes, and wearing turkey wings (FW 14). Terry also figures with draperies and veils in Woolf’s lampooning of allegorical painting, posing for Watts’s “Modesty at the Feet of Mammon” or, as she puts it, “sitting for Modesty in a veil” (FW 24). Watts, meanwhile, is absurdly absorbed by “the problem of the drapery”:

That indeed is a profoundly difficult problem. For by my treatment of the drapery I wish to express two important but utterly contradictory ideas. In the first place I wish to convey to the onlooker the idea that Modesty is always veiled; in the second that Modesty is absolutely naked. For a long time I have pondered at a loss. At last I have attempted a solution. I am wrapping her in a fine white substance which has the appearance of a veil; but if you examine it closely it is seen to consist of innumerable stars. It is in short the Milky Way. (FW 17)

Watts’s Symbolist vocabulary, with the typical notion of the veil that shrouds the mystery of our being, the world parallel to nature, also brings in the Carlylean Idealist influence on the Symbolists and the constant interplay between Carlyle’s work and Watts’s own, as does the title of the painting, responding, as Andrew Wilton has shown, to Carlyle’s attack (in Past and Present) on “‘Midas-eared Mammonism’ as a pervasive evil of modern life” (Wilton 29). Thus Woolf’s sartorial shorthand evokes not simply the familiar practices
she associated with the Cameron circle, of “drap[ing] and arrang[ing], . . . and carry[ing] on life in a high-handed and adventurous way” (“Julia Margaret Cameron” 13), but an entire Symbolist aesthetic, complete with philosophical and ideological underpinnings. The Woolf who writes Freshwater liberates Terry from her symbolic overdressing, in the 1923 version letting her run off dressed in a pair of checked trousers that allegedly recall a costume worn by the real Terry in an early boy’s role (Farfan 57), while in the 1935 version she leaves “painted, powdered—unveiled” (FW 47).

Notwithstanding this farcical liberation from allegorical symbolism, however, and despite what Woolf describes in one essay as the “modern distaste for allegory” (MOE 27), a concern with the other-worldliness of dress continues to make itself felt in Woolf’s fiction to the extent of constituting what I referred to above as Woolf’s real adventurousness in the question of dress. Draped, veiled, and garlanded figures, whose garments would seem to be allusive rather than embodied, keep turning up in her narratives at moments of heightened significance—or perhaps create such moments. The figures are suggestive of Pre-Raphaelite iconography, though their source may also be that of Greek sculpture, possibly as mediated in literary topoi. Sketches in A Passionate Apprentice describe the young Woolf’s impressions of statues seen in Greece in 1906, where the stone—almost liquid, yet with the solidity of marble—brings out draperies, garlands, and robes in ways that confirm and elaborate on her stock of images from reading the classics (see PA 319, 322, 324). As instances of such other-worldly figures—whose other-worldliness is signaled by their garments—consider for example “the veiled lady . . . all her draperies about her,” an apparition from the night outside Jacob’s Cambridge rooms in Jacob’s Room (37); the “majestic goddess [clad in] amber-coloured raiment” playfully present in Between the Acts (72); or the “figure, made of sky and branches” appearing to Peter Walsh as an apparition “from the troubled sea,” a composite of the landscape and the clothed wind “who will mount me on her streamers and let me blow to nothingness with the rest” (MD 63). The impression of something deeply serious invested in these figures, even in their moments of playful appearance, suggests that it would be mistaken to read images such as these as parallel instances to the Bloomsbury iconography described above, involved in a related reinscription of pastoral and myth. Rather, this is that juncture where Woolf ventures beyond Bloomsbury’s signifying range in the question of sartorial discourse and its allegorical potential. To begin to explore what these dressed figures might be gesturing towards, I propose a detour via Walter Benjamin and his reading of “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” more precisely the motif of the veil and its dual character of aura and a figure of shock.

Addressing the relationship between the lyric poem and historical experience, Benjamin argues in this essay that the strength of Baudelaire’s writing is to give us the scattered fragments of genuine historical experience in its dialectic of spleen et ideal. Ideal, as expounded upon by Benjamin, refers us to the power of remembrance, not of historical data but of the data of prehistory, the involuntary memory of an earlier life, la vie antérieure and its delicate veil, its aura. In the spleen, on the other hand, time becomes palpable: “The spleen . . . exposes the passing moment in all its nakedness. To his horror, the melancholy man sees the earth revert to a mere state of nature. No breath of prehistory surrounds it; there is no aura” (“On Some Motifs” 185). What is suggested here takes the form of a simple dichotomy: the aura (of la vie antérieure) as veil, and the spleen as nakedness (the disintegration of the aura and the rending of the veil). The complication of this dichotomy
through certain twists in Benjamin’s discourse will not concern us here. It is sufficient to note that his argument with respect to Baudelaire draws on some of the signifying potential that has accrued to the veil in mythological, religious, and literary symbolism over the centuries: various allegorical usages of the veil as that which conceals and reveals, and of the veil (or veiled speech) as a symbol of allegory itself, a necessary mediacy that suggests, through concealment, the features of truth. It is also significant that elsewhere in his writing Benjamin’s primary interest in the question of clothing turns on the connection between spleen and the figure of nakedness and unveiling: for example, in *The Arcades Project*, which introduces the allegorical dimension of fashion. The serial repetition of fashion and the way it exhibits the sex appeal of the inorganic, according to this argument, have the effect of rending the veil of the aura and eliminating the illusory appearance that emanates from a given order.

Rather than the dialectic of veiling and unveiling, however, the significance of Benjamin’s tropology with respect to Woolf’s veiled and draped figures resides in its elaboration of the alignment of aura and veil. The aura is constituted by the associations that, at home in *la mémoire involontaire*, tend to cluster around the object of a perception. Two points are of particular relevance here: one, that the aura is the manifestation of a distance—an encounter with an earlier life, *la vie antérieure*; two, that experience of the aura rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. To perceive the aura of an object, we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. The aura, then, entails or arises from figures of animation—prosopopoeia, anthropomorhism, or apostrophe—that confer eyes, face, and by implication the ability to speak on inanimate or natural objects.

The question I have put for consideration by proposing this detour through Benjamin’s essay is whether one might approach Woolf’s veiled and draped figures with the same perspective. The answer, I think, is yes, though with certain qualifications. First, Woolf’s aura is not involved in an allegorical dialectic with a moment of nakedness or unveiling, as described by Benjamin. Further, the *mémoire involontaire* in Woolf’s case is better understood as a composite of data of personal prehistory and of literary memory, manifesting itself in her writing as topoi, echoes, and allusions. This involuntary memory—following from literature’s ability to represent analeptically as well as proleptically, to cross boundaries of life and death—is of *la vie postérieure*, of the posthumous, as much as a memory of *la vie antérieure*. My argument here is that the topos of the veil, and of veiled and draped apparitions, in Woolf’s writing is the manifestation of literary memory of the posthumous—of life after death—and that this topos is implicated with depictions of an anthropomorphized, meaningful, and emblematic nature.

It is well known that nature and its agents are clothed in Woolf’s writing. The sea is like a cloth, the water a veil, the air gauze and mesh, sea and sky are all one fabric. Cliffs and ships signal secret messages as if part of a meaningful web. There is writing on the landscape: a scroll of smoke droops in valediction; the topography is a writing that signifies the nature of things. These tropes are all from *The Waves* (1931) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), but there is also nature’s “secret signalling” in *Mrs. Dalloway*, by which “every moment Nature signified by some laughing hint . . . her determination to show, by brandishing her plumes, shaking her tresses, flinging her mantle this way and that, beautifully, always beautifully, and standing close up to breathe through her hollowed
hands Shakespeare’s words, her meaning” (MD 124). Shakespeare, who “loathed humanity-- the putting on of clothes” (MD 79), is thus included in a textual weave of clothing and natural agents—elemental personifications; a weave, moreover, that entails the chiasmic, in the sense of a crossing or cross-over of the boundaries of life and death: the dirge from Cymbeline, “Fear no more,” speaks of a “knowledge . . . accrued from beyond death” (Tambling 38), from the detemporalized unground of the posthumous.\footnote{Returning to To the Lighthouse, the body of Time appears in “Time Passes” in a series of prosopopoeias, clothed allegorical figures folding their garments (137–42). These passages have the tone of the revelation, an unveiling: we are shown what is concealed from us, a landscape of anteriority and posteriority, not as naked truth but as “Loveliness itself,” “Stillness” itself (TTL 141); clothed allegorical figures who invest the world with meaning by clothing, veiling, enveloping—in the mantle of silence, the veil of silence.

There is an extension across Woolf’s writing of affinity with the landscape, of living on, in, and as landscape, where landscape suggests both itself and a posthumous unground, with a temporality that extends beyond individual and generational memory. This anthropofugal connectedness, this literary memory enacts and confirms. Mrs. Ramsay, sinking down into communion with the landscape, is transposed and dispersed into the topography, at one with inanimate things, trees, streams, flowers. The deepest level, the lake of one’s being, generates an image whose origin is uncertain, which doesn’t seem to issue from anyone in particular: “a mist, a bride to meet her lover” (TTL 71). Suggesting a literary knowledge beyond the speaking subject, the image evokes the Euphrosyne, the weaver of fate in The Voyage Out (1915), traveling towards death “with veils drawn before her and behind,” “a bride going forth to her husband,” Tristan’s “corpse-like Bride,” which Rachel also evokes (VO 25, 27). Lily Briscoe’s allusion to Tennyson’s “Tears, Idle Tears” with its “Death in Life” and the designation of Mrs. Ramsey as a “fading ship” whose sails sink beneath the horizon enter into this intertextuality of and from the unground: “that strange no-man’s land where to follow people is impossible” (TTL 92), but of which writing may speak, proleptically and analeptically. Significantly, Mrs. Ramsay’s return from the verge of the unground is effected by the sun and the wind striking the sails of the ship—a symbolic nexus of cloth, the intervention of nature’s agents, and the chiasmic.

Lily evokes the poet’s tears in another thought, imagining that a word from the poet would have rent the surface of the pool and made something appear: “Something would emerge. A hand would be shoved up, a blade would be flashed” (TTL 194). As Hermione Lee suggests in her notes to the novel, this echoes the arm “clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful” rising from the surface of the lake to catch Excalibur in Tennyson’s Morte d’Arthur (Lee 256n20). It is not far from this evocation of the unground and its clothed apparitions to the ambiguous figures from the sea in The Waves: clad in “the ambiguous draperies of the flowing tide” (TW 178), the people emerging out of the sea are shown as “ambiguously draped,” constituting drapery as a chiasmic figure, a cross-over from and of the unground. In To the Lighthouse, of course, Cam’s recognition of this ambiguity of the dead, their ghostliness—their freedom to come and go like smoke—is conveyed through images of envelopment: the island “wrapped in its mantle of peace; as if the people there had fallen asleep, she thought; were free like smoke, were free to come and go like ghosts” (TTL 185). Cam herself accesses the posthumous unground: her mind “shrouded,” wander[ing] in that underworld of waters where in the green light a change
came over one’s entire mind and one’s body shone half transparent enveloped in a green cloak” (*TTL* 198).

I have said that Woolf’s veiled figures exist beyond the signifying range of dress and drapery in Bloomsbury iconography and that if these figures are allegorical—as I think they are—their allegorical character is different both from Bloomsbury playfulness and from Benjamin’s allegorical dialectic. The veil in Woolf, as I have argued, emerges as a chiasmic figure, a figure of writing itself and of the vocation of writing. Concealing and revealing, it crosses the conditions of life and death, indexing life in death and death in life.

Beyond this, dress has the ability to signify other-worldliness because of its symbolic and mythological implications—which in turn stem from its material qualities, of weave or web, an interface of outside and inside, its double function of concealing and revealing. It also carries particular significance in Woolf’s personal “prehistory”: as maternal, movable, and translucent; as material upon and with which light and wind play; as something that registers movement and presence, both the promise and the elusiveness of meaning. The many curtains and blinds that move in Woolf’s writing return us to the images of childhood, restoring and confirming agency to natural elements. This, in turn, connects with a reading of nature as meaningful—not as pantheism, but as that animation Benjamin associates with the aura and its moments of manifestation of *la vie antérieure*.

In conclusion, however, to take the argument beyond the domain of the aura, I want to introduce a connection between Woolf’s “fabric” of sea and sky and the clothes philosophy of Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*, in which the philosopher thinks of all nature and life as one living garment, and of people as “Apparitions”—“a living link in that Tissue of History, which inweaves all Being” (14). Bringing in Carlyle’s name returns us to Watts’s allegorical symbolism in *Freshwater*, for which Carlyle was a direct inspiration, as indeed he was for the whole Cameron circle. Carlyle, I would propose, in light of the pervasiveness of dress-related metaphors in Woolf’s work, provides a more relevant “context” for the webs and filaments that inhabit her texts than the thoughts of Walter Pater or the Unanimists habitually invoked by commentators. Of course, this is not to suggest an analogy either with Carlyle’s German Idealism or his Christian beliefs. What is striking in the Clothes Philosopher’s proposition that all visible things are emblems and that all emblems are clothes, is that clothes become doubly constituted as “wonder-hiding” illusions and as signs of wonder. The dichotomy is not, as with Benjamin, between garment and nakedness, but between garment and garment: the empty or the overdressing garment, on the one hand, and the garment that *reveals as it conceals*, on the other. This “coincidence” of Carlyle and Woolf extends to the conception of landscape, of topography as meaningful and emblematic, signifying “the nature of things”—which is both worldly and other-worldly, substance and symbol, death in life and life in death. Here, as I see it, is where Woolf’s sartorial adventurousness is to be found.

**Notes**

1. See, for example, Julia Margaret Cameron’s “Pre-Raphaelite Study.” On the connections between interart dialogue and social reform, see Rosner; on Pre-Raphaelite dress, see Mankoff.
2. For more on this, see Anscombe and Mendes.
3. Benjamin quotes Baudelaire to suggest what he means by this connection between aura and figures of
animation: “Man wends his way through forests of symbols/Which look at him with their familiar glances” (“On Some Motifs” 182).

4. I am indebted to Jeremy Tambling’s valuable reading of Cymbeline in Becoming Posthumous for this understanding of the posthumous as a trope and as the dominant figure for Cymbeline. I am equally indebted to J. Hillis Miller’s Topographies, especially his reading of Tennyson’s “Tears, Idle Tears,” for the idea of an atemporal unground.

Works Cited

“A NOVEL IS AN IMPRESSION NOT AN ARGUMENT”:
VIRGINIA WOOLF AND JAMES SULLY

by Akemi Yaguchi

“I am much of Hardys [sic] opinion that a novel is an impression not an argument” (L5: 91)—Virginia Woolf made this remark in 1932 in a letter to one of her readers who was interested in psychology. Harmon H. Goldstone, the correspondent, suspected some influence of Freudian argument on Woolf’s works; Woolf had replied rather flatly to an earlier inquiry: “I have not studied Dr Freud or any psychoanalyst—indeed I think I have never read any of their books” (L5: 36). This claim, however, is doubtful. Her own Hogarth Press published the English translations of Freud’s works from 1922, and in a draft of a 1924 essay, “Character in Fiction,” Woolf remarked that “if you read Freud you know in ten minutes some facts . . . which our parents could not possibly have guessed for themselves” (E3: 504). Nevertheless, it is certain that Hardy’s idea about impressions struck Woolf before she was involved in the publication of Freudian theory. In her reading notes between 14 February 1919 and 22 January 1921, Woolf mentions the preface to the fifth edition of Thomas Hardy’s Tess of the D’Urbervilles, which states, “Let me repeat that a novel is an impression, not an argument” (viii). Does this imply that, in her letter to Harmon Goldstone, Woolf was attempting to dodge what Elizabeth Abel calls a psychological “colonization of the literary field” (17) by giving priority to literature over psychology in her aesthetics? This paper will probe the background to Hardy’s idea adopted by Woolf in order to show that her invocation of Hardy is not a refusal of psychology across the board, but a countermeasure incorporating another psychological discourse of the period, that of James Sully.

James Sully is a British psychologist who was influential among not only psychologists but also the general public from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. His Teacher’s Handbook of Psychology, an 1886 textbook he wrote for school teachers, reached a fifth edition in 1909, which “had even larger sales, both in Britain and America, than the first textbook” he wrote mainly for psychologists in 1882 (Gurjeva 82). Sully lived chiefly by his own pen until 1892, when he became the Grote Professor at University College London at the age of fifty; his Baptist background had excluded him from attaining an Oxbridge Anglican education, which also had excluded him from academia until then. For this reason, Sully’s psychology appeared mostly in general magazines such as the Westminster Review, Contemporary Review, Fortnightly Review, and Cornhill Magazine; he also contributed his articles to specialist magazines such as Mind, but his preference was for general magazines rather than specialist ones because the honoraria were larger for the former.

Sully was successful, on this ground, in addressing intellectuals and writers with a nonprofessional interest in psychology at his time, Walter Pater being one of them, as Ian Small points out (83–5). Sully’s first article appeared in The Fortnightly Review in 1871, where he probed how beauty is acknowledged by human mind. Under the title “The Aesthetics of Human Character,” Sully deployed his aesthetic psychology with the proviso
that what is beautiful can be recognized only through the “external impressions of beauty” (505)—that is, not as the aesthetic object itself but through the impressions it produces. This is essentially similar to Walter Pater’s aesthetic credo, articulated in his 1873 preface to The Renaissance:

“To see the object as in itself it really is,” has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever; and in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one’s object as it really is, is to know one’s own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly. . . . And he who experiences these impressions strongly, and drives directly at the discrimination and analysis of them, has no need to trouble himself with the abstract question what beauty is in itself. (viii–ix)

Here, Pater claims that to know the object of beauty itself is not primarily included in aesthetic activity, and he calls for a focus on the reality of impressions the object produces to the aesthetic observer. This consonance of Pater and Sully, as well as their contemporaneity, suggests that “Pater was adapting . . . both terms and ideas that had been generated by a discourse . . . of British psychology” (Small 81), especially Sully’s.

However, it also should not be overlooked that Pater’s aesthetics is somewhat discordant with Sully’s. Pater insists in the same preface that

what is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to me? What effect does it really produce on me? . . . How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence? The answers to these questions are the original facts with which the aesthetic critic has to do; and, as in the study of light, of morals, of number, one must realise such primary data for one’s self, or not at all. (viii)

Here, Pater emphasizes the importance of the individuality of aesthetic judgment, while Sully maintains in his 1871 essay that what is beautiful must hold a “common relation to other minds besides his own,” as “the beautiful expresses the instinctive tendency of the emotional mind to be in harmony with other minds” (“Aesthetics” 505). In other words, in Sully’s view, beauty should be acknowledged among people equally and cannot be approved individually. Sully’s discussion in the essay develops into “the beauty of morality” in the light of a feature of morality that seeks for “harmony with other minds” (“Aesthetics” 518). Pater’s mention of “the study . . . of morals” above further highlights his difference from Sully, as it should be conducted “for one’s self” in Pater’s view.

It is well known that Hardy met Pater in 1886 and left a remark in 1892 that “we don’t always remember as we should that in getting at the truth, we get only at the true nature of the impression that an object, etc., produces us” (qtd. in F. Hardy 9). This remark reminds us not only of Pater, but also of Sully, although it appears that Hardy adapted Sully via Pater rather than from Sully himself directly. In the 1892 preface to the fifth edition of Tess, Hardy deplores typical criticisms against the novel that

maintain a conscientious difference of sentiment concerning, among other things, subjects fit for art, and reveal an inability to associate the idea of the sub-
Hardy chides critics of *Tess* for introducing a moral issue into his novel; that is, the thematic suitability of a murder by Tess for art. His proclamation that “a novel is an impression, not an argument” appears directly after this lamentation, which suggests that aesthetic impression is not related to morality in Hardy’s view. This is similar to Pater’s vision, not Sully’s.

Woolf relished both Pater and Hardy and studied them carefully, as is suggested by the statement from her preface to *Orlando* that “no one can read or write without being perpetually in the debt of . . . Walter Pater” (*O* 5), as well as from her praise for Hardy as “a profound and poetic genius” (*CE* 1: 266). It is plausible, on this ground, that Woolf inherited Sully’s aesthetic vision through her reading of Pater and Hardy. There is also another possibility about her inheritance of Sully, however: it is a direct influence of Sully’s work on her.

Woolf knew Sully in person. As a frequent contributor to *Cornhill Magazine* under the editorship of Leslie Stephen, Sully visited Talland House in St. Ives, joining Stephen’s “Tramp Sundays” even after his resignation from the *Cornhill* editorship. Woolf mentions Sully in her 1905 journal in a way that suggests familiar acquaintance: “We steamed a certain way this morning, & then our engines gave out again, & for four hours I suppose we rocked & drifted out of sight of land, & very much bored. There is a certain Professor Lee on board, who is something like Sully” (*PA* 260). Sully reminisces in his autobiography that, “from 1875 until 1882, when Stephen gave up the editorship of the magazine, I sent him a fair number of articles. . . . All the articles I sent him were accepted save one” (*My Life* 298–99). It is possible, therefore, that Sully’s papers for the *Cornhill Magazine* remained in Stephen’s library where Woolf was educated at the turn of the century. According to Sully, it was “probably [John] Morley or [George Henry] Lewes, [that] had given [him] an introduction to [Stephen]” in 1875 (*My Life* 297). Considering their first meeting was in order “to discuss possibilities of work for the *Cornhill*” (*My Life* 297), it is the most probable that Morley or Lewes, the editors of *The Fortnightly Review* to which Sully was also a frequent contributor, introduced Stephen to Sully’s *Sensation and Intuition*, which was published in the previous year and was his only book at that time.

Suggestively, significant kinships are found between Sully’s psychological views in *Sensation and Intuition* and Woolf’s aesthetics shown in her literary manifesto “Character in Fiction” (1924). First, both of them link sensation with artistic originality by means of impressions that the sensation produces. Sully insists,

I may just allude to the comprehensive mental principle known as the law of change or transition of impression, according to which a continual variation of elements in sensation and emotion is requisite in order to clearness and intensity of consciousness. This principle, in its aesthetic aspect, obviously includes the artistic laws of originality or freshness, and of contrast and variety of impression. (*Sensation* 346–47)
Here, Sully attributes “artistic . . . originality” to a clear recognition of “a continual variation of elements in sensation and emotion,” which is linked with “change or transition of impression.” Woolf’s “Character in Fiction” presents Mrs. Brown, an aesthetic object, who is represented through the sensuous impressions she made upon Woolf as a writer seeking for her artistic originality: “The impression [Mrs. Brown] made was overwhelming. It came pouring out like a draught, like a smell of burning” (E3: 425).

Another kinship between Woolf and Sully is found in that both of them show a doubt about the uniformity of the linkage between sensation and impression, while they still recognize a value in the linkage as an expedient for their artistic explorations. In Sully’s words,

No department of aesthetic susceptibility presents a perfectly uniform mode of pleasure. Even organic sensibility is, within certain limits, a variable quantity. . . . In all cases aesthetic impression presents itself as something eminently inconsistent and relative. We cannot say that a given object will produce a like pleasing effect on any two minds. (Sensation 347)

After this reservation, Sully continues that, “nevertheless, we are compelled by our definition of art to seek some comparatively fixed objective principle even in this apparent fluctuating and chaotic region of facts” (348). Sully dares bridging a gap of relativity with a plausible common ground of the link between sensation and impression. In “Character in Fiction,” Woolf shows the same hesitation as Sully does, remarking “old Mrs. Brown’s character will strike you very differently. . . . You see one thing in character, and I another” (E3: 425–26). In order to bridge the gap, she continues,

All I could do was . . . to describe this vivid, this overmastering impression [of Mrs. Brown] by likening it to a draught or a smell of burning, . . . knowing that somehow I had to find a common ground between us, a convention which would not seem to you too odd, unreal, and far-fetched to believe in. (E3: 431–32)

Woolf’s linking of sensation with impression here is also a temporary measure, while she is longing for an artistic “common ground.” The exploration of sympathy among people is a feature of Sully, which Pater and Hardy rather cut off from their adaptation of him; Woolf’s having this feature suggests that her inheritance of Sully could be a direct one, with a modification of the feature from morality to “a convention” to make people understood to each other.

When Freud was introduced to Britain in the mid-1910s and became a fashionable in London literary circles in the 1920s, Sully was already a figure whose fame and influence had been well established. Freud himself, in his 1900 work The Interpretations of Dreams, mentioned Sully as one of the most important predecessors of his work (Standard Edition 5: 712). Their views have different backgrounds from each other’s, however. Sully’s view was engendered as a discourse that was open to common readers such as Pater, Hardy, and Stephen, while Freudian theory was constructed through specialist investigations and imported to Britain; although the Hogarth Press’s audience was mainly nonpsychologists like Leonard Woolf, Freud’s theory itself was engendered among specialist discussions made in
the specialist magazines such as *Internationale Zeitschrift fuer Psychoanalyse*. In her 1920 essay “Freudian Fiction,” Woolf show her anxiety about Freudian “colonization of the literary field” (Abel 17), attacking the tendency of novelists “act[ing] the part of stepfather to some of the very numerous progeny of Dr Freud. . . by producing works that are “essay[s] in morbid psychology” rather than works of art (E3: 196). By supporting Hardy’s opinion in the letter to her correspondent, who was also under the great shadow of Freudianism, Woolf counterattacked its prestige and suggested an equally reputable scientific alternative with better-established links with the local literary community for several decades.

Notes

1. Woolf excluded this remark on Freud when she published the essay. Compare it with the corresponding part of the published version of “Character in Fiction” (E3: 422).
2. 14 February 1919 is the day when Woolf was asked by the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* to “be ready with an article on Hardy’s novels whenever the evil day [of his death] comes” (D2: 126n2), while on 22 January 1921, Woolf recorded in her diary that “I fancy I shall finish Hardy tomorrow” (D2: 158). See Silver (203, 206).
3. Sully comments in his autobiography as follows: “Stephen’s retirement from the *Cornhill* hardly involved a loosening of the bond of intimacy between us. We had by this time become fast friends, and I continued to be in touch with him on Tramp Sundays and at other times” (My Life 301). It is not mentioned when he visited Talland House, but Sully also remarks that “Stephen was not only himself an athlete, but a lover of popular athletics. When I was staying with him at his house in St. Ives he took me over to Penzance to see some Cornish wrestling” (My Life 302).

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In *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913), anthropologist and archaeologist Jane Ellen Harrison argues that ritual began because prehistoric human existence was precarious. After a winter of deprivation, primeval humans urgently needed the seasons to turn and new food to grow, but they were by no means certain that it would happen: “The savage utters his will to live, his intense desire for food; but it should be noted, it is desire and will and longing, not certainty and satisfaction that he utters” (65). Fertility rituals arose because humans needed a way to articulate the intense “desire and will and longing” they felt while waiting for the spring. The precarious position in which Woolf leaves Isa and Giles at the end of *Between the Acts* (1941) bears a strong resemblance to Harrison’s sketch of primeval humans awaiting the spring; not only are the Olivers plunged into prehistoric night, “the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among the rocks” (*BTA* 219), they also experience a tangle of emotions much like the powerful combination of desire, uncertainty, and determination that Harrison identifies as the impetus for ritual: “Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the field of night” (*BTA* 219). Just as the clash of uncertainty and desire drove prehistoric humans to articulate their desires through ritual, so too the clash of love and hate spurs Isa and Giles to voice their overflowing emotions as the novel ends. With her final line, “Then the curtain rose. They spoke” (219), Woolf presents the scene as theatre, the successor to ritual, and holds out the possibility that human will and desire can still transform the world.

The looming danger of World War II heightens the emotional tension that the modern characters have in common with prehistoric humans, but it should also remind us of the potential dangers in turning to the past as a response to present crises. In the early twentieth century, modernist writers and anthropologists alike sought to recover the original state of culture, in which they hoped to find a way of life more authentic and vital than that of the modern metropolis. Longing for a way to cure the ills of modernity led many to indulge in nostalgic primitivism and fostered a sense of rupture between the past and the present. But by the time Woolf was writing her final novel, the connection between nostalgic, reactionary responses to modernity and fascist politics was clear, since fascist rhetoric often appealed to an idealized past. In *Three Guineas* (1938), Woolf had analyzed fascism as a politics of domination, whether of dictator over nation or of father over daughter; in *Between the Acts* she expands her attention to consider the relationship between past and present. Rather than engage in the domination of nostalgia, which privileges the past over the present, she articulates a nonhierarchical relation between past and present. As Gillian Beer argues, Woolf “refuses that metaphor which assumes that prehistory is deeper, grander, more sonorous than the present moment, and instead disperses it throughout the now of Between the Acts” (26). Woolf’s effort to reimagine the relationship...
between past and present in this novel is part of her larger anti-authoritarian agenda and complements her relentless critique of patriarchy, imperialism, and fascism. Such efforts were urgently needed, for as the novel shows, rediscovering the past can help one imagine creative responses to the inequities of the present, provided such rediscovery is itself sensitive to the dynamics of power and politics.

It is hardly surprising, then, that Woolf turned to the work of her friend, feminist anthropologist Jane Ellen Harrison. Though Harrison died in 1928, years before Woolf would begin to write *Between the Acts*, the two met socially many times, and Woolf’s copy of *Ancient Art and Ritual* bore Harrison’s personal inscription (Marcus 195n5). Woolf pays homage to Harrison’s achievements as a woman scholar in the Fernham College scene of *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), with a glimpse of that “formidable yet humble” figure, “J— H— herself” (17). Several critics have already explored the Harrison-Woolf connection with respect to *Between the Acts*, focusing largely on Harrison’s recovery of a matriarchal stage preceding classical Greek society and how it influences Woolf’s feminist revision of history. But while they rightly point to the feminist implications of Harrison’s argument that the origins of classical thought lie in matriarchy rather than patriarchy, it is also important to recognize that such an argument relies on the assumption that origins have privileged status. In this essay, I build on the work of others who have discussed Harrison and Woolf in order to explore how Woolf did not just evoke the primeval, but also questioned the logic of valuing origins above the present moment.

Woolf most fully articulates her vision of a nonhierarchical relationship between past and present through the pageant, beginning with the preferred site for its performance, the terrace that both evokes theatre’s ritual roots and admits the present moment. The trees on the terrace are “regular enough to suggest columns in a church,” but “a church without a roof” (64–5). The outdoor location allows the sights and sounds of the present into the performance, as when airplanes fly overhead during Reverend Streatfield’s comments (193). In its openness to the present moment, the terrace contrasts with the alternate site for the pageant in case of rain, “the barn that had been built over seven hundred years ago and reminded some people of a Greek temple, others of the middle ages, most people of an age before their own, scarcely anybody of the present moment” (99). The barn encourages a return to the past that closes out the present; “scarcely anybody” thinks of June 1939 when looking at it. While both the terrace and the barn resemble sites of ritual—a cathedral and a Greek temple—only the terrace combines the ritual past with the present.

The terrace also evokes a stage in the development of ritual that precedes temples and cathedrals; in fact, it resembles the very first stage that Harrison describes. In her account, the earliest ritual sites were merely round flat places for ritual dance; there was no need for seats because there was “no division at first between actors and spectators; all are actors, all are doing the thing done, dancing the dance danced” (*Ancient Art* 126). In Harrison’s account, primitive ritual turns into drama or religion when most of the community stops participating actively and instead observes the performance of an actor or priest. Classical Greek amphitheatres incorporate the vestiges of the round dancing place in their orchestra circles but add seats around the perimeter for the newly created spectators. Harrison argues that the architecture and even the name of the theatre signal a fundamental shift in expectations:
In the orchestra all is life and dancing; the marble seats [of the theatre] are the very symbol of rest, aloofness from action, contemplation. The seats for spectators grow and grow in importance till at last they absorb, as it were, the whole spirit, and give their name theatre to the whole structure; action is swallowed up in contemplation. (*Ancient Art* 141–42)

Where the seatless dancing place suggests that there are few, if any, spectators during the ritual dance, the sheer number of seats in a classical amphitheatre indicates that the great majority of people present expected to remain aloof from the action. In the barn at Pointz Hall, which is already associated with the later contemplative stage through its resemblance to a Greek temple, there are distinct areas for actors and audience, marked by a plank stage and benches in rows (26). In contrast, the areas for actors and audience run together at the terrace, which combines characteristics of the dancing place and the amphitheatre.

The first time Miss La Trobe sees the terrace, it strikes her as the “very place” for a pageant because she recognizes the components of a theatre in the natural features of the site: “There the stage; here the audience; and down there among the bushes a perfect dressing-room for the actors” (57). But the boundaries between these areas are not rigidly enforced as they would be in a modern theatre building. Bart can see the performers dressing behind the bramble hedge, and only his feeling that he “must respect the conventions” prevents him from talking to them (203). Likewise, the rise of the terrace helps distinguish it from the lawn, “flat as the floor of a theatre” (76), where the audience sits, but both are covered with the same grass and thus blend into each other. The terrace, then, is not a complete return to the communal ritual sites of the past but a blending of its elements with those of the modern theatre.

The blend of past and present elements in the terrace setting prepares for the way the pageant will blur the lines between actors and audience. In the final act, the people in the front row suddenly find themselves—or at least their images—on stage, when Miss La Trobe uses mirrors to confront the audience with themselves. The audience reacts with discomfort and annoyance because they had seen the terrace as a theatre, with all the expectations of passive contemplation that structure entails, without realizing that it also resembles the round dancing place. They are not allowed to sit back and contemplate the pageant but are drawn into the action willy-nilly. The back rows experience the mirrors as an extension of the drama, laughing at their neighbors’ discomfort just as they laughed at Albert wiggling in the donkey costume during the Victorian act:

“That’s them,” the back rows were tittering. “Must we submit passively to this malignant indignity?” the front row demanded. Each turned ostensibly to say—O whatever came handy—to his neighbour. Each tried to shift an inch or two beyond the inquisitive insulting eye. Some made as if to go. (186)

In their irritation, the front row questions the expectation that theatre audiences will “submit passively” to what they see on stage, but the audience members mainly assert their agency by attempting to avoid the unsettling gaze of the mirrors. The resemblance between the pageant site and the round dancing place suggests another possible answer
to their question: the mirrors invite the audience to recognize the ways they have been acting and participating in the performance all along. Though this move to make the audience into actors is in some ways a return to the earlier choric dance stage that Harrison describes, it takes place in the act identified in the program as the “Present Time,” and the flashing mirrors and jangling music evoke the fragmentation of modern life as well (177). By incorporating elements of the past into the staging of the present era, the pageant suggests that one can engage the past without nostalgically fleeing from the present.

Implicit in Harrison’s account of how ritual develops into art and religion is the emergence of hierarchy, since the process hinges on choosing a “spokesman, leader, and representative” who takes over the performance, turning the rest of the community into observers (Themis 46). La Trobe’s move to blur the boundaries between actors and audience is thus a move away from hierarchies of power and authority. Woolf echoes Harrison’s words when satirically describing Reverend Streatfield and Giles at the end of the novel. When Streatfield rises to speak at the end of the pageant, the audience looks at him and thinks, “There he stood, their representative spokesman; their symbol; themselves; a butt, a clod, laughed at by looking-glasses” (190). Though the reverend’s appearance at this moment recalls the historical connections between theatre, religion, and ritual, the laughing looking glasses have questioned the division between spectators and spokesmen, making it impossible to take Streatfield’s authority wholly seriously. Giles comes in for similar treatment later that evening when Isa looks at him in his professional clothes and sneers to herself, “Our representative, our spokesman” (215). Though the pageant cannot completely dismantle the hierarchies in which Streatfield and Giles hold privileged positions, it nevertheless exposes the ridiculous aspects of authority. If the pageant were presented as a magical cure, able to instantly level hierarchies, it would seem like an improbable and nostalgic retreat from the problems of modernity. The modest effects of the pageant link it more firmly to the present moment, where patriarchy and fascism must be countered with common things like guineas, laughter, and words.

Just as Woolf limits the effects of the pageant, she also stops short of the complete submersion in collective experience that characterizes ritual in Harrison’s account: “In the primitive choral dance all three—artist, work of art, spectator—were fused, or rather not yet differentiated” (Ancient Art 170–71). Woolf repeatedly expressed her suspicion of the “herd instinct,” which is central to Harrison’s analysis of ritual, and by 1939, Woolf saw a strong link between “herd instinct,” fascism, and militarism. As Michelle Pridmore-Brown argues, Between the Acts critiques these connections and attempts to “short-circuit the herd impulse” that Hitler and Churchill manipulated in their war speeches (408). Thus, for Woolf, a partial and fragmentary invocation of primitive ritual is most appropriate, since it allows for both questioning authority and maintaining individuality. The dynamics of authority around the pageant have characteristics both of primitive ritual and of the later “representative spokesman” phase; the community is not fused into an undifferentiated whole as in ritual dance, but neither is the audience completely passive and limited to contemplating the messages of spokespeople such as Streatfield and La Trobe.

Since in Harrison’s account, art, like religion, develops when communal ritual gives way to a few actors performing for an audience, artists are also implicated in the perpetuation of hierarchy. Through the pageant, Woolf demonstrates both how art can be produced along authoritarian lines and how it might subvert such power dynamics. Initially,
La Trobe has “the look of a commander pacing his deck” and barks orders to her cast like a military dictator (62). But in deliberately involving the audience, the pageant diffuses some of her authority. Letting go of authority is not a comfortable experience for La Trobe: in the intervals, both planned and unplanned, where the stage is left empty and cows, rain, and the audience’s reactions fill the gaps, she is tormented by the thought that her pageant is failing. The first such interval occurs by accident, when the stage is empty between scenes and the song she was counting on to “continue the emotion” is lost in the sound of the wind in the trees (139). At this moment, La Trobe is in agony: “And the stage was empty. Miss La Trobe leant against the tree, paralyzed. Her power had left her. Beads of perspiration broke on her forehead. Illusion had failed. ‘This is death,’ she murmured” (140). Yet this experience does not discourage her from including “ten mins. of present time. Swallows, cows, etc.” at the beginning of the last act, during which she had forbidden music (179, 180). This time, the empty stage and lack of music are planned; however, La Trobe feels the same torment: “Panic seized her. Blood seemed to pour from her shoes. This is death, death, death, she noted in the margin of her mind; when illusion fails” (180). Though giving up control of her “illusion” for an interval is agonizing, in doing so La Trobe points out that the performance is more than just actors on a stage; nature and the audience also play their parts, and are in fact the focus of attention when the stage is empty. Similarly, when La Trobe refuses to come forward and be thanked after the pageant, stooping down behind the bushes “to avoid attention” (208–9), focus once more shifts to nature and the audience: “Every sound in nature was painfully audible; the swish of the trees; the gulp of a cow; even the skim of the swallows over the grass could be heard. But no one spoke. Whom could they make responsible? Whom could they thank for their entertainment? Was there no one?” (194-5). Unable to thank La Trobe, William Dodge thanks Lucy instead (207). With no author in sight, thanks circulate among the members of the audience, acknowledging each person’s contribution to the pageant rather than collecting authority in a single artistic mastermind.

As La Trobe’s hold on authority loosens, the interpretive freedom of the audience increases. Rather than passively receiving the “illusion” La Trobe presents on stage, they must take their own reactions and those of their neighbors into account as they ask what the pageant means: “She meant we all act. Yes, but whose play? Ah, that’s the question! And if we’re left asking questions, isn’t it a failure, as a play? I must say I like to feel sure if I go to the theatre, that I’ve grasped the meaning . . . Or was that, perhaps, what she meant?” (200). Because La Trobe does not appear to be thanked, the audience cannot ask her what she meant and must struggle to find meaning for themselves. Like the mirrors in the “Present Era” act, La Trobe’s refusal to explain is a way to get the audience to engage actively in the performance. But in creating a situation where the audience must interpret the play for themselves, La Trobe runs the risk that audience members may misunderstand her play, which would make it a “failure” in her eyes (209). During her “experiment” with “ten mins. of present time,” an interval during which the audience could be thinking anything, she fears that they are “slipping the noose” and not understanding her message (179–80). Through La Trobe, Woolf shows how the artist’s desire to communicate could make one’s art a “noose” to snare an audience, restricting their interpretive freedom, even as she also shows La Trobe resisting this possibility. If La Trobe were truly the dictator she initially appears to be, she would never allow her “illusion” to fail, but would craft a
totalizing vision that would leave no room for questions or other points of view. Instead, her pageant encourages audience members to exercise their own interpretive powers as it encourages interrogating the relationship between past and present.

During the pageant, the audience recognizes figures in the play on two levels at once, seeing both the role and the actor’s everyday identity. For example, in the Renaissance scene, the audience is delighted when “from behind the bushes issued Queen Elizabeth—Eliza Clark, licensed to sell tobacco. Could she be Mrs. Clark of the village shop? She was splendidly made up” (83). It is not the totality of the illusion that delights, but the way that two identities are simultaneously in play. The audience has as much fun wondering at Eliza Clark playing Queen Elizabeth as they do marveling at the spectacle of Queen Elizabeth in the pageant. By yoking “Queen Elizabeth” and “Eliza Clark” with a dash, Woolf draws attention to the way these two distinct identities are connected without emphasizing one over the other. “Queen Elizabeth—Eliza Clark” thus models in miniature a nonhierarchical relationship between the past and the present. Woolf extends this relationship to the prehistoric past when the cows add their voices to the pageant: “From cow after cow came the same yearning bellow. The whole world was filled with dumb yearning. It was the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment” (140). Here, it is not solely the primeval voice that is important, nor the present moment, but the way people hear and respond to the voice of the primeval in their present lives.

The relationship between past and present modeled in the pageant resembles the one that emerges from Lucy Swithin’s “divided glance,” which registers both the here and now and the traces of the past, like the audience recognizing both Eliza Clark and Queen Elizabeth. On the morning of the pageant, it takes Lucy “five seconds in actual time, in mind time ever so much longer, to separate Grace herself, with blue china on a tray, from the leather-covered grunting monster who was about, as the door opened, to demolish a whole tree in the green steaming undergrowth of the primeval forest” (9). As her difficulty in untangling her vision of a mammoth from Grace the maid indicates, for Lucy, the past is deeply implicated in the present. Yet her primeval daydream is not a retreat into an idealized past because both Grace and the mammoth are equally near and real to her. Lucy’s ability to register both simultaneously leads to an understanding of the past and present as twined together rather than separated by nostalgia and hierarchy. Though Grace calls Lucy “Batty” for her “divided glance that was half meant for a beast in a swamp, half for a maid in a print frock and white apron,” the novel suggests that we should aspire to precisely this way of seeing (9).

Woolf closes the novel with an evocation of the past that is profoundly antinostalgic. Indeed, it is hard to say which is less desirable: the frightening prehistoric darkness that envelops Isa and Giles or the darkness of war about to fall over modern Europe. But even in this dimming landscape, contact with the past strengthens longing, and longing spurs Isa and Giles to finally articulate their fears and desires, much as it spurred primitive humans to take ritual action in Harrison’s account. The darkness at the end of the novel evokes the looming danger of World War II, but it also recalls the fertile mud of Miss La Trobe’s creative vision when she is planning her next play (212). Poised on the edge of darkness, *Between the Acts*, like primitive ritual, holds out hope that moments of danger and anxiety can give rise to extraordinary human expressions. After all, it is then we need them most.
Notes

1. For feminist readings of *Between the Acts* that engage with Harrison's work on matriarchy, see Barrett, Cramer, Little, Maika, and Marcus. Marcus also discusses Harrison's relevance for *The Years* (1937) and for some of Woolf’s essays. Cuddy-Keane and Shattuck discuss Harrison's analysis of the chorus in classical Greek drama and its relationship to the audience.

2. Harrison's fullest articulations of her argument that the earliest stage of Greek culture was matriarchal are found in *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* and *Themis*. See Carpentier, especially Chapter 3, for a fuller exposition of Harrison's thinking on matriarchy and its implications for feminism.

3. See Pawlowski for a detailed analysis of Woolf’s engagement with theories of herd psychology and its relationship to fascism.

4. See Jed Esty's argument that Woolf “reckon[s] with both the dangers and the comforts of a more communal aesthetic in *Between the Acts*,” recognizing its potential for “stultifying ideologies and mob aesthetics” as well as “a meaningful shared history” (107). Once again, Woolf’s partial, fragmentary invocation of primitive ritual allows her to articulate the advantages and disadvantages of such communal forms of expression without falling into nostalgia.

Works Cited


Notes on Contributors

Meg Albrinck is Associate Professor of Literature and Writing and Chair of the Humanities Division at Lakeland College in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. She has presented her work on war literature and women’s writing at conferences and in print, and she includes Woolf’s writing in courses on British literature, war narratives, women’s writing, and gender studies.

Christina Alt is a D.Phil. student at Lincoln College, Oxford. Her doctoral thesis explores changing literary responses to the natural history tradition resulting from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century developments in the scientific study of nature and examines in particular Virginia Woolf’s treatment of the disciplines of taxonomy, biology, ethology, and ecology.

Alice D’Amore is a third-year PhD student at Purdue University. A course entitled “Woolf in Context” founded her interest in Woolfian studies and provided an exciting platform from which to investigate modern feminist textual experimentation—in this case with trauma. She spends the majority of her time presenting and publishing on Caribbean-American and Caribbean-Canadian feminist works.

Trevor James Bond (MLIS., MA. UCLA) is Special Collections Librarian at the Washington State University Libraries where oversees the rare book and photograph collections. He recently spent 6 months working in the rare books division of the Bodleian Library where he cataloged and scanned rare chapbooks. He current research interests include streaming audio and printed ephemera.

Stephanie Callan is a Ph. D. candidate in English at the University of Oregon. She is writing a dissertation on modernism and anthropology in the work of Lady Augusta Gregory and Zora Neale Hurston.


Karin de Weille (BA in economics from Princeton, MFA from Sarah Lawrence, PhD in literature from the University of Toronto) has taught at the University of Toronto, New School University, and John Jay College, presented papers at various conferences, and published poetry in journals and anthologies. She is currently completing a transdisciplinary study of modernist form.

Renée Dickinson is an Assistant Professor at Radford University. Her article is a slight tangential turn from the second chapter of her dissertation, “The Corporeum: Body, Land, Nation and Text in Virginia Woolf and Olive Moore.” Her current work focuses on the recovery and analysis of Olive Moore texts and life.
JED ESTY is Associate Professor in the English Department and in the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory at the University of Illinois. He is the author of A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England (Princeton 2004) and coeditor, with Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Antoinette Burton, and Matti Bunzl, of Postcolonial Studies and Beyond (Duke 2005). His contribution to this volume is drawn from a work in progress entitled Tropics of Youth: The Bildungsroman and Colonial Modernity.

ELIZABETH F. EVANS has just completed her PhD in English Literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In the fall she will be a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Wake Forest University. This paper emerges from a book-length project currently titled “Liminal London: Gender and Threshold Space in Narratives of Urban Modernity.”

CHRISTINE FROULA, Professor of English at Northwestern University, has published widely on interdisciplinary modernism, textual scholarship, and feminist and critical theory, including Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde, Modernism’s Body: Sex, Culture, and Joyce, To Write Paradise: Style and Error in Pound’s Cantos, and A Guide to Ezra Pound’s Selected Poems

DIANE F. GILLESPIE, Professor Emerita of English at Washington State University, is author of The Sisters’ Art: The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell and of numerous articles. She is editor of Woolf’s Roger Fry: A Biography and of The Multiple Muses of Virginia Woolf as well as co-editor of Julia Stephen’s writings, Virginia Woolf and the Arts, and Cicely Hamilton’s Diana of Dobson’s.

MOLLIE GODFREY is pursuing a Ph.D. in English Language and Literature at the University of Chicago. Her current research focuses on race, modernism and the 20th century American novel.

JOANNA GRANT is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Rochester in Rochester, New York. Her essay comes from her dissertation, “Journeys to Barbary: Modernism’s Middle East.” She currently teaches at Auburn University in Alabama.

Dr Benjamin Harvey is an assistant professor of art history at Mississippi State University. His research focuses on word and image issues, especially as they pertain to the art and literature of both nineteenth-century France and Bloomsbury. He is currently working on several projects concerning Virginia Woolf’s art criticism.


JOYCE KELLEY is completing a Ph.D. in English at the University of Iowa. She holds an M.A. in English from the University of Iowa and a B.A. in English and music from
Haverford College. Her dissertation is entitled “Excursions into Modernism: Women Writers, Travel, and the Body.”

Gill Lowe is Senior Teaching Practitioner at Suffolk College, University of East Anglia. She specialises in auto/biography, children’s literature and adaptation. She became interested in the manuscript of Hyde Park Gate News while researching a monograph about Julia Stephen, Virginia Woolf’s mother, now published by Cecil Woolf as Versions of Julia.

Randi Kopp is Associate Professor of English at the University of Bergen, Norway. She is the author of Scenes of Infidelity: Feminism in the Theatre (1995) and has published articles on critical theory and literary modernism. Her current project is a study of Virginia Woolf in the context of modernism, fashion and anti-fashion.

Katie Macnamara is a doctoral candidate in English Literature at Indiana University in Bloomington, where she is working on a dissertation exploring modernist approaches to the essay form. A Chicago native, she studied English and Russian literature at Princeton University, and taught English in Malaysia and Singapore before returning to the Midwest for graduate school.

Douglas Mao is Associate Professor of English at Cornell University. A past president of the Modernist Studies Association, he is the author of Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production and co-editor, with Rebecca Walkowitz, of Bad Modernisms. He is finishing a book on aesthetic environments, human development, and literature 1860-1950.

Alexandra Neel is a PhD candidate in English at Princeton University, where she is completing her dissertation, “The Writing of Ice: Literary and Photographic Explorations of Antarctica and the Arctic,” which examines the exchanges between writing, photography, and polar travel.

Eleanor McNees is associate professor of English and Director of Graduate Studies at the University of Denver. In addition to a number of essays on Virginia Woolf, she is the author of Eucharistic Poetry, and editor of collections of essays on the Bronte Sisters, Virginia Woolf and Sources and Documents of the Novel. She is currently working on a book on the literary influence of Leslie and James Fitzjames Stephen on Virginia Woolf.

Cheryl Mares is a professor of English at Sweet Briar College in Virginia. She has published a number of articles on Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust. Currently, her research focuses on ideas and images of American culture in works by various English writers, especially those associated with the Bloomsbury Group.

Ayako Muneuchi is a lecturer at Tokyo University of Science. Her research interests are concerned with the relationship between literature and the modernisation of society, and focus in particular on the representation of the hotel. She is currently working on...
her dissertation, which inquires into the early-twentieth-century “hotel-consciousness” of British writers including Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, and Henry Green.

Robert Reginio will receive a Ph.D. in English from the University of Massachusetts in 2006. His dissertation is an interdisciplinary examination of modernism that analyzes the way writers and artists confronted the issues currently at the center of trauma studies and the subsequent reconsideration of the relationship between memory and history.

Kathryn Simpson is a Lecturer at the University of Birmingham, England, where she teaches courses on nineteenth and twentieth century fiction and film. Her research interests focus on the interrelationships of sexuality and creativity in modernist women’s writing and her current research explores the operation of the gift economy as it works in conjunction with market and libidinal economies.

Helen Southworth is Assistant Professor of Literature at the Clark Honors College at the University of Oregon. She is the author of The Intersecting Realities and Fictions of Virginia Woolf and Colette (Ohio State 2004). Her essays have appeared in Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature, the Journal of Modern Literature and the Woolf Studies Annual. She is currently working on projects involving the relationship between George Borrow and the Modernists and Hogarth Press author John Hampson.

Elisa Kay Sparks is Associate Professor of English and Director of Women’s Studies at Clemson University in South Carolina. A printmaker on the side, specializing in woodcut, she has published articles on Woolf and Georgia O’Keeffe as well as on spaces associated with Woolf, including gardens and aspects of London.

Kelly Sulzbach attends the University of Oregon and expects to complete her Ph.D. in English literature by 2007-08. She earned a B.A. at Yale University and a J.D. from UC Davis. She has eagerly begun her dissertation, “Nature Replies in a Modern Voice: The Relationship Between Humans and the Environment in the work of E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, and W.H. Auden.”

Emily O. Wittman is Arthur J. Ennis Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Core Humanities at Villanova University. She received her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Princeton University, with a dissertation entitled “The Discipline of Travel Experience and Expertise in American, English and French Interwar Literature.” She also writes poetry.

Akemi Yaguchi holds a Ph.D. in British Modernist Literature from Hiroshima University, Japan. She is currently a Postgraduate Fellow completing a Ph.D. in Victorian Literature at the University of Exeter, UK.
Thursday, June 9
Noon: Registration opens

Thursday, June 9
2-3:30 p.m. Parallel Panels 1

1A: Virginia Woolf and Trauma
Chair: Suzette Henke (Indiana University, Bloomington)
Patricia Cramer (University of Connecticut, Storrs), “Trauma and Lesbian Returns in The Voyage Out and The Years”
David Eberly, “The Name of the Face: Marital Trauma in the Work of Virginia Woolf”
Claire Kahane (University of California, Berkeley), “Crying Woolf: Representations of Trauma in Between the Acts”
Holly Laird (University of Tulsa, Oklahoma), “Reading ‘Virginia’s Death’: A (Post)Traumatic Narrative of Suicide”

1B: Woolf Online
Merry Pawlowski (California State University, Bakersfield) and Vara Neverow (Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven), “Virginia Woolf Online at the Center for Virginia Woolf Studies”
Wayne Chapman (Clemson University, South Carolina), “Virginia Woolf International (South Carolina Review On-line Library, Expanded and Renovated)”
Janet M. Manson (Clemson University, South Carolina), Annotated Guide to the Writings and Papers of Leonard Woolf

1C: Ecocritical Explorations: Woolf and Science
Chair: Linda Asako Angst (Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Oregon)
Justyna Kostkowska (Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro), “Kew Gardens’ Narrative Ecology: Virginia Woolf’s Ecological Imagination and the Narrative Discovery of Jacob’s Room”
Thursday, June 9
3:30-4 p.m. Afternoon break: coffee and pastries available

Thursday, June 9
4-6 p.m. Featured Speaker
Diane Gillespie (Washington State University), “Godiva Still Rides: Virginia Woolf and Divestiture”
Introduced by Leslie Hankins, Cornell College

Thursday, June 9
6 p.m. Wine and Cheese Reception

Friday, June 10
8-8:45 a.m. Business meeting of the IVWS

Friday, June 10
9-10:30 a.m. Parallel Panels 2

2A: Aesthetic/Text
Chair: Carolyn Byrd (Independent Scholar)
Victor Vargas (Claremont Graduate University), “Six Characters in Search of ‘sensabilia’”
Erica Delsandro (Bucknell University and Washington University, St. Louis), “Encountering the Impossible: Woolf’s Exploration of Time, Death, and Art in The Waves”

2B: Flirtations and Sexual (Mis)adventures: Victoria Ocampo, Margaret Cavendish, and the Androgyny Machine
Chair: Kristin Czarnecki (Georgetown College, Ohio)
Madelyn Detloff (Miami University of Ohio, Oxford), “Flirting with the Impossible: On Not Coming (to Argentina) with Victoria Ocampo”
Emily Smith, “In Pursuit of a Wild Hare: Margaret Cavendish as Harriet/Harry in Virginia Woolf’s Orlando”
Jillian St. Jacques (Oregon State University, Corvallis), “Orlando, Projected Temporalities and the Androgyny Machine”

2C: Traumatic Encounters
Chair: Alice Staveley (Stanford University, California)
Jennifer Barker (Indiana University, Bloomington), “Woolf’s Traumatic Exploration of the World”
Vara Neverow (Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven), “Through the Paterian Prism of Childhood: Virginia Woolf, Sigmund Freud, and ‘The Child in the House’”

Alice D’Amore (Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana), “Autobiographic Ruptures: Rhoda’s Traumatic Displacement”

2D: Woolf’s Nation
Chair: Marlene Briggs (University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada)
Jessica Citti (University of Wisconsin, Madison), “‘Loosed are our possessions’: Pedagogy, Imperialism and Between the Acts”
Mitch Nakaue (University of Wisconsin, Madison), “Rings Around The Waves: Mourning and Memory at the End of Empire”
Kevin Piper, Kulturnarration (University of Wisconsin, Madison), “To the Lighthouse as Re-Visionary Epic”

2E: A Bloom of One’s Own: Exploring Bloomsbury Through Altered Books
Chair: Sally Jacobsen (Northern Kentucky University)
Elisa Kay Sparks (Clemson University, South Carolina), “A Bloom of One’s Own: Altered Books as Visual Learning Enhancements”
Allison Kellar (Clemson University, South Carolina), “Altering a Naked Room”
Skye Suttie (Clemson University, South Carolina), “Altering Text/Books”

2F: Voyages Out of Empire: Postcolonial and Anti-Imperial Readings
Chair: Helen Southworth (University of Oregon, Eugene)
Patricia Serviss (Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA), “Virginia Woolf: A Female Rhetoric of (Neo)Colonial Subversion”
Kristin Anderson (Oxford University), “Neutral Regions of Low Colour: Postcolonial Readings of To the Lighthouse in Sara Suleri Goodyear’s Meatless Days”
Alissa Appel (University of Rochester), “Mrs. Dalloway and Leonard Woolf’s Economic Imperialism”

Friday, June 10
10:30-11 a.m. Morning break: coffee and pastries available

Friday, June 10
11 a.m. -12:30 Parallel Panels 3

3A: Woolf and “Influence”
Chair: Jay Dickson (Reed College, Oregon)
Anne Fernald (Fordham University, Lincoln Center, NY), “Woolfian Resonances”
Jessica Gibson-James (University of Dayton, Ohio), “Threaded Narrative: The Unexplored Victorian Influence on Mrs. Dalloway”

3B: Self and Autobiography
Chair: Rachel Cole (Lewis and Clark College)
Kristin Czarnecki (Georgetown College, Ohio), “The Hush and Mystery of Motherhood: Maternal Ambivalence in Virginia Woolf’s Diaries”
Alyda Faber (Atlantic School of Theology, Halifax, Canada), “Virginia Woolf’s Exploration of Self as Ascetic Mysticism”
Jennifer Shaddock (University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire), “The Most Satisfactory State in the Whole World: Virginia Woolf’s Journeys into Nothingness”

3C: Woolf’s Own Reading
Chair: Jane Hunter (Lewis and Clark College)
Emily O. Wittman (Villanova University, Pennsylvania), “The Decline and Fall of Rachel Vinrace: Reading Gibbon in Virginia Woolf’s The Voyage Out”
Akemi Yaguchi (Exeter College, Devon, UK), “A novel is an impression not at argument’: Virginia Woolf and James Sully”

3D: Public and Private
Chair: Amanda Golden (University of Washington, Seattle)
Rebecca Disrud (Indiana University, Bloomington), “Party of One: Exploring the Limits of the Party Consciousness in Mrs. Dalloway”
Elizabeth Evans (University of Wisconsin, Madison), “Woolf’s Exploration of Boundaries Between in The Years”
Chelsea Topping (Portland State University, Oregon), “The Bell Jar, and Mrs. Peters’ Hat: Social Construction, Self-Expression, and Narrative in Plath and Woolf”
Elizabeth Pedersen (University of Wollongong, Australia), “Journey to the Interior: Ekphrasis in To the Lighthouse and Beyond”

3E: Woolf Today, 2005
Chair: Robert Reginio (University of Massachusetts, Amherst)
Lisa L. Coleman (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Durant), “Western Peace Talk: An Exploration of ‘Unsubstantial Territory’”
3F: Continuing Woolf I
Chair: Louise Westling (University of Oregon, Eugene)
Monica Ayuso (California State University, Bakersfield), “Textual Detours: From Sylvia Molloy’s Certificate of Absence to Virginia Woolf’s Between the Acts”
Patricia Juliana Smith (Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY), “The Enigmas of the Androgynous Mind: or, Virginia Woolf, Angela Carter, and Orlando at the Opera”
Lidan Lin (Indiana University Purdue University, Fort Wayne), “From Feminism to Postfeminism: Woolf, Drabble, and Carter”

3G: Visual Culture from Impressionism to Cinema
Chair: Elisa Kay Sparks (Clemson University, South Carolina)
Carolyn Byrd, “Artistic Adventures: Virginia Woolf’s Exploration of Post-Impressionism and Its Influence on Her Works (of Literary Art)”
Micki Nyman (Saint Louis University, Missouri), “Virginia Woolf’s Cinematic Palimpsest: Mixing it up in Lacan’s Imaginary”

Friday, June 10
12:30-2 p.m. Lunch: pre-ordered/pre-paid box lunches available

Friday, June 10
2-3:30 Parallel Panels 4

4A: Forward—Into the Past: Thinking Back Through Virginia Woolf
Chair: Alice D’Amore (Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana)
Suzanne Diamond (Youngstown State University), “Confession Minus Conversion: Exploring Woolf’s ‘Apprehensive Sensibility’”
Georgia Johnston (Saint Louis University, Missouri), “Woolf’s Model of Memory”
Patricia Moran (University of California, Davis), “Listening in to the Past: Models of Memory in Woolf and Contemporary Neuroscience”

4B: Mrs. Dalloway: Gender and the Politics of Style (Undergraduate Students of Woolf)
Chair: Perrin Kerns (Marylhurst University)
Deena Lindstedt (Marylhurst University), “Virginia Woolf’s Party Consciousness”
Cynthia Frese (Marylhurst University), “To Kindle and Illuminate: The Party as
Offering in Mrs. Dalloway
Kelly White (Marylhurst University), “Clarissa and Septimus: A Movement Beyond Gender”

4C: Virginia Woolf and Expeditions in Art and Film
Chair: Diane F. Gillespie (Washington State University, Pullman)
Leslie Kathleen Hankins (Cornell College, Mt Vern on, Iowa), “‘My mountai n top—that persistent vision’: Doomed Expeditions in Film and Fiction: Early Everest and Antarctic Films in Woolf’s Fiction from To the Lighthouse to ‘The Symbol’”
Suzanne Bellamy, “Perce ption Codes, Tools of the Abstract Explorer”

4D: Adventures in French Theory: Deleuze and Guattari, Blanchot, Kristeva, Lacan
Chair: Michael Mirabile (Reed College, Oregon)
Charlie Wesley (State University of New York, Fredonia), “Exploring ‘Revolutionary’ Potential in The Waves and Three Guineas”
Matthew James Vechinski (University of Washington, Seattle), “Se eing the Impossible: The ‘Life’ of To the Lighthouse”
Carolyn M. Tilghman (University of Texas, Tyler), “‘Because my reaction is not the usual’: An Exploration of Melancholy in The Waves”
Stefanie Boese (Northwestern University, Chicago, Illinois), “[S]ome little language’: Reality Between Sanity and Madness in the Works of Virginia Woolf”

4E: Nationalism and Politics
Chair: Mitch Nakaue (University of Wisconsin, Madison)
Marlene Briggs (University of British Columbia, Canada), “Abjection and Monstrosity: Doris Kilman and Anglo-German Relations in Mrs. Dalloway”
Alessandra Capperdoni (Simon Fraser University, Canada), “The Gender of Citizenship—The Sex of Space: Virginia Woolf’s The Years and the Politics of the Everyday”
Ryan Fong (University of California, Davis), “The Ghost of Fascist Futures: Exploring the Haunted/ing Artist in Between the Acts”

4F: Wild Voices, the Value of Song: Musical Inspirations
Chair: Claudia Nadine (Lewis and Clark College)
Sarah E. Baker (Indiana University), “Exploring the Wild Voice: The Value of Song in Between the Acts”
Emilie Crapoulet (Université de Provence, France and University of Surrey, UK), “Exploring the Sound of Music”

Friday, June 10
3:30-4 p.m. Afternoon break: Beverages and cookies available
Friday, June 10
4-5:30  Featured Speaker
Jed Esty (University of Illinois at Chicago), “Unseasonable Youth, or Woolf’s Alternative Modernity”
Introduced by Urmilla Seshagiri, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Friday, June 10
5:30-6:15  Buffet dinner

Friday, June 10
6:30-8:30 p.m. Theatrical Performance
Kathleen Worley as Virginia Woolf

Saturday, June 11
8-8:45 a.m. Business meeting for 2006 and future organizers of the annual conference

Saturday, June 11
9-10:30 a.m. Parallel Panels 5

5A: Colonial Relations
Chair: Abigail Miller Lockett (Middle Tennessee State University)
Carol Dell’Amico (California State University, Bakersfield), “Mrs. Dalloway, Flâneur Novels, and the Colonial”
Justine Dymond (University of Massachusetts, Amherst), “Modernity’s Elsewhere in The Waves”
Stacey Meredith Kaplan (University of Oregon, Eugene), “‘The Limit of the Journey’: South America and Modernism in Virginia Woolf’s The Voyage Out”

5B: Woolf and the Exploration of Subversive Space
Chair: Micki Nyman (Saint Louis University, Missouri)
Jeff Drouin (Brooklyn College), “New York, Subversive Science: Realism and Relativity in The Waves”
Cori L. Gabbard (The City College of New York), “A Wrinkle in Time: Virginia Woolf’s Freshwater and Julia Margaret Cameron”
Jean E. Mills (Hunter College, New York), “Tea and Exploration of Subversive Space in Virginia Woolf’s The Years”

5C: The Locus of Desire: Discovering Woolf Through Creative and
**Critical Eyes**
Chair: Jan VanStavern (Dominican University of California, San Rafael)
Respondent/Artist: Judy Halebsky (University of California)
Henry Alley (University of Oregon, Eugene), “Men Touching and Mrs. Dalloway”
Penny Jackson (Dominican University of California, San Rafael), “A Flower, a Moth, and Two Snails: Inner and Outer Weather in the Short Works of Virginia Woolf”
Chase Clow (Dominican University of California, San Rafael), “Borrowed Adventures: A Room Not Of One’s Own”
Jan VanStavern (Dominican University of California, San Rafael), “Traveling in Place: Woolf’s Radical Pilgrimages”

**5D: Memory and Memorials**
Chair: Georgia Johnston (Saint Louis University, Missouri)
Keri Barber (University of California, Riverside), “Woolf’s Exploration of the Past in Jacob’s Room: ‘The Eighteenth Century Has Its Distinction’”
Lydia Pottle Currie (Temple University, PA), “‘What I write today I should not write in a year’s time’: Woolf’s Multifaceted Adventures in Autobiography”
Robert Reginio (University of Massachusetts, Amherst), “Virginia Woolf and the Technologies of Exploration: Jacob’s Room as a Response to Post-War Memorial Gestures”

**5E: “Round the Mulberry Bush”: Woolf as Social Activist/War, Civilization, and the Human Condition (Undergraduate Students of Woolf)**
Chair: Linda Strom (Youngstown University)
Connie Moore (Marylhurst University Portland, OR), “Civilized Humanity”
Margie Doolan (Marylhurst University Portland, OR), “Modernism as Antidote to War and Virginia Woolf’s Three Guineas”
Sue Cool (Marylhurst University Portland, OR), “The Human Experience: The Modern Condition as Explored by Woolf and the Modernists”

**5F: Woolf and the United States**
Chair: John Callahan (Lewis and Clark College)
Cheryl Mares (Sweet Briar College, Sweet Briar, VA), “The Making of Woolf’s America”
Thaine Stearns (Sonoma State University, CA), “‘Others Wanted to Travel’: Woolf and ‘America Herself’”

**Saturday, June 11**
**10:30-11 a.m.** Morning break: coffee and pastries available
Saturday, June 11
11 a.m.-12:30  Parallel Panels 6

6A: Wandering the World
Chair: Evelyn Haller (Doane College, Nebraska)
Joanna Grant (State University of New York, Brockport), “They Came to Baghdad: Woolf and Sackville-West’s Levant”
Joyce Kelley (University of Iowa), “‘Nooks and corners which I enjoy exploring’: The Relationship Between Vita Sackville-West’s Travel Narratives and Woolf’s Writing”
Martha Klironomos (San Fransisco State University), “Early Twentieth-Century British Women Travellers to Greece: Contextualizing the Example of Virginia Woolf”

6B: Woolf, Inter-War British Empire, the Pacific:”After the Imperial Turn”
Chair: Tom Gillcrist (Reed College)
Tomoko Ohtani (Tokyo Gakugei University Tokyo, Japan), “Mrs. Dalloway and the (Geo)politics of Friendship: ‘Conservative Modernity’ Reconsidered”
Hogara Matsumoto (Sophia University Tokyo, Japan), “An/Other First World War: Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and the South Seas”
Nobyoshi Ota (Tokyo Gakugei University Tokyo, Japan), “Woolf, Lloyd George, China: After ‘The Strange Death of Liberal England’”

6C: Camp, Comedy, Parody
Chair: Madlyn Detloff (Miami University of Ohio)
Randi Koppen (University of Bergen Norway), “Sartorial Adventures: Woolf and the (Other-)Worldliness of Dress”
Julia Paolitto (Magdalen College Oxford University), “Incongruous Living Humor: The Comedy of Between the Acts”
Sally A. Jacobsen (Northern Kentucky University), “Between the Acts: Ottoline Morrell and Mrs. Manresa, D.H. Lawrence and Giles Oliver”

6D: Architecture and Space
Chair: L. Brown Kennedy (Hampshire College, Massachusetts)
Karin de Weille (Sarah Lawrence College), “The Exploration of Space, Power, and Identity in Mrs. Dalloway”
P. Keiko Kagawa (Western Oregon University), “The Archi-Spatial Narratives of Virginia Woolf”
Benjamin Harvey (Mississippi State University), “The Twentieth Part: Word and Image in Woolf’s Reading Room”
6E: Travel of the Mind
Chair: Kelly Sultzbach (University of Oregon, Eugene)
Erin Sells (Emory University), “The Recumbent Explorer: Virginia Woolf’s *On Being Ill* and the Journey of Illness”
Heonjoo Sohn, “Virginia Woolf, an Explorer of the ‘Undiscovered Countries’”

6F: Gender and Feminism
Chair: Anne Fernald (Fordham University, New York)
Larissa M. Ennis (Villanova University), “‘How it makes one long to be a man!’: Evelyn Murgatroyd and Gendered Imperial Project(ion)s in *The Voyage Out*”
Katharyn Simpson (University of Birmingham, United Kingdom), “Short Change: Economies Explored in Woolf’s Short Fiction”
Jennifer Sorensen (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor), “A Genre of One’s Own?” Judy Suh (Duquesne University, Pittsburgh), “Anti-Semitic Stereotypes in *The Years*: Woolf’s Reassessment of British Liberal Feminism”

Saturday, June 11
12:30-1 p.m. Lunch: pre-ordered/pre-paid box lunches available

Saturday, June 11
1-2:30 p.m. Featured Speaker
Douglas Mao (Cornell University), “Strange Necessities”
Introduced by Anne Fernald, Fordham University

Saturday, June 11
2:30-3 p.m. Afternoon break: Beverages and cookies available

Saturday, June 11
3-4:30 p.m. Parallel Panels 7

7A: Woolf and Shakespeare
Chair: Lyell Asher (Lewis and Clark College)
Mollie Godfrey (University of Chicago), “Discovering the Androgynous Mind: Woolf’s Modernist Re-Imagining of the National Poet”
L. Brown Kennedy (Hampshire College), “Theatrical Forms, Pseudo-Pastoral Spaces: Virginia Woolf’s Double Plot”
Geoff Ridden (University College Winchester, United Kingdom), “*Orlando* and *Othello*: Racial and Gender Differences in Woolf, Potter, and Shakespeare”
7B: Off the Beaten Track: Woolf’s Eccentric Antecedents
Chair: Beth Rigel Daugherty (Otterbein College)
Emily Setina (Yale University), “A Camera of Her Own: Woolf and the Legacy of the Indomitable Mrs. Cameron”
Helen Southworth (University of Oregon), “Virginia Woolf’s Wild England: George Borrow, Amateur Ethnography and Between the Acts”
Renee Dickinson (University of Colorado, Boulder), “Extinguishing the Lady with the Lamp: Florence Nightingale and the Work of Empire in the Interludes of The Waves”

7C: Exploring London
Chair: Salah Khan (Reed College)
Veronica Geminder (Cambridge University), “City Webs: Exploring the Nature of London”
Sara Gerend (Depauw University, Indiana), “Street Haunting: Phantasmagorias of the Modern Imperial Metropolis”
Joanna Lackey (Wellesley College), “Street Haunting in Winter the Greatest of Adventures’: Female Urban Experience in Virginia Woolf’s London”

7D: Daily Life: Explorations of Habitus, Minutia, and the Commonplace
Chair: Wayne Chapman (Clemson University, South Carolina)
Silke Greskamp (Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg), “Exploring the Literary Field: Avant-Garde Habitus, Experiments with Literary Structure and the Poetics of Impersonality”
Diana Royer (Miami University), “Significantly Insignificant: Minutia in the Fiction of Virginia Woolf”
Carol Loeb Shloss (Stanford University), “Adventures of the Commonplace: dedicated to hermione lee, who judged lucia joyce to have a minor life”

7E: Woolf and Publishing
Chair: Mark Hussey (Pace University)
Gill Lowe (Suffolk College, University of East Anglia), “Hyde Park Gate News”
Claudia Olk (Humboldt-University of Berlin), “Exploring the Art of ‘Scene-Making’ in the Charleston Bulletin Supplements”
Alice Staveley (Stanford University), “Solid Objects: (W)rites of Passage at the Hogarth Press”

7F: Woolf and Community
Chair: Monica Ayuso (California State University, Bakersfield)
Emily Hinnov (University of New Hampshire), “The Art of Self-Exploration and
Community in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Ayako Muneuchi (Tokyo University of Science), “Hotel Narrative: Virginia Woolf’s Modernist Exploration in *The Voyage Out*”

**Saturday, June 11**

**4:45-6:15 p.m. Featured Speaker**

Maria Dibattista (Princeton University) “Virginia Woolf’s Sense of Adventure”

Introduced by Jay Dickson, Reed College

**Saturday, June 11**

**6:30-8:30 p.m. Banquet (pre-paid)**

**8:30 p.m.**


Introduced by Doug Erickson, Lewis and Clark College

**Sunday, June 12**

**8:30-9:15 a.m. Business Meeting, *Virginia Woolf Miscellany***

**Sunday, June 12**

**10:30 a.m.-12 Parallel Panel 8**

**8A: Travel Writing**

Chair: Renee Dickinson (University of Colorado, Boulder)

Holly Henry (Colorado State University, San Bernardino), “Obtaining a Global Perspective: The Geopolitics of Woolf and Huxley’s Travel Writing”

Martha Weitzel Hickey (Portland State University), “Woolf, Lee, Views and Waves, or Adventures in a Motor-Car”

Marilyn Schwinn Smith (Five Colleges, Inc.), “Out of One’s Room and Into the World: The Travel Writing of Anne Morrow Lindbergh and Ruth Gruber”

**8B: Re/Imagining Subjectivities**

Chair: Patricia Moran (University of California, Davis)

Elizabeth Hirsh (University of South Florida), “*Flush’s* Thanatography”

Mia L. McIver (University of California, Irvine), “Theaters of Consciousness: Reality and Representation in *Between the Acts*”

8C: Continuing Woolf II
Chair: Chelsea Topping (Portland State University)
Mahmuldul Hasan, “Thematic and Formal Insurgency in Woolf’s To the Lighthouse and in Rokeya’s Fictional Works”
Nicole Malkin (University of Oregon), “Un-sexing the Novel: From Woolf’s Erudite Androgyny to the Genderless Speaker in Jeanette Winterson”

8D: Ethnography, Anthropology, and the Idea of England
Chair: Ryan Fong (University of California, Davis)
Meg Albrinck (Lakeland College), “Lily the Ethnographer: Discovering Self in To the Lighthouse”
Stephanie Callan (University of Oregon), “Exploring the Confluence of Primitive Ritual and Modern Longing in Between the Acts”
Caroline Webb (University of Newcastle, Ourimbah), “‘A Recreated World’: England, Art, and Convention in Between the Acts”
Abigail Miller Lockett (Middle Tennessee State University), “Exploring the Past and Defining the Character of Modern English Society in Virginia Woolf’s The Years”

Sunday, June 12
12-12:45 p.m. Lunch: pre-ordered/pre-paid box lunches available

Sunday, June 12
1-2:30 p.m. Featured Speaker
Christine Froula (Northwestern University), “On French and British Freedoms: Early Bloomsbury”
Introduced by Helen Southworth, University of Oregon
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