Woolf: Across the Generations

Selected Papers from the Twelfth International Conference on Virginia Woolf
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Virginia Woolf Conference
Woolf: Across the Generations

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Virginia Woolf

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**Introduction: How We Crossed the Generations**

J.J. Wilson

In preparation for writing this brief introduction, I read several of the earlier samples of the genre which were printed in those wonderful hard copy volumes of the Selected Papers from the annual Woolf conferences by Pace University (which does not mean that I am not elated by this new electronic version scrolling before us, I assure you.) Those introductions themselves make good reading, rather like inhaling all the italicized interludes in The Waves without reading the monologues in between. Indeed, I was tempted just to lift the Vara Neverow and Mark Hussey first paragraph, which begins, “. . . blessed with four flawlessly sunny days, the conference was an intimate and intense encounter of common readers and professors, amateurs and experts, aficionados and critics” (10).

Equally apt would have been the late Paul Connolly, starting characteristically with an interactive question: “Why do people attend a Virginia Woolf conference? . . . To return the tribute of our learning to that love?” (1). And from Diane Gillespie and Leslie Hankins a wonderful expansion of Woolf’s "party consciousness" to "the conference consciousness" and a description of us all arriving that would fit as well for the 12th Annual Conference as their 6th:

Inevitably, the conference participants arrive in ones and twos, some jet-lagged and disoriented, most filled with varying degrees of confidence and self-consciousness, anticipation and nervousness, all expecting to be swept up through some invisible artistry into a vitalizing whole (xii).

Georgia Johnston moved on to question the very nature of the act of remembering a conference: "To remember the conference as it was, however, is an impossible task" which every year the director attempts, though we all realize that "such an all-impossible, imagined omniscience cannot be written" (3).

Fortunately, however, I do not have to depend on my memory or my omniscience, as Merry Pawlowski and Eileen Barrett have gotten so many of the papers up on the web for all the world to see. Hail to them both and to Merry's student assistants Don Leonides and Rebecca Benas for making this contribution to Woolf scholarship and to all of our failing memories possible.

Eileen Barrett was present at the beginning, helping me word the invitation for paper proposals in inclusive language, driving up from the Bay Area to Sonoma many times to help us organize the juried papers into suitable and stimulating panels, which was actually a fascinating process, testing our senses of classification, connections, synthesis, and even marketing. She also worked with us on the great day when the Program copy got put to bed.

So Eileen was already intimately acquainted with the "table of contents" before she took on this task with Merry Pawlowski -- who keeps taking on tasks, bless her! -- of editing the first ever electronic version of the Selected Papers. While nothing could include it all, not even the hospitable spaciousness of cyberspace, she and Merry have done as much as is humanly possible to provide a virtual conference for the mind here.
For example, the editors wisely chose Sybil Oldfield's historical approach to Woolf's legacy through reading her obituaries and thus the very "first generation's attempt to evaluate the lasting achievement of Virginia Woolf." And she ends with the penetrating question: "Would we have spoken up for her as well at that time?"

Todd Avery's essay follows well here, following a pattern we see often in the across the generations scholarship of today. He starts with the concession and compliments to the earlier scholars' productivity and sensitivity to Woolf's "seismographic sensitivity" in matters political, and then comes the inevitable "and yet" more and deeper digging must be done, especially "to illuminate her politically constructive thinking in relation to more recent theories of democracy, the type of governance that Woolf herself theorizes so carefully...in a time of war." Then he gives another bow in the direction of previous critics, while gently chiding us for not applying "four political and ethical theorists whose names are, with very few exceptions, noticeably absent from Woolf criticism." Avery then introduces us to Deleuze, Guattari, Mouffe and Laclau. So useful and yes, sensitive and constructive too. Joseph Kreutziger, in another section, applies Bachelard to Woolf in new and interesting ways.

I will not be able to discuss each of the papers posted here (there are 24 of them!) but let me assure you that they do all testify to Woolf's lasting and ever-changing legacy, to generational differences in and about her texts, and of course to the gender issues in and about her texts. I have just watched some video footage of Krystyna Colburn facilitating a post-panel conversation of lesbian approaches to Woolf, where every person in the room spoke -- a dream discussion too rare in academic conferences.

Papers here by Karyn Sproles and Karen Kaviola and others continue to improve upon the past work: "For despite the ground-breaking contributions collected in Eileen Barrett and Patricia Cramer's 1997 book, Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings," the debate must continue "sometimes informed by generational differences but that are just as often intra-generational."

Not surprisingly, the last section of these Selected Papers is devoted to pedagogy. Woolf scholars are without exception devoted teachers and we have never held a conference that does not take up the questions of how to teach Virginia Woolf. At Sonoma State, the focus was on the "across the generation gap," for example, Judith Johnston's "Grrls and Ezine Fiction: Teaching A Room of One's Own in American Universities today." As Karen Sproles said in her paper which treats pedagogy too (all these papers happily overlap, of course) "We have been taught well by Woolf; we must teach Woolf well. As scholars and teachers we are passing Woolf on to a new generation." Ruth Saxton has a paper published here and I understand that she will be chairing a pedagogy panel at Smith College in June, so the renewing work continues.

What you will not find here, amongst all these riches, however, are such special events from the Conference as the tour of our Reprographics facility on campus, which has printed every issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany since it began in the early 1970s. Although the photographs may stir our memories of the remarkable opening Roundtable, featuring such adorable notables as Awiakta, Jane Emery, Florence Howe, Herbert Marder, Karen Levenback, Stuart Clark standing in for Mark Hussey, Vara Neverow (and Tillie
Olsen via video!), this event had to be seen and heard and laughed with and wept over. Talk about living history!

Shopping sprees with the run on Virginia Woolf beanie babies and the "Time Passes" wrist watches will not find a place on these seriously scholarly pages, nor, thanks be, the raucous singing of “For She's a Jolly Good Something Or Other” at the Banquet. The "proceedings" at the late night "cookies and milk" sessions had best be kept "off the record," but I am sorry that there is no way yet to convey to the electronic audience the new workshop approach to "Works in Progress," which was chaired and cheered on by Beth Daugherty. Here for the first time beginning scholars got to meet with much published ones to talk over ideas for essays, books, future conference papers, etc. Let's hope that this helpful and collegial feature becomes a regular part of our gatherings.

Fortunately, Paul Sarran and his hard-working video crew did get many of the extracurricular events on tape, along with the panels and in-depth interviews with such luminaries as Awikata and Suzanne Bellamy, as well as with community people in attendance and some of the devoted volunteer staff, in their snazzy "Woolf Camp" t-shirts. The over thirty hours of tapes (now, here are the real HOURS...) are being edited down, with input from yet another team of volunteers, to an affordable video which I will have available for sale at the upcoming Smith Conference; it can be ordered also directly from the film-maker, Paul Sarran at sarran@toast.net. New to Woolf conferences, Paul's learning curve was steep -- he says that what he wants to emphasize in this video is not just the scholarship but also the friendship so manifest. Is this the first time our conferences have been observed by a film maker? The full version will be archived in our library here at Sonoma State University in the media department. Paul also says that he can duplicate "raw material" for people interested in having a certain section, but I think most of us will be satisfied with the highlights version, an aide-memoire for those who were fortunate enough to be there and a better-than-nothing for those who could not be. See you at Smith College in June! J.J. Wilson, Sonoma State University.
The Obituarists` Verdicts “It is difficult to estimate what value posterity will put upon her work” *John O`London`s Weekly*, April 11, 1941

Sybil Oldfield.

The first generation attempt to evaluate the lasting achievement of Virginia Woolf`s work as a whole was published in (mostly anonymous) obituaries in April 1941. Those obituaries were the public counterparts of the private condolence letters written to Leonard Woolf and Vanessa Bell. Both the public and the private responses were written in the historical context of the very worst months of World War Two for Britain.

Portugal, Italy and Spain - as well as Germany - were all at that moment ruled by nationalist fascist dictatorships. Austria had already been (willingly) annexed by Nazi Germany before the war and now, by March 1941, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, Denmark, Belgium and France had recently been conquered by the Nazis and so were under the military rule of their occupiers and of the Gestapo. On March 24, 1941, Yugoslavia had been overrun and by March 26, Greece was under imminent threat. In the Blitzkrieg on Britain, 500 British civilians had recently been killed in just one night during the bombing of the ship-building centres Clydeside and Merseyside; and by the end of March it was revealed that 28,959 British civilians had so far been killed; and 40,166 seriously injured in Nazi bombing raids. For the whole of that month Hitler had been expected to mount the invasion of southern Britain.

But in addition to that frightening context of the current military and political world situation in which Britain stood alone – before Hitler turned East to invade Russia and before America joined in the fight after Pearl Harbor - there was yet another hostile context for the death of Virginia Woolf. That context was an aggressive moment in contemporary British cultural history in the days immediately before and after Virginia Woolf`s death, when the intelligentsia, meaning chiefly the writers and artists in her circle, were under attack in the Press and even in Parliament. The Ramsay Macdonaldite Lord Elton`s *Notebook in Wartime*, published early in 1941, contained a chapter “The Versailles of the Intellect” which bitterly berated British intellectuals - “we all know an intellectual when we meet one” - for having been “pacifists or shirkers” in World War One who then survived to mock “the [courage], unselfishness, discipline, endurance [of] the common man.” The *Times*` third editorial of Tuesday, March 25, 1941 `The Eclipse of the Highbrow`, praised Lord Elton`s “sane and lively little book.” It paraphrased his attack on the pacifism of Bloomsbury in World War One, referring to “those who had deliberately stood aside from the conflict” and alleged that, for the intellectuals who had therefore so luckily survived into the 1920s and 30s:

high endeavour was out of fashion. They preferred a hasty brilliance, which degenerated rapidly into a habitual clever triviality upon which, in turn, the more conscientious performers...laboured to graft a pedantic and deliberate obscurity or perversity. Arts were brought down to the level of esoteric parlour games.... In prose there were experiments in almost meaningless sound....Meanwhile the public grew first bewildered and then bored....The artists, even while sometimes declaring themselves communist despised the common man and he retaliated... That age is past, though some of its ghosts yet walk... The young artists of the future are being trained on the battlefield of Britain... at least [this war] can hardly give rise to arts...
unintelligible outside a Bloomsbury drawing-room and completely at variance with those stoic virtues [endurance, unselfishness, discipline] which the whole nation is now called upon to practise.

We should note the key words – “degenerated,” “triviality,” “obscurity,” “perversity,” “meaningless,” “unintelligible.” We are not a million miles away from the book-burners in Berlin of 1933 or the exhibition of “entartete Kunst” in Munich. So there we have it – the Bloomsbury writer defined as feeble pacifist, selfish, undisciplined, unintelligible, and so by implication unfit to fight the good fight that Britain now had on its hands. The Woolfs took The Times and Virginia Woolf almost certainly would have read that contemptuous, hostile editorial on March 25, three days before her death, as well as the blistering answers to it, by Kenneth Clark - Director of the National Gallery - and by the poet Stephen Spender, editor of Horizon, who defended the poets and the artists of the day, on March 27. Spender actually counter-attacked, saying that The Times leader was worthy of the Nazis’ Voelkischer Beobachter and reminding The Times that many of those whom it now accused of “playing parlour games” had actually been prophetic anti-fascists at a time when both Lord Elton and The Times itself had advocated Appeasement.[1] Clark and Spender in their turn were fiercely attacked in later Times correspondence columns still always under the heading “The Eclipse of the Highbrow.” And on April 4, The Guardian, the Church of England’s weekly newspaper, backed Lord Elton and The Times leader thus:

Writers and artists [before World War Two] made their aim the development of stylistic theories which only appealed to a small clique. The result was a reaction against those ordinary virtues to which the nation owed its life....Books were written which to the uninitiated at least conveyed no meaning...The root of the evil was the decay of social responsibility in the pursuit of art as an end divorced from life.

But that was not all. On Tuesday, April 1, 1941, the House of Commons narrowly rejected by 144 to 136 votes, a proposal that theatres should be allowed to open on Sundays - if local licensing authorities in any area populated by large numbers of troops or war-workers thought this desirable. During the Parliamentary Debate on that issue, Philip Magnay, a National Labour M.P, (i.e. a national socialist) declared in the House of Commons that during the last ten years or so:

All the things that were sweet and reasonable and clean and Christian had been more and more jeered at and flouted... The springs of literature had been befouled.... Things were coming to a dreadful pass for anyone who had spiritual vision and could read the signs of the times ... All this technique of sapping and mining the morale of our people which had gone on for years was Fifth Column work.

Intellectuals, in other words were no longer to be seen as mere feeble, out-of-touch aesthetes and war-shirkers, they were actually the traitors within. That speech was reported in The Times on April 2. On April 3 The Times announced Virginia Woolf’s “presumed death,” i.e. suicide. It was bad timing. The obituary writers would now either have actively to champion Virginia Woolf in a hostile political and cultural climate or else agree that her death was corroborative evidence that the modernist writer was elitist and self-absorbed, unable and unfit to participate in the struggle that Britain was then having to wage on her own.
Philip Jordan in the radical News Chronicle on April 4 leapt indignantly to Virginia Woolf’s defense against The Times leader writer and Philip Magnay M.P:

Tragic as is Virginia Woolf’s death for us, we can be glad for her sake that she did not live long enough to read the nonsense that Magnay talked. As one of the minds that have enriched the art and literature of the last decade or so – perhaps she did more to raise the standard of English literature than any of her contemporaries except Joyce and E.M. Forster – her beautiful serenity would have been deeply shocked by such ignorance so proudly displayed. That is war in a nutshell; it exalts a Magnay and becomes too hard for a Virginia Woolf.

Incidentally, one can see here that even a devoted admirer believed she could not cope with the war, seeing that as the sole cause of her suicide.

It is significant that the word used over and over again to sum up Virginia Woolf’s work in the first obituaries in the serious newspapers was “baffling.” The Times said of Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando and The Waves that they “are sometimes baffling to minds less agile than hers.” The Manchester Guardian wrote: “That she was a remote person and difficult to meet might be derived from some of her novels, in which the subtlety of her mind at play among the mental processes of others might baffle the common reader.” But it did go on to praise “her belief in free and equal and civilised living.” And Basil de Selincourt in The Observer wrote: “the reading of her novels can be a strenuous exercise,...The greatest of them, The Waves most of us must be content to wonder at; we can hardly hope to comprehend it. But however we may be baffled by her works, we have never been offended.” -i.e. she did not do any “befouling”. The Birmingham Post, referring to The Years, Three Guineas and the biography of Roger Fry, said “Mrs. Virginia Woolf did not spare herself ... nor her readers. Her writing was charged with being “obscure,” “difficult,” “highbrow,” “conscious.” The qualities of her novels are not likely to gain them an increase of popularity outside the age that produced them.” Similarly “A Bookman’s Diary” in John O’London’s Weekly, April 11, 1941, while acknowledging Virginia Woolf to be “the most distinguished woman writer of her generation” and singling out Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse as deserving “a permanent place in literature,” also hedged its bets in the sentence I have taken for my sub-title: “It is difficult to estimate what value posterity will put upon her work.” As for Time Magazine, April 14, 1941, “her stream of consciousness novels, Jacob’s Room, To the Lighthouse ... to some readers ... didn’t always make sense, but they made her name and parts of them almost made music.”

Before we rush to mock these condescending or frankly puzzled judgements, I think we should acknowledge that it must have been more difficult to have been a first generation appreciative reader of Virginia Woolf in the 1920s and 1930s than it has been for us coming to her later, with our expectations already fixed on a hoped-for illumination of the vie interieure. That sense of puzzlement was enacted most clearly in the fact that several papers published not just one obituary but two contrasting responses to Virginia Woolf’s death either on the same or on the next day. For example The New York Post headline on April 3 was “Virginia Woolf’s Last Story: Suicide Closes Life of Frustration.” There Laurence Greene quotes with approval an earlier judgement by Lewis Gannett: “she achieves a half-illumination, then acknowledges failure.” The next day, however, a much more sympathetic paragraph appeared in The New York Post. It agreed that the war had been too much for
Virginia Woolf but it also insisted that she was an immortal – she was “representative of modern English intellectualism at its best... England’s finest mind and aspiration.... a great and beloved woman whose writings will be read by discriminating followers for generations to come.” Similarly The Manchester Guardian printed two different reactions to her work and death and so, even more startlingly, did The Times Literary Supplement on April 12. I would like to look at that last example in more detail because I think it perfectly exemplifies the split response to Virginia Woolf in 1941 and the nature of the hostility to her as well as the insights of a true appreciator. The Times Literary Supplement’s chosen anonymous obituarist clearly belonged to the Lord Elton/Times leader-writer/ Magnay school. Writing under the heading “End of an Epoch,” he describes that epoch as “one of the strangest in our annals” and he spends most of his time disapproving of “Bloomsbury.” While granting Mrs. Woolf “sensitive apprehensions of life” and her “heroic integrity in pursuing the Heracleitian vision of a fleeting universe” he goes on:

But even Mrs. Woolf’s work itself, probing and intellectually self-conscious, stands for something which sprang from the disorder of society during the past twenty years and is passing now that that disorder has crashed the world into disaster. Her characters [he does not name any] tend to be victims merely, intelligent, sceptical – and adrift. Adrift! In certain loud but unrepresentative circles during the peace that was no peace[,] traditions in social life, in religion, in morals, in literature, broke their moorings; and nowhere did the dislocation find more noticeable expression than in “Bloomsbury.”

The obituarist then spends his long next paragraph attacking the bogey of Bloomsbury; he begins by holding Virginia Woolf guilty by association:

There were some writers, Mrs. Woolf sometimes, [he does not say precisely where] whose artistic sensitiveness was alert to the drift, but who reported its surface processes not in anger or alarm, but in an aloof irony, or in amused or sad acceptance, as if the inevitable destiny of lost mankind was nothingness.

It seems clear to me that Virginia Woolf is being condemned here for the nihilistic sins of Lytton Strachey. The obituarist ends with an implicit, critical reference to her suicide:

Faced by the shocking reality of war, few human beings can continue to show interest in self-torture. Readers are turning to the writers who could be original without casting away tradition, free while submitting to eternal laws, and aware that prose and poetry lose heart when life loses heart.

It will have been noticed that this obituarist does not mention a single example of Virginia Woolf’s work. Who was he? He was a Philip Tomlinson, whose stated reviewing expertise included, as well as the very general “literature in translation,” "Australian biography, the Himalayas, Native Americans, the Prince of Wales [Edward V11I], and Polar exploration.” Not, one might have thought, the most appropriate first choice of the Times Literary Supplement for an obituary on Virginia Woolf. Tomlinson had not in fact been asked to review anything for the TLS since 1927 when he had written on The Prince of Wales’ Travels Around the Empire in 1926. Without altogether resorting to conspiracy theory, I do suspect that Tomlinson was picked as a known conservative enemy of Bloomsbury by
someone at The Times office who wanted to exploit the opportunity to put the boot in once more against that sort of “highbrow.” David Cecil actually wrote in protest against that obituary in a letter to the next week’s TLS; he denied that the effect of Virginia Woolf’s work was “disheartening.”

It is true that she presents life as an unsolved mystery: but no writer has ever shown a more vivid appreciation of its beauty and fascination....Myself, in these last anxious years, I have found her, of all contemporary authors, by far the most strengthening to the spirit.

But someone else at the TLS had already on April 12, the same date as the Tomlinson obituary, clearly thought Tomlinson was not adequate and so they also published in the same issue a few pages later an anonymous, quite marvellous, “Epitaph on Virginia Woolf - Interpreter of the Age between the Wars; The Vision and the Pursuit.” The writer of that “Epitaph” we now know was Orlo Williams - Orlando Cyprian Williams to give his full name. Williams was an extraordinary all-rounder of a man, the most civilized of polymaths. A champion boxer and fencer at Eton and Balliol, awarded the Military Cross in the First World War, Clerk to the House of Commons for forty years, he too might not seem to have been an obvious first choice for the appreciation of Virginia Woolf. However, Orlo Williams was also able to read French, Italian, German, Latin, Swedish, Danish and Dutch; he had translated several Italian novels into English, written books on The Essay, on Great English Novels, and on Charles Lamb and his reviewing expertise covered “English history; literature; memoirs; education...; Parliament;” and “general subjects.” More significant still, he had actually already published several perceptive and admiring Criterion and TLS reviews of Virginia Woolf`s work.

Forget Orlo Williams` boxing. Listen to his “Epitaph”:

... the work of Virginia Woolf... is part of us and of our day - of our tormented day. [Although we cannot foretell the taste of the future common reader] All that is certain is that, whenever the English narrative prose of the early twentieth century is brought up for critical judgement, the name of this writer will be mentioned with high honour.

It may well be that the common reader of our own day has not sufficiently appreciated her work, that he found it difficult, confusing “above his head”, some might even have called it weird. For this one must blame, among other things, a want of patience and even of intelligence. ...in [Virginia Woolf`s own] mental processes there was nothing hazy.

Orlo Williams then instances her admirable essays on books and writers in The Common Reader and

the two brilliant pamphlets which she wrote for the furtherance of women`s influence - which she considered too small - in the affairs of the world. A Room of One`s Own dwells on the independence of women, its necessity, its laws and its duties; Three Guineas was an effort, forlorn but powerful, to enlist women in a “Society of Outsiders”, rebels against the man-made world of conflicting loyalties.
and resultant war. Every sentence in those books is clear, every argument cogent, the wit like crystal, the passion like bare flame...It would be absurd to suppose that a mind so capable of lucid argument changed its nature when a novel was toward, wrapping itself in many vapours or trotting out whimsies of an overwrought nervous temperament. Virginia Woolf hated many things - cruelty, tyranny, materialism, acceptance of the second-best, smugness, and vulgarity, but she hated whimsies also simply because they are false things, while her quest was the ever-elusive truth.

Williams does not just stop with those ringing assertions. He goes on to give quite exemplary quotations from Virginia Woolf herself, picking out her “Notes on an Elizabethan Play,” her great essay on “Modern Fiction” - “Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day ....Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically aranged: life is a luminous halo.” He quotes her on an infinitely meaningful moment in a Jane Austen novel; he quotes Bernard on a similar such moment in the Hampton Court section of The Waves; he quotes Lily Briscoe -

The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; .. Mrs. Ramsay saying, “Life stand still here”; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent.

And he ends with Bernard’s “Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death.”

Now that is something like. And totally unlike Philip Tomlinson. What Orlo Williams has done, in fact, is allow Virginia Woolf to write her own Epitaph, to speak from the grave immediately after her death, as he believed she would go on speaking to us across the generations if only we had ears to listen. But how extraordinary to have two such conflicting obituaries on the same person on the same day in the same TLS.

Also on April 12 came another anonymous championing of her - this time from Lady Rhondda, in her editorial for her feminist weekly Time and Tide. Lady Rhondda had written to Virginia Woolf in May and June 1938 thanking her for Three Guineas, and Virginia Woolf had replied “Your letter has given me great pleasure all day.... I’m very glad that you call yourself an outsider - the first to take the name!” (Letters 6, 229, 236-7). In her obituary, Lady Rhondda insists that though Virginia Woolf’s “tragic disappearance” - for her body had not yet been found -

has shocked the world, ..like all great artists, she was a channel for the flow of life.... Far as her experiments led her, she never lost sight of her human responsibility as... to communicate with her fellow creatures, never allowed herself to stray off arrogantly into a private world, never willingly left her meaning obscure. It was indeed important to her that it should not be obscure, for in her own manner she had a message to deliver, a call to sound. She was a champion of human liberty, of the right of individual men and women to serve truth in freedom....When freedom has again been won she will not be here to see it. She has gone away, but we are not left without a rich and imperishable legacy.
Two other early women’s appreciations of Virginia Woolf may be inserted here. Also in Time and Tide, but a little later, July 19, 1941, Theodora Bosanquet wrote a profoundly appreciative review of Between the Acts, declaring it to be not despondent but triumphant –

Yes, surely Mrs. Woolf’s affirmation is clear. We are all enlisted... All the characters are judged ...by their capacity for receiving and giving life. The men, as usual, are less capable than the women. The men are reasonable and licentious. The men wonder why the army is left out of the nineteenth century.. And Civilization? Lost, doomed, crashing, it would seem. But midnight is near. The next Day of Creation is almost at its first hour.

I should point out, incidentally, that another essay is needed in which to do justice to the significance of the first critical reception of Between the Acts, which, in many cases, took the form of a late obituary and/ or summing up of the writer’s view of Virginia Woolf’s whole work – for example the reviews of Between the Acts by Edwin Muir, Joan Bennett, and B.G. Brooks. One other example of a sympathetic woman’s obituary is by the unknown - to me at least- Margaret J. Baker in The Adelphi, May, 1941: She recalls how she had felt as a London schoolgirl in the thirties when she first discovered The Waves and then all the other novels:

For the first time someone was explaining exactly what went on inside a woman’s brain and it was not the conventional thoughts of love and hate and jealousy which she described, but the fleeting half-expressed thoughts that run through a million women’s brains when they brush their hair or wash up the breakfast things. At last the quietness of their faces, ... the agony of their feelings in a world which they, the creators, see ruled by destruction, was partly expressed....

I have singled out these, mainly anonymous, obituaries partly because they could be taken as the verdicts of, very different, “common readers.” There were also many other signed obituaries and memories of Virginia Woolf written by her known friends - and which could therefore be all too easily discounted by those who were hostile to her, and to “Bloomsbury”. Her friend Rose Macaulay for example in The Spectator April 11, 1941, felt she had to address the current attacks in the British press on the “highbrow” and on “Bloomsbury” to which I referred earlier:

Was she a “highbrow” of the breed that we have been told lately is in deserved eclipse? If she was (and really what can this mean except cultured, scholarly, fastidious and fine in mind?) she is a living answer to that philistine nonsense,...People, she said, talked so much nonsense about “Bloomsbury”. She chanced to live in Bloomsbury,... but she regarded herself, as she regarded others, as an individual, never as a type.

Stephen Spender, who had so robustly defended the contemporary “highbrow” writer in his letter to The Times, March 27th, was surprisingly luke-warm in his “Tribute” to Virginia Woolf in The Listener, April 10, 1941. While admitting her triumphant achievement, he refers so frequently to her “weakness,” “misfortune,” “many difficulties,” “ill-health” and then to her “somewhat narrow and limited” material, her “defects,” her “too great sensitivity,” and “unco-ordinated impressions,” that one begins to wonder whose side he is on and whether
he, as an ex-Marxist felt alienated by her feminism and, as a young poet by her earlier Letter to a Young Poet - partly aimed at himself? David Garnett, in The New Statesman, April 12, 1941, having rhapsodised about her looks, stressed what he perceived as essential sexual difference in Virginia Woolf - “one of the few great women writers and perhaps the most original and least like a man of them all.” David Cecil, in Time and Tide, May 17, 1941 for all his earlier championing of her in the TLS against Philip Tomlinson’s accusation that her effect was “disheartening.” now writes:

Necessarily her vision entails limitations. So strict a concentration on the aesthetic aspects of life involves a detachment of spirit. Emotionally there is a sort of ethereal coldness about Virginia Woolf’s work. ...[her characters] seem a little lacking in heart. And also in soul: ... And now war has killed her.

“Thanks very much,” she might have responded, “save me from my friends.” Several more memoir/notices were written on Virginia Woolf by her friends in the May and June numbers of Horizon – by T. S. Eliot, Rose Macaulay once more, Vita Sackville West, William Plomer, Duncan Grant and Hugh Walpole. Almost all of them focussed on personal memories of her. Vita Sackville West tried to distinguish between the unique, genuine, supremely gifted woman whom she had known and the guyed “Queen of Bloomsbury,” -”Queen of the Highbrows” in Arnold Bennett`s coinage – who had been attacked by association in the alleged “Eclipse of the Highbrow” in The Times. T. S Eliot’s offering in Horizon I found extraordinarily frigid and pompous. He too refers, obliquely to the contemporary attack on Bloomsbury;

I am well aware that the literary-social importance which Virginia Woolf enjoyed, had its nucleus in a society which those people whose ideas about it were vague - ... were wont, not always disinterestedly perhaps, to deride. The sufficient answer... would probably be that it was the only one there was: ... It is no part of my purpose here either to defend, criticize or appraise elites; I only mention the matter in order to make the point that Virginia Woolf was the centre, not merely of an esoteric group, but of the literary life of London... With the death of Virginia Woolf, a whole pattern of Culture is broken.

Eliot himself was unhappy about what he had written. We have a letter in Monks House Papers, University of Sussex Special Collections, from him to Leonard Woolf in which he apologizes. “There is ..a kind of pomposity in the uncorrected text which is abhorrent.” Eliot had, apparently, tried to correct his essay in proof, making many subtle alterations – but it was the uncorrected version that was published in Horizon and we have no surviving text of his wished-for alterations. Eliot ends his letter to Leonard Woolf: “I had rather such a misfortune befel anything I wrote rather than this: and there is nothing to be done about it afterwards.” Feeling that strongly, why did he not insist on publishing his corrected version somewhere else later?

On April 20 it was reported that Virginia Woolf’s body had been found and on April 21 in The Manchester Guardian and on April 23 in The Sunday Times there were reports of the Coroner’s Inquest. The Sunday Times’ bye-line was: “’Cannot Go On Any Longer’ Virginia Woolf’s Last Message.” Virginia Woolf was then, alas, misquoted in both papers as having written “I have the feeling that I shall go mad and cannot go on any longer in these terrible
times.” Naturally this sounded as though she was a weak defeatist, copping out of Britain`s crucial struggle against Hitler – the very “Battle of Britain.” She was duly attacked for her defeatism in next week`s Sunday Times by a letter from a Mrs. Hicks, wife of the Bishop of Lincoln, “where shall we all be if we listen to and sympathise with this sort of ‘I cannot carry on’?” Although Leonard wrote to The Sunday Times what should have been the definitive rebuttal the following week, on May 4, 1941 - giving Virginia Woolf’s actual words: “I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can`t go through another of those terrible times. [my emphasis] And I shan`t recover this time,” it was still published under the heading “I cannot carry on” and from that day to this the crucial mis-rendering of “these terrible times” - implying the war - instead of “those terrible times” - referring to her past mental breakdowns - has persisted. Time Magazine repeated the misquotation on May 5, 1941. And unbelievably even the magisterial recent biography by Hermione Lee perpetuates the fatal error. Naturally all those who wanted to see Virginia Woolf as a feeble aesthete, bad for the country’s morale in wartime, now had new ammunition. H. E. Bates wished people had stopped taking her seriously – “one salutary raspberry of honest derision would have been salutary” -Quaritch`s Books of the Month, April-May 1941; Frank Swinnerton accused her of having had “almost no practical experience of life. She was like somebody bedridden in a house in the country, ... incapable of more than subtle guesswork about her own species”-Observer, July 20, 1941. And Herbert Muller, in “The Illusion Fades” in A scant, 2, Winter 1942, after repeating the misquotation “these terrible times,” viciously attacked the characters in Between the Acts for nowhere representing “the gallantry, fortitude, and unpretentious heroism exhibited in the nation`s response to a leader who promised only blood, sweat, toil and tears.” Virginia Woolf should not have been Virginia Woolf - but Winston Churchill.

Conclusion.

I have ended as I began by stressing that Virginia Woolf`s suicide - and therefore the British obituaries written in response - coincided with the most desperate, crucial weeks of the whole of the Second World War for Britain. Moreover her death also coincided with the precise weeks in which an attack on the “Highbrow,” on Bloomsbury and on the whole intelligentsia as constituting a Fifth Column had been mounted in The Times and voiced in the House of Commons. Unsympathetic obituary writers, both left wing and right wing - for instance Philip Tomlinson in The TLS -took the opportunity of her suicide to arraign Virginia Woolf and reinforce the public`s image of her as a cold, remote, “baffling” artist, divorced from common humanity who finally escaped into death from the common task of the struggle against Nazi world domination. And their attacks, based, as I believe, on a total mis-reading of Virginia Woolf`s work, were given re-inforcement by the wretched, widely distributed mis-quotation of her final letter. Other obituarists did leap to her defence, notably Philip Jordan in The News Chronicle. Some of these defenders included several personal friends - Rose Macaulay, Vita Sackville West, Duncan Grant - whom the general public might have felt were too close to her to give an objective account; other friends - David Cecil, Stephen Spender, T.S. Eliot - I found surprisingly lukewarm, taking away with their right hand what they gave with their left, feeling apparently unable to commit themselves as yet about Virginia Woolf`s eventual place in literature. And I think this also holds for E.M.Forster`s Rede Lecture which was not strictly an obituary. In fairness, we must remember that the obituarists did not know what we know - they had not yet been able to read Between The Acts, nor the Complete Essays, let alone the complete Diaries and the collected Letters, all of which support our own conviction of Virginia Woolf`s greatness.
Moreover the grimmest weeks of World War Two hardly constituted the right historical moment for a just appreciation of the lasting insights of Virginia Woolf’s pacifism in Three Guineas. And that same fortuitous, historical “bad timing” also, of course, contributed to the baseless accusation against her of a lack of common, strongly felt humanity. Nevertheless, there were some splendid obituary offerings – Margaret L. Baker, Lady Rhondda, and, above all, Orlando Williams, I think, stand out. Would we have spoken up for her as well at that time?

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Over the past couple of decades, writers on Woolf have detailed with increasing precision the ways that, in both her fiction and non-fiction, Woolf critiques such systems of social management and domination as patriarchy, militarism, capitalism, and religion. Efforts to tease out the nuances of these critiques have taken a variety of forms; the work of understanding Woolf’s seismographic sensitivity in such matters has been itself marked by a similar critical sensitivity, generating a critical heritage whose richness is arguably unparalleled in the field of modernist studies. And yet, as we know—and as the variety of papers and creative presentations at this conference testifies—the mine that is Woolf’s life and work appears ever richer the more deeply we dig. This is certainly the case with respect to Woolf’s aesthetic as well as her theoretical engagements with English and European politics during the 1930s. But, given the large volume of critical work that addresses this aspect of Woolf’s thinking, it is perhaps strange that very little has been done to illuminate her politically constructive thinking in relation to more recent theories of democracy, the type of governance that Woolf herself theorizes so carefully in the political cauldron of the 1930s, in a time of war.

This is not to say that Woolf’s efforts to theorize a democratic mode of political life have been ignored completely. I think, for example, of Michael Tratner’s chapter on The Waves in Modernism and Mass Politics (1995) and Jessica Berman’s recent book, Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community (2001). Two collections of essays also represent important recent contributions to the study of Woolf’s politics: those edited by Wayne Chapman and Janet Manson (Women in the Milieu of Leonard and Virginia Woolf: Peace, Politics, and Education [1998]) and Merry Pawlowski (Virginia Woolf and Fascism: Resisting the Dictators’ Seduction [2001]). This is especially the case with feminist criticism. Toril Moi, for example, almost twenty years ago in Sexual/Textual Politics (1985) showed how Woolf in Three Guineas “shows an acute awareness of both liberal and radical feminism,” and that Woolf’s use of “mobile, pluralist viewpoints,” as Loretta Stec glosses it, “undermines the unitary point of view of ‘Man,’ the ‘seamlessly unified self’ at the heart of traditional, patriarchal humanism” (Stec, “Dystopian Modernism” 187-8). Pushing this observation further, Stec, like Hermione Lee and many others, writes that Woolf enlists this simultaneously formal and epistemological pluralism in the service of a “utopian discourse,” to deconstruct or at least to “defamiliarize the fascist, patriarchal, and militarist realities of the 1930s” (“Dystopian Modernism” 179).

Similarly, Jessica Berman shows how, in The Waves, Woolf’s utopian purpose resides in her envisioning of “a community that exists in fragmentation, that constantly is in the process of becoming, without ever resolving itself into a common being” (“Of Oceans” 115). Berman continues, in one of the most perceptive recent passages on the politics of The Waves, to speak of the politically constructive elements of the novel. “From a political perspective,” she writes:
The Waves may be seen as a novel about the possibility of community not only without charismatic leaders but also without any totalizing structure like that of state or nation. Woolf’s social vision here moves beyond simply criticizing either the notion of empire or the problem of leadership. Rather, in the positive interconnection of her community of characters she constructs an alternative model of social organization. (115)

I myself have argued that Three Guineas is dedicated equally to a pacifist critique of patriarchy and to the active creation of a new type of civilization based on a new type of ethical-aesthetic pedagogy, grounded in an ethical belief in the intrinsic, irreducible value of individuals’ lives and in an aesthetic devotion to the cultivation of beauty in everyday life—what Nigel Nicolson has called “the mysteries of the normal” (Avery 7; Nicolson 11).

These efforts to describe the nuances of social and political critique in which Woolf was engaged in the 1930s have been and continue to be important, if for no other reason than that they have placed Woolf irretrievably “beyond aestheticism” and have lodged her works firmly within a longer, more vibrant, and more ethically concerned tradition marked by a marriage of aesthetic experimentation and progressive social activism. Woolf was deeply preoccupied during the 1930s with questions about relations between individuals and masses, about the power relations that constitute individuals by inscribing them within social formations, and about ways to reenvision social relations outside of the violent and reductive tendencies of both fascism and liberalism and within a collectivist, cooperative framework in which “Justice and Equality and Liberty” (TG 102) may be had for all. However, in light of this preoccupation, perhaps because of our own understandable fixation on the critical elements of Woolf’s work, and despite all of the tremendously interesting recent historically focused work on Woolf’s political critiques, we have, I think, yet to develop a theoretical framework within which it may be possible adequately to address a simple but crucial question for a fuller understanding of the constructive dimension of Woolf’s political thinking. The question is this: What is the precise nature of Woolf’s positive contribution, during the 1930s, and more specifically, in The Waves and Three Guineas, to democratic political theory? To put it another way: What, within a framework of current democratic theory (some of which bears visible traces of Woolf’s thinking), is the nature of the “new words” and “new methods” for fostering “the great principles of Justice and Equality and Liberty” of which Woolf speaks with such eloquent passion in the closing sentences of Three Guineas? Or, to return to Jessica Berman’s diagnosis: What, with reference to current democratic theory, is the precise nature of “the positive interconnection of [Woolf’s] community of characters” in whom Woolf “constructs an alternative model of social organization” in The Waves? And what exactly is this “alternative model” anyway?

The poststructuralist political and ethical work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari is particularly relevant and useful in this context. Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, the book they co-authored in 1983, is described by Michel Foucault as an “Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life” (Anti-Oedipus xiii). Anti-Oedipus confronts “three adversaries” in, I think, much the same way, and to the same end (though in slightly more rebarbative prose), that Woolf confronts her own adversaries, and her enemies, in Three Guineas. From a “negative” or “critical” perspective, Deleuze and Guattari’s purpose is to combat, in the interests of the multiplication of political and emotional and aesthetic possibilities, three enemies of democracy. The first enemy is the “bureaucrats”—“those who would preserve the pure
order of politics and political discourse” (xii); the second enemy is the ranks of Oedipal
psychoanalysts—“the poor technicians of desire . . . who would subjugate the multiplicity of
desire to the twofold law of structure and lack” (xii-xiii); the third enemy to a relentlessly
contestatory, richly aesthetic democratic practice is, in a word, fascism—“And not only,” as
Foucault writes, “historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini . . . but also the
fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to
love power. . . . all varieties of fascism, from the enormous ones that surround and crush us
to the petty ones that constitute the tyrannical bitterness of our everyday lives” (Anti-Oedipus
xiv).

From a positive or constructive perspective, on the other hand, Deleuze and
Guattari’s aim is to “de-individualize” the liberal subject “by means of multiplication and
displacement, diverse combinations” (Anti-Oedipus xiv). This aim recalls Woolf’s plan for a
“new college” in Three Guineas. Its aim, she explains, “should be not to segregate and
specialize, but to combine. It should explore the ways in which mind and body can be made
to co-operate, discover what new combinations make good wholes in human life” (TG 34).

For Deleuze and Guattari, “The group must not be the organic bond uniting
hierarchized individuals”—a near quotation of Mussolini’s own description of fascism—”but
a constant generator of de-individualization” and a political space where “orphans,”
“atheists,” and “nomads” (Seem xxi)—the poststructuralist versions of Woolf’s “Outsiders”—
may generate new collective arrangements in struggles against entrenched power. So too for
Woolf in The Waves, the fragmentation of individual identity, the de-individualization of
individuals by means of the formation and negotiation of diverse combinations allows, as
Julie Wise puts it in the paper she read yesterday at this conference, “for a multiplication of
identity,” and is thus “a rapturous celebration of the outsider’s refusal to be reduced to a
single order. And perhaps,” she concludes, “through this celebration, this proliferation of
stories and meanings, runs the possibility of a more complicated and profound current of
political critique in the novel than has yet been noticed.”

The nature of this current, in both The Waves and Three Guineas, becomes more clear
when we combine the Deleuzian (or Deleuze-Guattarian) defense of de-individualization
with the democratic theory that the political philosopher Chantal Mouffe has been
developing, individually and in collaboration with Ernesto Laclau, over the past decade. If
the enemy to Deleuze and Guattari’s vision for new social combinations and greater social
equality is various types of despotism—of the market, of “Oedipal” psychoanalysis, of
fascism of all sorts—for Chantal Mouffe, the enemy to democracy is the unqualified
liberalism that, in theory and practice, mortgages equality and complexity to purchase the
dubious because “commonsensical” moral and social goods of unrestrained “freedom.”
Neo-liberalism secures this mortgage at a crippling rate of interest: namely, the sacrifice of
fully participatory citizenship and of collective as opposed to individualistic or theistic
conceptions of the good. In today’s time of war, as in the 1930s, the “commonsensical” idea
that “We fight to protect our freedom” masks, as Woolf was well aware, and as Mouffe
agrees, a wide array of rather unsavory ideological investments and patently unequal social
and political practices.

In Mouffe’s argument, in The Democratic Paradox (2000), that “Democratic individuals
can only be made possible by multiplying the institutions, the discourses, the forms of life
that foster identification with democratic values” (96), we hear, I think, more than a redaction of Deleuze and Guattari’s position, more also than a fading trace of Woolf’s plans for education reform and for reform of the professions. In Mouffe’s words, we also hear a distinct echo of Woolf’s plans for the Outsider’s Society, which works to help individuals escape the “hypnotic” effect of “the limelight which paralyses the free action of the human faculties and inhibits the human power to change and create new wholes much as a strong headlamp paralyses the little creatures who run out of the darkness into its beams” (TG 114). The Outsider’s Society also encourages a habit of vigilant critique as part of Woolf’s own project of “fost[ing] identification with democratic values” (Mouffe 96). This happens when women refuse to knit socks for soldiers (TG 116), when they absent themselves from religious services—or better, attend them “to inform themselves of the practice of that religion” and to “analys[e] the spiritual and intellectual value of sermons” (TG 113)—and when they disdain the “cup[s] and award[s]” publicly given for athletic accomplishment (TG 116).

Moreover, in Mouffe’s call for a model of democracy that, conceptually, involves an “agonistic” “struggle between adversaries”—as opposed to both an “antagonistic” struggle between enemies and the Kantian and later, Habermasian notion of deliberative democracy with its hopes for rational consensus between free-willing, autonomous individuals (Democratic 13)—it is hard not to hear the tone and substance of several passages in the letter in which Woolf answers her male correspondent’s question about how to prevent war. I am thinking especially of the concluding paragraphs of Three Guineas, where Woolf makes it clear that her stance toward her male friend is neither a hostile one (as one would adopt toward an enemy) nor exactly, despite her affinity for indifference, an “indifferent” one, nor one that grows out of a desire to achieve a consensus, a rational agreement about how to prevent war. Instead, Woolf models “agonism;” she places herself in what Mouffe describes as an “adversarial” relation with a man whom she considers a “legitimate opponent” (102).

This type of opponent, to paraphrase Mouffe, is “one with whom [Woolf] has some common ground because they have a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy: liberty and equality. But they disagree concerning the meaning and implementation of those principles” (Mouffe 102). “We are both determined,” Woolf tells her correspondent, “to do what we can to destroy the evil” represented by the photo of “Man himself”—of Tyrant or Dictator or Führer or Duce— “you by your methods, we by ours. And since we are different, our help must be different” (TG 143). Woolf’s disagreement with her correspondent regarding the implementation of their shared principles results in her decision to forge “new words . . . and new methods” (143) to achieve the immediate goal of preventing war, and the longer-lasting goal of wholesale democratic social transformation. Recognizing the dangers to women and men, and indeed to Justice and Equality and Liberty themselves, inherent to her correspondent’s evident wish for methodological consent—sign my manifesto, join my society, subscribe to it—Woolf takes this opportunity to theorize and also to enact an “adversarial” model of democratic action. She accepts, she tells her correspondent, that the aim of fighting fascism “is the same for us both” (TG 143). But in her continual references to the photographs documenting evil and in her mandate that Outsiders “maintain an attitude of complete indifference” (TG 107) and thereby demonstrate the active character of political passivity, Woolf constructs or at least adumbrates a practical means whereby, as Mouffe puts it, to “provide . . . channels through which collective passions will be given ways to express themselves over issues which, while
allowing enough possibility for identification, will not construct the opponent as an enemy but as an adversary” (Mouffe 103). Woolf combines these means with a clear recognition of the importance of harnessing individuals’ capacity for empathy—“the capacity of the human spirit to overflow boundaries and . . . dream . . . the dream of peace” (TG 143). In Woolf’s plan for the Outsider’s Society, then, as in Mouffe’s descriptions of “agonistic pluralism,” “radical democracy,” and elsewhere, “an ethics of dis-harmony,” “the prime task of democratic politics,” as Mouffe writes, “is not to eliminate passions from the sphere of the public, in order to render a rational consensus possible, but to mobilize those passions towards democratic designs” (Democratic 103). To refuse to sign the form that her male correspondent has sent, to insist repeatedly not only on women’s “difference” from even the best-willed of men but also on the necessity of preserving a structural position of difference, is finally to maintain that it is only through the “multiplication of institutions, discourses, and forms of life” (Mouffe, Democratic 96) that democratic individuals and democratic institutions will be possible.

Woolf’s theorization of democratic practice in The Waves and Three Guineas lends itself quite readily to categories that Deleuze and Guattari work through in Anti-Oedipus and that Chantal Mouffe develops in works from the co-authored Hegemony and Socialist Strategy to Dimensions of Radical Democracy, The Democratic Paradox, and such essays as “Which Ethics for Democracy?” and “Feminism, Citizenship, and Radical Democratic Politics”–none of which, incidentally, notices a connection with or a debt to Woolf. From this perspective, I realize that I may have made Woolf sound a bit like Deleuze and Guattari but especially Mouffe avant la lettre; I have wondered at moments whether I were discovering this “anticipation” merely through a very selective and too facile imposition of an easy theoretical template onto Woolf’s work. I don’t think that this is the case; I think that there are close similarities between the ways that Woolf and Mouffe engage with their adversaries and enemies, the specific concepts through which they do so, and last but not least, their respective political aims.

Loretta Stec has argued, in the Spring 2002 issue of the Virginia Woolf Miscellany, that the usefulness of Three Guineas today, in a post-September 11 world, lies in the ways that it models resistance to “commonsense responses to a complex political reality” (4). I agree fully. I think that Woolf helps us clearly to see the perhaps dictatorial, arguably quasi-fascist, and self-avowedly imperialist intent behind such “commonsensical” statements as the following: “Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack;” “America was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon for freedom . . . in the world;” and “We go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.” The list goes on: those sentences come from the address that President Bush broadcast on the night of the September 11 attacks. But I also think that in order to appreciate, as fully as possible, the politically constructive aspects of Three Guineas and The Waves and other of Woolf’s works, we could do worse than to examine those works through a theoretical lens that focuses our sights on the social practices and methods by which we may yet “overflow boundaries” of individualism and foster democratic community.
Woolf Re-Visits Wembley: Pre-War Bloomsbury Aesthetics and Interwar British Empire

by Mary Lou Emery

On May 29, 1924, Virginia and Leonard Woolf visited the British Empire Exhibition in the London suburb of Wembley. Woolf’s explicit response to the Exhibition appeared the next month in an essay titled "Thunder at Wembley." I will return to this essay later, but first I want to venture the argument that Woolf also responded to the Empire Exhibit indirectly, in her fiction, especially in To the Lighthouse and Between the Acts. In To the Lighthouse, Woolf revisits Wembley, or more specifically, the Official Guides to Wembley, incorporating and reframing their modernist and formalist aesthetic principles. In Between the Acts, she visits Wembley once again, this time to create an aesthetics unbound by formalist or imperial concerns.

To convey the significance to Woolf of the British Empire Exhibit and its Guides, I want to stress a larger cultural context between the wars in which they appeared. As John M. Mackenzie has shown, this context included a number of commercial and government enterprises, such as annual celebrations of Empire Day and the advertising campaigns of the Empire Marketing Board, all aimed to help the British re-imagine their identity as an imperial power following World War I. Displays of all kinds - film and slide lectures, plays and pageants, picture postcards, and posters, often by well-known artists - educated the British public in powerful visual terms about their citizenship in an imperial global "family."

Simultaneously, the aesthetics of Bloomsbury formalism and the influence of an international modernism in the visual arts were quickly infiltrating mass culture. No longer confined to gallery showings, modernist art appeared everywhere: in the expanding London Underground system and its newly renovated stations and in advertisements for everything from newspapers to winter sales, the British public encountered the styles of fauvism, cubism, and futurism, appreciated modernist techniques such as collage, and learned to experience pleasure in the formal composition of visual elements. Even Roger Fry, an early proponent of art as an imaginative realm separate from the real world, admired the advertising posters of E. McKnight Kauffer, admitting ironically "the...intelligence people can show in front of a poster which if it had been a picture in a gallery would have been roundly declared unintelligible" (qtd. in Saler 101).
However, as Michael Saler has noted, this commercial and civic oriented modernism emerged in opposition to the severe detachment from social and moral life that constituted a major tenet of Clive Bell's and Roger Fry's pre-war aesthetics.

In her essays, diaries, and fiction, Woolf participated in the interwar debates about the relationship between art and life. Though differing in their arguments about the influences motivating Woolf's ideas about art, a number of critics, including Diane Gillespie, Christopher Reed, and Jane Goldman, locate in Woolf's writing a departure from the early Bloomsbury distinction separating art from life experience. Increasingly, even if implicitly, Woolf's writing expressed the notion that art and life are, or should be, connected.

However, this is a complicated notion, with at least two sides, which I'll state perhaps simplistically here for the sake of argument. One places art within the material world as an expression of political or social conscience. Another connection places art at the service of an oppressive system - of fascism, global capitalism, or imperialism. While Fry may have been able, even if ironically, to approve the advertising posters of McKnight Kauffer, I wonder about the problems posed for Woolf when visual modernism converged with imperialist display as it did in the 1924 Empire Exhibit at Wembley.
The Exhibit centered on two themes: that of the imperial "family" and of education. Celebrated as a "Family Party of the British Empire," the 1924 Empire Exhibit was designed, more than any other before it, to combine entertainment with a "great educational opportunity" ("Foreword"). It aimed to teach the British public about each of the colonies, represented as "neighbors at Wembley," and about the Empire as a whole "in microcosm before our eyes" ("Foreword"). As an educational opportunity, it offered a new curriculum in imperial ideology that developed out of a shift, taking place between the wars, in the rhetoric of empire. The new rhetoric downplayed invasion, conquest, and governance to emphasize communication, trade, and education; it muted military domination in favor of aesthetic appreciation. The education offered the British public by the Wembley Exhibit thus included visual information about goods, commerce, and geography.

Numerous large pavilions throughout the 220 acres of the Exhibition displayed carefully arranged manufactured goods and handicrafts from the colonies. Enormous electrically animated maps propelled ships as moving lights from "port to port" across the seas. As in previous Empire Exhibits, these displays included reconstructed villages occupied by living colonized people engaged in supposedly typical daily activities, such as Jamaican women weaving "jippa jappa hats."
Designing the Exhibit to educate through visual display, the organizers did not want visitors wandering about with untutored eyes. The Guides taught them "The Wise Way to See Wembley," which was "with Empire Eyes," and to educate those eyes, they offered the lens of modernist visual aesthetics. Through principles formulated by Bloomsbury almost twenty years before, the Guides launched 27 million Wembley visitors on an entertaining tour of a miniature Empire, refiguring, along the way, ideologies of imperialism to suit the changed conditions of interwar Britain.

The anonymously authored British Empire Exhibition, 1924, Official Guide recommended to the visitor such modernist qualities as harmony, subordination of parts to a dynamic whole, and the lines of connection within the whole as ways of seeing particular buildings and their relationships within the Exhibition. For example in describing the Palace of Engineering, the Guide explains why it is so pleasing to the eye:

The explanation of the harmony that prevails is to be found in the fact that the fancies of individual exhibitors have been subordinated to the plan of the whole, agreed upon by a group of forty architects. The result is a triumph, and the wonder of construction and arrangement break gently upon the visitor instead of beating him flat with their noise, as is so often the case. (48)

The first thing we might note in this passage is the reference to a group of architects, whose collectively planned design overrides the "fancies" of individual exhibitors. Artistic form and the elements of design, on a grand, collective, and structural scale matter far more than the content of the exhibits. That a group came up with the "plan of the whole" recalls pre-war artistic activity in the form of groups: the London Group, Bloomsbury Group, Omega Workshops, the Vorticists, or the Camden Town Group, to name a few. We might also note the Guide's promotion of certain aesthetic qualities. In addition to its approval of subtle harmonies, the Guide in another passage approves of "the long, spacious, light avenues within the building," the "order of the whole," and the lack of "fussy detail" (48-49). While the emphasis on harmony and order in the description of the Palace of Engineering may recall classical rather than modernist aesthetics, we should remember that English theories of modernist art, including those of Roger Fry, developed from a deep appreciation of Renaissance classicism. As seen in the rejection of "fussy detail" and emphasis on the "satisfying arrangement" of parts within an ordered whole, the passage repeats the key terms of pre-war Bloomsbury aesthetics.
Scholars of Woolf and Bloomsbury are familiar with these terms, articulated by Bell and Fry between approximately 1909 and 1917 and often referred to as the doctrine of "significant form." Rather than imitating form, as Fry argued, modernist art "created form"; rather than imitating life, it found "an equivalent for life" (Fry, "French..." 167). Eschewing any realistic reference to a world outside the imagination, a true work of art was also exempt from moral responsibility (Bell 20; Fry, "Essay..." 15). It is interesting to note that the Official Guide to the British Empire Exhibit never attempts to persuade visitors that the miniature Empire they are touring resembles anything in the real world. It also suppresses any reference to the history of slavery, indentured labor, revolts, and mutinies in the colonies and any questions as to the morality of empire. Rather, it repeatedly stresses the patterns, lines of connection, and unities created by and within the representation itself. In stressing these elements of design, the Guide repeats Fry's insistence on order and unity of the whole (Fry, "Essay..." 22-23); it also echoes Bell's definition of significant form as "forms arranged and combined according to certain unknown and mysterious laws [that...] move us in a particular way" (16).

The aesthetics of significant form, especially the emphasis on arrangement of forms, lines of connection, and movement appear everywhere in the Exhibit and the language of the Guides. Perhaps most remarkable is the way that The British Empire Exhibition, 1924, Official Guide teaches visitors how to perceive the connections that shape the larger whole of the Exhibit. Facing the Guide's cover appears an ad for the Eastern Associated Telegraph Companies. It states that "Their Cables and their efficient Service are the connecting Links binding the whole World."

A list of telegraph stations unfolds to a three-page map of the world. Here we find a modification in the cartographic representation of the British Empire. Viewers accustomed to identifying areas of the world ruled by Britain through red or pink shading saw, again,
these areas colored in pink. However, the telegraph cables connecting them appeared in a much stronger red.4

The telegraphic lines of connection are thus most visually prominent and, signaled by their coloring in red, stand more significantly for the totality of the British Empire than the colonized lands that they connect. These connecting cables, displayed visually as marking and unifying the whole world, lead the way at the front of the Guide, providing a model for visual apprehension of the miniature Wembley empire. Thus, the ordinary English citizen learned to “see with Empire eyes” a world mapped by modern communications technology and perceived according to modernist visual aesthetics.

The significance of these cables, visually connecting large land masses in the period following the First World War, recalls the problem faced by Lily Briscoe as she attempts, after the war, to finish a painting that she started before the war began: “It was a question, she remembered, how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left” (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 53). Woolf positions Lily as an obscure woman artist who attempts, through her painting, to recreate social meaning after the war’s end. Facing the canvas, she returns to the pre-war aesthetics with which she struggled ten years earlier, seeking through them a resolution in keeping with the changes brought by the war. Woolf’s concerns, like those of the Wembley organizers, lay also with the post-war reconstruction of social meaning, but unlike the organizers, she was concerned with a counter-imperial potential in the arts. Nevertheless, we can see in Woolf’s novel the influence of the same modernist aesthetics also at work at Wembley.

In the final sections of To the Lighthouse, for example, Virginia Woolf, as author, takes on her character Lily Briscoe’s artistic project of connecting “this mass...with that” and creating a structured, dynamic whole. One way she does this is through an aesthetics of narrative simultaneity. The novel performs this simultaneity through parallel narratives that connect Lily’s inner journey towards an artistic vision with the voyage of Mr. Ramsay and his children to the lighthouse. The British Empire Exhibition, 1924, Official Guide also employed narrative simultaneity to represent the experience of visitors to Wembley. The Foreword to the Guide announced that, while visitors toured the exhibits on the "Never-Stop-Railway," "A Special Service Squadron of the Navy [was] now completing a tour of the
Empire." Visitors could thus imagine themselves on a parallel journey with this squadron, seeking along with the sailors "an equally great educational opportunity."

When Mr. Ramsay and his children complete their voyage to one land mass, and Lily Briscoe simultaneously completes her painting on another, the epiphanies they experience seem connected as if telegraphed across the distance separating them. On opening day, the British Empire Exhibit added to its enactment of simultaneous journeys and cabled connections with an actual telegraphic performance. The Exhibition formally opened on St. George's Day, April 23, 1924 with the King's unremarkable announcement "I declare this Exhibition open." The content, however, was only an excuse for the spectacular form in which the words were communicated. Not only was this the first time that the King had spoken to the British people by radio, his words were also "flashed around the world, received again at Wembley and borne in a white envelope by a telegraph boy to the King eighty seconds later" (Hewlett 176). Thus, the English language and the culture it represented literally encircled the world, dramatizing the near simultaneity possible in sending and receiving a telegraph message, and most importantly, re-claiming and unifying in a new way, for the British crown, the lands the message circumnavigated. As both sender and receiver, the British King managed to occupy two identities at once and, thus, to appropriate the multiple subjectivities of modernism in a dazzling display of modern communications. As in the modernist aesthetics of Fry and Bell, the power of Britain, as portrayed at Wembley, lay in its capacity for simultaneous movement and dynamic connections among the large masses of land that constituted the Empire.

In To the Lighthouse, Woolf couples these modernist aesthetics with imperial tropes central also to the discourses of the Empire Exhibit. She, too, creates an empire in domesticated microcosm, a little island empire that is also, as Hermione Lee notes, a "little island of the family" (473) and one with an imperial history. Woolf extends the metaphor of empire as family in comparisons between Mrs. Ramsay and Queen Victoria, a ruler who, like an earlier English Queen, sends her men, though belatedly, on a sea voyage, though in miniature. Finally, in portraying the dead "Queen" Mrs. Ramsay, Lily Briscoe insists on the formal values of shape, line, color, (Mrs. Ramsay becomes a "the shape of a dome" (51) and a "triangular purple shape" (52). Lily seeks especially the dynamic lines of connection among them, a quest fraught with the danger that "the unity of the whole might be broken" (53).

However, Woolf's reproduction of the modernist imperial discourses of Wembley and its Official Guide creates a counter-discursive dialogue with them, recognizing and questioning the uses to which the aesthetic theories of her Bloomsbury mentors had been adapted. In contrast to the flat instructions of the Guide, Woolf appropriates modernist aesthetics self-reflexively in the form of Lily Briscoe's continual meditations on her artistic design problems. While the Guide taught millions of visitors to see with "Empire eyes," Woolf's characters learn through insight to see differently. Rather than millions of people all seeing in one way, Woolf's individuals see from multiple perspectives: James realizes, on seeing the lighthouse, that "nothing was simply one thing," while Lily imagines seeing Mrs. Ramsay with "fifty pairs of eyes." The Guide engineered its empire vision under command of the various heads of state, board chairmen, and military officials who organized and built Wembley with the aid of its male architects and designers. In her essay "Thunder at Wembley," Woolf names specifically "Lord Stevenson, Lieutenant-General Sir Travers Clarke, and the Duke of Devonshire" (184). In place of this collective institutional agent of
masculine imperial vision, Woolf positions lone Lily Briscoe on the lawn of the Ramsay's house, a space subversively analogous to the suburban location of Wembley, on the lawn, so to speak, of London. Though Lily states at the novel's conclusion, "I have had my vision," readers sense that this "I" is also multiple, in this case, a composite female agent of creativity. It has borrowed intuitively from the inner life of Mrs. Ramsay where Lily has imagined "tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out, would teach one everything, but they would never be offered openly, never made public" (51). Lily's vision has also borrowed from that of the Scottish working woman, Mrs. McNab who, earlier in the novel, conjured the image of Mrs. Ramsay: "She could see her, as she came up the drive with the washing, stooping over her flowers... – she could see her with one of the children by her in the grey cloak" (136). Unmentioned anywhere in the Guide, labored thousands of similar workers, who built the pavilions, unloaded and arranged the goods, ran the transport systems, served food, entertained visitors, and cleaned up after them. Woolf not only mentions the workers in her novel, but positions them at its center, creating a formal dialogue between the "work" they perform and the "work of art" created at the novel's end. Finally, the family we perceive at the conclusion of the novel has lost all of its metaphorical trappings of empire – it includes a bereft and less tyrannical father, his former subjects educated by their own inner guides and, in place of the queenly mother, an unmarried, rebellious, unofficial daughter whose artistic vision encompasses a reality well beyond the little island empire of the past.

Woolf’s critical dialogue with the popular imperial modernism of Wembley continued in her writing of Between the Acts. Here, she re-visits Wembley and also her own essay, "Thunder at Wembley" to narrate a far more explicit and satirical response to the display of Empire. Highly visible at Wembley, but masked by their occupation as actors performing stereotyped images of themselves as "natives," were colonized people on display as, for example, the Jamaican weavers of "jippa jappa hats." While Woolf mentions in "Thunder at Wembley, "sacks of grain" and "mowing machines from Canada," she rejects the tourist gaze, never mentioning these human objects of the visitors' "empire eyes." Instead, Woolf dwells at length on the visitors themselves, whom she sees as uniformly middle-class, mediocre, and yet "beautiful...stately." Turning her gaze upon the British public, she finds in them a dignity that threatens to ruin the Exhibition for, watching them, "the rest of the show becomes insignificant" (185). Woolf makes this move again in Between the Acts, when not only the narrator's gaze turns toward the pageant's audience, but the audience is forced, in the last act, to see themselves through fragments of mirrors brought onto the stage by the actors. They must see, reflect on, and question themselves, rather than a projected image of their national identity. They must ask about the ideological project engaging them, as Woolf does in "Thunder at Wembley," "How, with all this dignity of their own, can they bring themselves to believe in that?" (185).

"Thunder at Wembley" forecasts also the forces of nature that continually interrupt the pageant of English history performed in Between the Acts. At Wembley, a thrush sings and the wind comes up:

The sky is livid, lurid, sulphurine. It is in violent commotion. It is whirling waterspouts of cloud into the air; of dust in the Exhibition. Dust swirls down the avenues, hisses and hurries like erected cobras round the corners. Pagodas are dissolving in dust. Ferro-concrete is fallible. Colonies are perishing and dispersing in spray of
inconceivable beauty and terror which some malignant power illuminates. Ash and violet are the colours of decay...The Empire is perishing; the bands are playing; the Exhibition is in ruins. For that is what comes of letting in the sky. (186-87)

Here we see color extended beyond the "iconographic feminism" Jane Goldman finds in Woolf's writing. In Woolf's reflections on Wembley, color marks social decay and the "violent commotion" of water and wind, destroyers of the "harmonious whole" of Wembley's palatial structures, now exposed as "fallible" "ferro-concrete." In "Thunder at Wembley," a false and perishing Empire cannot stand up to the actions of real human beings or of nature – the sky and the thrush – all metaphors for freedom. Similarly, in Between the Acts, the wind, the rain, swallows, cows bellowing, and the unpredictable actions of ordinary human beings intervene in the staged history of England and become part of the play itself.

Re-visiting Wembley, Woolf generated a critical dialogue with her mentors of a generation before and engaged interwar debates concerning the relationship between art and life. In counter-discursive dialogue with the Official Guides to the British Empire Exhibit, she asserted in To the Lighthouse a multiple way of seeing through a visionary female lineage. This lineage crossed generations and classes, creating an alternative to the trope of empire as family. And in her essay, "Thunder at Wembley," Woolf composed the prelude for her last novel's plea for creativity and freedom.
In this article, I am working with two versions of the Guide to the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. One was edited by G.C. Lawrence and contains the photographs of the Jamaican Pavilion reproduced in this article. The other is anonymously authored and contains the "Foreword" from which I quote and the map and advertisement reproduced in this article. Both Guides draw on modernist aesthetic principles in their descriptions of the Exhibit and their appeals to visitors.

These images are from E. McKnight Kauffer: A Designer and His Public by Mark Haworth-Booth. The are copyright and reproduced here courtesy of the Estate of E. McKnight Kauffer.

These images are from the Official Guide edited by G. C. Lawrence.

These images are from The British Empire Exhibition, 1924, Official Guide.

Janet Winston has analyzed Woolf's portrayal of Mrs. Ramsay as a figure for Queen Victoria in her article, "Something Out of Harmony: To the Lighthouse and the Subject(s) of Empire." Woolf Studies Annual, Volume Two (April 1996): 39-70.

In 1908, a poster for the London Underground advertised the charms of suburban living with a tranquil picture of a modest mock-Tudor villa surrounded by a cottage garden, and a quotation from Cowper’s “Sanctuary”:

‘Tis pleasant, through the loopholes of retreat... to see the stir Of the great Babel, and not feel the crowd. (Fox 178, 180)

The assumptions embodied in this poster --the combination of rural and urban, the association of nature with relaxation and tranquility, the promise of middle class access to nature’s bounty, even the equal companionship of the sexes -- represent a major shift in attitudes towards nature which is reflected in the place of gardens in Woolf’s life and work.

Gardens were – like everything in Woolf’s milieu -- freighted with cultural contexts which she took for granted but which we labor mightily to reconstruct. We all know and accept, as did the whole Stephen family -- the obvious therapeutic ideology: the romantic view of nature articulated by Cowper and the Underground poster that exposure to nature as controlled and ordered in a garden breeds tranquility and civility. But gardens and gardening were also class-markers; access to gardens was a class privilege, and, in addition, the public gardens of England have long histories which almost always involve ties to monarchy, empire, patriarchy, and capital.

This ambiguous view of gardens as sites of both tranquility and of political conflict is present from the beginning of Woolf’s life, embodied in the contrast between cramped city living and the liberating space of public parks and country gardens. Prescribed two daily walks in Kensington Gardens and therapeutic planting in the back yard of Hyde Park Gate, at the age of fifteen Virginia was already satirizing the pacific effects of exposure to gardens. In her early journals, she makes fun of her cataloguing of new spring flowers in Kensington Gardens, saying “I shall turn into a country clergyman” (Passionate Apprentice, 55). A couple of years later while spending a summer holiday in Huntingdonshire she similarly stereotypes “country life”: “I think a year or two of such gardens & green fields would infallibly sweeten & soothe one & simplify one” (Passionate Apprentice 137). As Louise De Salvo notes in her article on “Virignia Woolf at 15,” Woolf occasionally resented her mandatory garden excursions. Time in the gardens – four hours a day at first -- was, after all, time not spent reading, doing lessons or any other constructive intellectual work. In “A Sketch of the Past” Woolf emphasizes the monotonous “dullness [of] innumerable winter walks” (Sketch 76, 77).

On the other hand, 22 Hyde Park Gate was often a suffocatingly cramped space, psychically as well as physically; as Jean Moorcroft Wilson Woolf reminds us, it was a dark house on a narrow cul-de-sac, inhabited by 8 children, their parents, and a half dozen servants (Wilson, 18)— in the words of The Years, a house where “all those different people
had lived, boxed up together, telling lies” (TY 223). Woolf’s recorded memories of Kensington Gardens reveal that the gardens were not only a pacifying place of escape but also a gateway to a wider world, the archetype of that liberating “view of the open sky” (A R O O, 38) which so often reappears in her work. The gardens were a world of contact with people outside her class and family, people such as the old women who sold nuts and balloons at the gates to the gardens, the rough men and kind ladies who picked up lost watches and boats, and “the smooth-faced, pink cheeked woman in a grey cotton dress” who kept a sweet shop near Kensington Palace (Woolf, M O B 75, 77).

Echoing these early associations of gardens with sometimes tedious tranquility, as well as freedom, and the adventure of encountering other classes, in Woolf’s work gardens frequently appear as places for meditation and observation and/or as places where opposite and discordant entities can meet and mingle. One aspect of their role as sites of synthesis is their use as places of courtship. In Woolf’s first novel, The Voyage Out, the idea of the garden is used in a fairly conventional, symbolic manner as a site of civilized order as compared to the more fecund but dangerous chaos of the jungle. But the gardens of South America are ill-tended, straggly, etiolated just as the conventional values of the British colonials seem somehow inadequate or worn out. The Ambrose’s villa looks “frail, ramshackle, and absurdly frivolous, ... like a pagoda in a tea garden” (VO 97). In the villa’s garden “blades of grass with spaces of earth between them could be counted”; vases are cracked; flowers droop; the fountains are parched (VO 97). Susan and Arthur, who get engaged in a garden, survive to a deadly conventional marriage while Rachael and Terence, who leave behind the Hyde Park safety of their deck chairs (VO 309) to explore the jungle, wild with post-impressionist color, have their futures cut short by Rachael’s untimely and inexplicable death. The Voyage Out is a book about the failure to make the transition from Victorian to modern values. The old social forms of marriage are inadequate for the sense of autonomy and identity Rachael craves, but she is too inexperienced and too uneducated to manage to create the new value system she needs to survive. For her the only choices are the dying garden of Western Civilization or the unformed chaos of the foreign jungle.

For Katherine Hilbery, the protagonist of Woolf’s next novel, Night and Day, there is a liminal space in between the old conventional garden and the uncharted jungle. This space is Kew Gardens— as Ralph says, “the only... place to discuss things satisfactorily” (ND 302). It is in the broad green spaces of Kew with not a person in sight that Katherine first appreciates the scientific qualities of Ralph’s mind, recognizes him – despite their class differences -- as a soul mate because of his disinterested knowledge of botany. It is at Kew where the green of the grass and trees merges into the “blue distance” of the sky that they make their utopian pledge to “lay down terms for a friendship which should be perfectly sincere and perfectly straightforward” (ND 337)

This association of gardens with new social values and the mingling of classes is part of a long utopian tradition of city planning including, for example, the Fabian tract Cottage Plans and Common Sense, published in 1902 at the height of the Garden City movement (Fox 181, 183). Public park advocates saw garden spaces as a healthy alternative to taverns and dance halls as well as places where the different classes could “meet and learn from each other” (Conway 5). Woolf’s interest in park access for all classes is shown as early as Night and Day where Mrs. Seal, who derives so much sustenance from the sight of “bare boughs against the sky” during her lunches in Russell Square, feels she must give up her midday
pleasure because of the “injustice” of her privilege: “Why should I have a beautiful square all to myself, when poor women who need rest have nowhere at all to sit?” (ND 87). Her conclusion that “all squares should be open to every one,” radical in 1919, was still an issue in 1933, when Woolf (at the urging of Fabian Bernard Shaw) wrote a letter to The New Statesman supporting the opening of private London Squares to the public during summer months.

The novels and short stories Woolf wrote around the same time and immediately after Night and Day continue this thematic presentation of gardens. In “The Mark on the Wall” (1917) for instance, meditation on the peaceful, unified world of a lily pond is disturbed by the sudden thought of “Whitiker’s Table of Precedency” with its codified hierarchies. The story “Kew Gardens” (1919) of course has often been interpreted as an exercise in “binary oppositions” (McVicker 41): of human and natural, male and female, war and peace, past and future, youth and age; it is a mélange of classes, marital statuses, and species, all of which merge into one unified “green-blue vapour” which is in turn contrasted with the mechanical and hierarchical nest of Chinese boxes that is the surrounding city. Even Jacob’s Room, in which gardens figure only sporadically, presents a view of Hyde Park, described by Jacob in the penultimate chapter as “The height of civilization,” as a space where the strolling upper classes can mingle with the “lower classes” who lie “with their knees cocked, flat on their backs” as well as with sheep and small children (JR 147). And of course in Mrs. Dalloway gardens often are the links which connect moments of being – the past and the present as well as various characters. Clarissa first remembers Peter and his marriage proposal in the garden at Bourton as she is crossing through St. James Park, while Lucrezia takes her husband Septimus into Regent’s Park in hopes that the tranquil setting will calm him down. It is in Regent’s Park where Peter has his dream of “the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world” (MD 58) and where Septimus also dreams of being one with the earth and the dead soldiers it holds as “Red flowers grew through his flesh” (MD 68).

Although on the surface Woolf’s presentation of gardens fits a utopian tradition of retreat from both the stress and the class distinctions of the city, there are often undercurrents (as in these connections of Regent’s Park with Flanders fields) which problematize garden spaces and show how they too are implicated in the uses of power in British society. Kew Gardens is perhaps the best example of this. The interconnected issues of class and access were a problem at Kew from the moment it became public property in 1840. At first divided by a wire fence into the Pleasure Grounds (later the arboretum) and the Botanic Garden (housing the greenhouses and rarer specimens of plants), the botanical gardens were closed to all but students of botany and painters of flowers until 1:00 PM, except for certain local residents who had always had privileged access. Ironically, the Pleasure Grounds were only opened to the public on Thursdays and Sundays.

When the railroad was extended to Kew in 1869, a whole new class of Londoners sought admission As Ray Desmond puts it in his history of Kew:

No longer was [Kew] largely the resort of local people, the prosperous middle class, and earnest botanists and gardeners. It now rated as one of London’s most popular attractions for the poor of the East End. (Desmond 234)

The railroad also brought intensified development of local property as Richmond and Kew became the latest London suburbs. This produced what Sir Joseph Hooker, then Director of
Kew, called “a swarm of filthy children and women of the lowest class [who] invaded the Gardens” (Desmond 238). Hooker refused all petitions to extend opening hours for many years, mounting what the official guide to Kew now calls “a robust and successful defense against politicians and others who wanted to dilute Kew’s base as a scientific and educational institution and turn the Garden into a pleasure park” (5).

In what local residents saw as a gesture of defiance, he had an extra course of brick, three feet high, added onto the wall which bounded the east edge of the gardens. In 1877, the Kew Gardens Public Rights Defense Association was founded by citizens of Richmond and who not only wanted all sections of the gardens to be opened at 10:00 AM every day, but also wanted the brick wall along the East side of the gardens to be replaced with iron railings. By 1883, all they had achieved was an hour’s grace; the gardens were now opened at noon. Battles over opening hours went on for decades, with the Richmond Town Council repeatedly submitting petitions for early hours. Three years before the Woolfs moved to Richmond, in 1912, the hours were advanced to 10:00 AM for the summer months, and in 1921, while they were still living in Hogarth House, Kew was finally opened to the public at 10:00 AM on a daily basis (Desmond 305).

The defense of scientific privilege which kept Kew for fifty years was closely associated with Kew’s central position as what The Times of London called “the botanical clearing-house of the KING’s Dominions” (“Kew Bulletin” 9). We often forget that British Colonialism was in fact a vegetable empire. Not only a horticultural center-- the home of rare plants such as the extensive collections of orchids, succulents, and water lilies (not to mention the giant A morphophallus titanium whose flowering in 1889, 1901, and 1926 drew huge crowds), Kew was also an agricultural center. It was the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew that collected the seeds, determined the most profitable and productive species, and re-disseminated the cash crops such as sugar, rubber, coffee, tea, and cotton which replaced subsistence agriculture in British colonies and made them profitable to Europeans.

Kew’s reputation as a site of privilege and a nexus of empire interestingly intersects with some rather ambivalent feminist associations. To begin with, women had an unusually significant role as collectors and illustrators of rare plants at Kew as well as many other botanical collections. Marianne North, who after her father’s death traveled to Jamaica, Brazil, Japan, Java, Ceylon, India, and Africa to paint rare plants and in 1882 donated an entire gallery of her work to Kew Gardens, is a possible model for Miss Helena Parry in Mrs. Dalloway – a woman for whom mention of British colonies conjures memories of “mountain passes and herself carried on the backs of coolies . . . descending to uproot orchids . . . which she painted in water-colour” (MD 178). In addition, beginning in 1896, Kew began to hire women gardeners, although they were as underpaid and paternalistically treated as the male gardeners (labor disputes with workmen, who were considered apprentices not eligible for full pay or allowed to unionize, were constant at Kew).

But Kew’s most notorious connection with women came in February 1913 when the suffragists twice invaded the gardens. Reading The Times of London for the entire month, it is clear the attacks on Kew were part of series of deliberate skirmishes against empire and patriarchy. On February 1st a woman was arrested for “wilfully damaging a glass case containing the insignia of the Order of Merit in the Jewel Room of the Tower of London” (“Damage” 8). On February 10th there was “an organized outbreak of suffragist violence in Pall Mall” during which windows were broken at a number of prestigious men’s clubs.
including the Carlton, the Reform, and the Oxford and Cambridge Clubs ("Attacks" 6). On February 17th, The Times listed a dozen golf courses across the country whose greens had been despoiled over the weekend by suffragists who “scored” them with various tools and burned the grass “with vitrol which was so poured out as to leave upon the surface messages such as ‘Votes for Women’” ("More Golf" 8.)

On Saturday, February 8, Kew Gardens joined the list of suffragist targets. That night, several orchid houses were broken into; glass was smashed, and a number of plants were destroyed. This rated banner headlines in The Daily Express -- “Mad women raid Kew Gardens” -- and drew heated rhetoric from the Gardener’s Magazine: “An attack on plants is as cold and cruel as one upon domestic animals or those in captivity” (both quoted by Desmond 306). In less frantic tones, the Times presented an even more provocative analogy: “It is said that in one of the houses was found a piece of paper saying that orchids could be destroyed, but not woman’s honor,” evidence suggesting that some feminists saw the flowers as symbols of male power to collect and display the feminine (“Attack” 8). Perhaps not so ironically, this report in the Times was printed the same day as an extensive review of the Kew Bulletin which outlined the Garden’s “promotion of the economic interest of agriculture throughout the Empire” ("Kew Bulletin” 9).

The amount of publicity over the Kew orchid raid is perhaps what inspired a second, even more destructive sortie nearly two weeks later, when the tea pavilion at Kew was burned down by two “Voteless” women who left the note “Peace on earth and good will to men when women get the Vote” (Arson 6). Tea pavilions were apparently a favorite target of the suffragist arson campaign; according to the Times, the one in Regent’s Park had been destroyed a few weeks earlier. It took seven years, until 1920, for a new, permanent pavilion to be built. The garden’s administrators had always been resistant to serving refreshments on the grounds that it would encourage frivolous pleasure seekers (apparently serious horticulturists don’t need tea), and during the war they postponed all projects that did not aid the war effort; as proof of the seriousness of Kew’s mission, between 1914 and 1918 many of the purely decorative flower beds, including those in front of the Palm House, were dug up and planted with onions and potatoes.

All this history casts quite an interesting light on the presentation of Kew Gardens in Woolf’s work, confirming that the “critique of Empire” which Jeanette McVicker reads in the text of the short story had deep roots in contemporary events. The comparison of an aging South American villa with a tea pavilion in Night and Day becomes a more serious indictment of fraying privilege when one knows that such pavilions were being torched in the name of women’s rights. Ralph’s insistence on meeting at Kew and his and Katherine’s declaration of mutual independent friendship in the beech glade surrounded by paths angling off in different directions (ND 330) take on new resonance knowing that the garden had long been a battleground for the rights of women and the working classes. When Ralph’s moment of possessive jealousy with Katherine in the orchid house is followed by a vision of her independence from him (ND 332) it becomes a repudiation of colonial exploitation and an affirmation of the possibility of female autonomy, an affirmation not supported by Peter Walsh who decides to buy Clarissa Dalloway a bunch of roses rather than orchids (MD 115). Knowing that during the time that Woolf was writing “Kew Gardens,” at least some of the oval flower beds were planted not with heart-shaped flowers but with onions for the war, makes the old man’s references to war more literal, and his memories of Uruguay seem more
apropos considering Kew’s colonialisist roots. The sly look that the two lower middle class
women give this elderly patriarch takes on a new significance in light of the two women who
were arrested for setting fire to the tea pavilion, which is perhaps why no one ever seems to
actually find their way to tea in the story.

The silence which the story moves to in the end is a utopian fantasy – a fantasy of all
differences disappearing and melting together, of a Kew planted with flowers not onions, of
the marble columns carrying the heavy load of Western culture dissolving like butterflies, a
fantasy that the garden really is a loophole of retreat. But of course, in the end, the sound at
least of Babel does break through, an omnibus rather than a Beadle interrupting our reverie
to remind us that access to all turf is bounded and temporary.
Leonard's Vegetable Empire

The Garden at Monk's House:
Across the Generations

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Monk's House on The Street in Rodmell
Asters, Zinnas, Nasturtiums, Geum

Wallflowers, Daffodils, Polyanthus
1922—adding brickwork

Autumn Crocus
View East from the Terrace

1928 – The Terrace and Farmland
Hellebores, Muscari, Autumn Crocus

First Fish Pond, Wall, and
Additions
1929-30

- Fish Pond
- Terrace by Granary
- Curved Wall
- Greenhouse #1
- Hedges
- Sitting/Bedroom
- Front Wall and Gate

Hedges 1929
1932 - the Dew Pond

Brick Paths
1930
Miranda

1933 – side terrace wi lily pond
Stapelia (spiky milkweed) Citus (rock rose)

Dahlias, Carnations, Clematis
Attaching Greenhouses to the House

Enlarging the studio for Trekkie — 1948
Wood Iris
Generations, Legacies, and Imperialisms: The Greco-Turkish War and Jacob's Room

Nobuyoshi Ota

1

Let me begin my paper with some quotation from Jacob's Room. "Either we are men, or we are women.... Either we are young, or growing old.... In any case life is but a procession of shadows..." (JR 70). Here is a typical modernist expression of the moment in which the evanescent nature of reality and human life is presented by the narrator. Woolf as well as the narrator seems to assert that "It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done" (JR 154). Yet such modernist style or more properly postmodern writing does not merely derive from her feminist impulse. As the narrator's reflection "Either we are young, or growing old" clearly reveals, larger issues of generations are also raised.

In Jacob's Room Woolf represents such issues and geopolitical questions as something unrepresentable or an unseizable force: "They say that the novelists never catch it; that it goes hurtling through their nets and leaves them torn to ribbons. This, they say, is what we live by—this unseizable force" (JR 156). What is to be noted here is that such "unseizable force" is thematized in Jacob's abortive yet somehow adulterous relation with Sandra Williams in the narrative. "They were talking about Germany at the Durrants, and Jacob (driven by this unseizable force) walked rapidly down Hermes Street and ran straight into the Williamses" (JR 156). It is beyond the border of Britain, within the location of the Near East, especially Greece that Jacob's desire and his relation to the Other are embodied in concrete human figures. How do we understand this affair of Jacob's with an upper-class woman in middle life? What is the significance of Jacob's travel to Athens and perhaps to Constantinople, that is, the geographies of Jacob's Room extending beyond the finite and limited territories and properties of the British Empire? How do we read the representation of the unrepresentable force moving around the global space in which the limited borders of the Occident and the Orient, the Atlantic and the Pacific are crisscrossed and intersected as the space of various negotiations? To put it differently, I would like to re-read Woolf's texts in terms of generational differences, and such reading, I hope, discloses a trace of the global, geopolitical conditions of British imperialism after the First World War.

I would like to argue that Jacob's Room represents as its subtext the Greco-Turkish War. While I assume there is a structural relation between modern war or militarism and Woolf's modernist text, I find problematic the identification of war solely with the First World War. Such interpretation is misleading to the degree to which it suggests that the outbreak of war in 1914 initiates the end of power struggles between imperial states once and for all (Handley; Levenback; Philips). In Woolf's text the First World War is shaped and refigured in relation to different struggles over British imperialism, struggles in which the figures of Greco-Turkish conflicts structure and (over)determine issues of British imperialism.
It is certain that the First World War is central to Jacob’s Room, determining and organizing the story of Jacob Flanders’ life within a militarized society. And while the war robs Jacob of his body and voice for its own violent end, the relation between imperialism and modern male subject is critically analyzed and depicted from Woolf’s feminist viewpoint. Yet, the outbreak of war in 1914, in fact, does not mark the end of conflicts and antagonisms between imperial powers; rather, modern and total war initiates further struggle on a global scale beyond Western Europe.

This was exactly the case in the Near East. The Nation and The Athenaeum, for example, published on June 18, 1921 an article “No War with Turkey!,” reporting that

Incessant war for seven years has drained its life-blood, and trade has been interrupted over the greater part of it for most of this time ... all the energy of this people, without the aid of mechanical transport or developed industries, must be devoted to the war against the Greek invaders. The Greeks may not be suffering to the same extent, for they are not isolated, nor is the war fought on their soil. But they, too, are extensively mobilized, and the heavy fall of the drachma reveals the strain on their finances. The broad fact is that none of the peoples of the Near East has enjoyed more than brief intervals and samples of peace, since the first Balkan War of 1912. (423)

This article concludes by opposing Eleftherios Venizelos’s scheme for a “Greater Greece” and Britain’s support—“The minimum of intervention is the best to be hoped for, but the first step is to end the Greek invasion and to bring back peace”(424); however, making the fantastic demand that the whole of Western Asia Minor should be handed over to Greece, the British and Greek Prime Ministers attempted to obtain by force what they had failed to obtain in the treaty of Servia, a kind of Anglo-Greek hegemony of the Near East. The landing of the Greek army at Smyrna in 1919 was their idea, but it ended up with the Chanak crisis and Lloyd George’s resignation as Prime Minister.

Another article “Constantinople To-Day” in The Nation and The Athenaeum on April 22, 1922 added further details about Constantinople: “After the Armistice of October, 1918, Constantinople became a focus of intrigue and a dumping ground for the victims of successive defeats in Russia” (122). And if we continue to read more from the same article, it is clear that the Great War did not end in other parts of the globe outside Europe, that is, Central Asia, India and Northern Africa. “Mustapha Kemal Pasha is the chosen champion of Turkish Nationalism. Behind this man and his Government are not only Turks who resent the presence of Greeks at Smyrna, of Italians at Adalia, and of the French in Syria, but, in addition, a considerable number of Mohammedans in Central Asia, India and Northern Africa, most of whom are British subjects”(122). The never-ending calamity and oppression in the Greco-Turkish War could be said to result from British intervention.1

Now it’s time to return to Woolf’s text, especially the ending, in which the First World War is allegedly represented, and yet, we must pay attention to the mode of narrative presentation. It is true that the last and the penultimate chapters obliquely describe Jacob’s death in the Great War by metonymic images such as the sound of guns across the sea, Jacob’s empty room and his empty shoes. Perhaps we might add to this list the symbolic
“ram’s skull.” Nevertheless, it has not been sufficiently observed that the fatal and miserable death of British soldiers abroad, produced by modern war and militarism has, in fact, already been represented in Chapter 8. As Rose Shaw observes in her talk to Mr. Bowley, “life was wicked because a man called Jimmy refused to marry a woman called (if memory serves) Helen Aitken... And now Jimmy feeds crows in Flanders and Helen visits hospitals” (JR 95-96). Thus, the image of death in the ending is the repetition of this earlier scene in which the narrator prefigures Jacob’s end through the figure of dead Jimmy in Flanders, subtly contrasting it with Helen’s visiting hospitals. To use the terminology of narratology and its analysis of narrative (re)presentation, we can meaningfully distinguish two levels of the text, that is, the story and the plot, enabling us to explore their signifying relations. While the narrator constructs the plot of Jacob’s Room to close its ending with Jacob’s tragic fate, another death of a young British soldier is presented at the story level, making the text as a whole open to collective history beyond private life within the parochial national context.

Furthermore, Woolf does not merely allude to the death of English soldiers abroad on the battlefield of Europe. The unburied bones of the dead can be seen not only in Western Europe; the clerks in Whitehall including Jacob’s friend, Timothy Durrant, working on Admiralty wires communicated from around the globe, record and transcribe the various reports, one of them concerning “mustering the forces in the uplands of Albania where the hills are sand-coloured, and bones lie unburied” (JR 172). From the outset, the First World War not only signifies the military conflicts of imperial powers and their political relations, among others, the hegemonic British Empire and the emerging imperial power of Germany. Economic factors such as railway and oil business interests in the Near East and the market and finance in the Pacific region also play an important role in their struggle (Kent “Agent of Empire?”; Kent Oil and Empire; Jones). So, within the text of Jacob’s Room, when the Prime Minister with his 16 cabinet ministers decides the course of British foreign policy, they are “manfully determined, as their faces showed, to impose some coherency upon Rajahs and Kaisers and the muttering in bazaars, the secret gatherings, plainly visible in Whitehall, of kilted peasants in Albanian uplands; to control the course of events” (JR 171-72).

The connection between the battles and the geographical locations of the Near East, I urge, is most clearly represented in the very attempts of Jacob to transgress national boundaries between Greece and Turkey. First, Jacob’s re-thinking on the problem of the British Empire cannot be dissociated from the difference between Jacob’s generation and his father’s. “This gloom, this surrender to the dark waters which lap us about, is a modern invention. Perhaps, as Cruttendon said, we do not believe enough. Our fathers at any rate had something to demolish” (JR 137). In this passage, the oppressive forces of the gloom and “the dark waters which lap us about” embody themselves as Britain’s colonialism over the Irish, that is, the young English men’s anxiety for “giving Home Rule to Ireland” (JR139). Yet, Captain Barfoot has repeatedly told Jacob about politics in his childhood, the Irish question is linked to the question of a different colonial relation: “the Captain would sometimes talk, as the evening waned, about Ireland or India; and then Mrs. Flanders would fall musing about Morty, her brother, lost all these years—had the natives got him, was his ship sunk— would the Admiralty tell her?” (JR 91) The allusion to Morty, Jacob’s uncle, suggests a further link between two colonized nations and the Oriental world: “Was that true about your uncle becoming a Mohammedan?” asked Timmy Durrant. Jacob had told the story of his Uncle Morty in Durrant’s room the night before” (JR 38). Thus, the social difference of generations in Jacob’s Room functions to disclose and lay bare the racial
Rewriting the generational difference between fathers and sons as well as the
c conventional binary juxtaposition of two literary modes such as “Georgians” and
“Edwardians,” the text suggestively figures two different kinds of legacies to Jacob. In other
words, narrowly political and literary thematization of generational difference is refigured in
terms of economic property which is inherited between generations.

One is “possible demise” (JR 15) from the “downfall” (JR 15) of uncle Morty, who
failed in his life and was lost after last being heard from in Rangoon. This Asian colony in
the Eastern world is also represented by the post of Archer, Jacob’s brother: Singapore.
“Such a sunset,’ wrote Mrs. Flanders in her letter to Archer at Singapore” (JR 173). Archer
reappears later in Chapter 11 when he is going to Gibraltar, perhaps soon after graduating
from the King’s Navy. “Archer,” said Mrs. Flanders with that tenderness which mothers so
often display towards their eldest sons, “will be at Gibraltar tomorrow” (JR 125). And near
the ending of Jacob’s Room in which the First World War is supposed to occur, British military
power is dispatched to the base of Gibraltar. Interestingly enough, the geopolitical image of
Gibraltar is juxtaposed with Constantinople: “the Ambassador at Constantinople had
audience with the Sultan; the fleet was at Gibraltar” (JR 171).

In addition to this unrealistic and insubstantial legacy with its imaginary world of the
East and the Pacific, which is not materialised within the narrative of Jacob’s Room, we must
pay attention to the other legacy: namely, the “hundred pounds” (JR 125) Old Miss
Birkbeck, his mother’s cousin, left Jacob after her death, which made possible a journey to
Greece and his dark insight into the fate of western civilization, including the British Empire.
What is to be noted about this legacy and Jacob’s journey is that he seems to go to Turkey
after Greece. Indeed, the narrator says that Jacob goes with Mr. and Mrs. Williams to
Constantinople whereas the representation of Constantinople is erased within the text. And
Woolf does not write about the foreshadowing political conflict and upheaval in the region
of Asia Minor and Lloyd George’s involvement with them.

Instead of the realistic and concrete geopolitical description of the Near East, we can
see represented highly poetic and symbolic scenery of darkness and light. The globe
including the Near East as well as the West seems to be covered by eternal darkness. “The
mainland of Greece was dark”; “Now one after another lights were extinguished. Now great
towns— Paris— Constantinople— London— were black as strewn rocks” (JR 160). Yet,
lights are not extinguished for ever and “colour returns” (JR 163); “The Bank of England
emerges”; “Sunlight strikes in upon shaving-glasses” (JR 163). As for concrete human
figures, too, the text leaves a gap unfilled. The self-conscious narrator, mockingly
abandoning the role to report realistic details, does not tell us whether Jacob and Sandra
reached the Acropolis. “As for reaching the Acropolis who shall say that we ever do it, or
that when Jacob woke next morning he found anything hard and durable to keep for ever?”
(JR 161) More importantly, the narrator insists that “Still, he went with them to
Constantinople” (JR 161), and yet, any concrete historical situation of Turkey is not narrated,
making Jacob’s transgression of the borders between the West and the East indeterminate.
Unlike the case of Woolf’s other experimental novel, The Waves, any images of antagonisms and misery in the Greco-Turkish War do not appear in the narrative of Jacob’s Room.²

Despite these erasures and displacements, we could re-read these modernist poetic passages and detect some traces of the Greco-Turkish War inscribed within the text. Setting the binarism of darkness and lightness, Woolf eventually valorises the image of light. Thus, the “summer’s day” which “equipped our brains and bodies with such an armoury of weapons that merely to see the flash and thrust of limbs engaged in the conduct of daily life is better than the old pageant of armies drawn out in battle array upon the plain” (JR 163). Yet, in such valorization, the military images of “an armoury of weapons” and “the old pageant of armies drawn out in battle array upon the plain” are displayed in the association of darkness. And if we read back to the other part of the quoted passages, we can find military conflicts and war violence located in the concrete geography of two straits, that is, the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus: “Violent was the wind now rushing down the Sea of Marmara between Greece and the plains of Troy” (JR 160).

It is this very region of the Near East that liberal imperialists in Britain were concerned with, bringing about the battles of the Greco-Turkish War. As Michael Smith’s historical study shows, Venizelos, bursting onto the Greek political stage from the vigorous provincial school of Cretan politics, had already made clear his expansionist ambition in December 1912 when he became acquainted with the Prime Minister, Lloyd George (15). While Lloyd George’s relationships with the Greek politician foretold the “origins” of Britain’s Greek policy, the end of his political career significantly marked the end of “Liberal England.” The following article, “A Record of Georgian Statesmanship” narrates the rise and fall of Lloyd George in connection with his policy on Greece, Turkey and Near East, examining his use of the liberalist concept “freedom.”

He was fighting, he tells us, for the “freedom of the Straits,” and he will continue to fight for it; yet his own words show that he does not know what the phrase means. The “freedom” which a month ago in his manifesto meant freedom for warships in time of war, has now become freedom for commerce in time of peace— which no one, for over a century, has ever thought of violating. (110)

What must be stressed about Lloyd George is that, as G. R. Searle states, his coalition government is a rare instance of achieved national government (117-47). In other words, his political act should be regarded as an attempt to resolve the contradictory forces between two imperialisms, and it is this very act that is put into question by the Chanak fiasco in his foreign policy towards the Near East.

To conclude, overtly Woolf seems to express Jacob’s development and English historical movement towards the First World War in Jacob’s Room. Yet, it is the Greco-Turkish War that overdetermines and reshapes such historical change both at personal and more globally political levels. Turkey is the seemingly marginalised yet global space in which various power struggles in the age of imperialism are staged and rearranged: political conflicts within Britain, international diplomacy and warfare including the antagonism between Britain and Germany, and various colonial relationships between the West and the East. Re-examining this significant geopolitical space of the Near East, we can re-interpret from the viewpoint of the non West the contradictory relations between two imperialisms,
that is, social imperialism and liberal imperialism, which represent and prefigure internal tensions between political nationalism and economic globalism today.
Notes

1 While it remains to be clarified in further researches whether Woolf read these particular articles in The Nation and The Athenaeum, her diary and letters show that this liberalist journal kept her attention during the early 20s (L2 477; D2 208); and Woolf obliquely refers to the Greco-Turkish War when she mentions E. M. Forster’s writing (possibly “India and the Turk,” The Nation and The Athenaeum, 30 Sep. 1922: 844-45) in the journal: “Here I am sitting in my garden room, with Morgan Forster beside me writing an article for the Nation upon the East—upon this new war, I think: and I have to exercise great discretion in not sneezing or knocking things over” (L2 559). The question of external evidence is not necessarily crucial to my intertextual reading, but recent Woolf studies have begun to explore the relation of Woolf and The Nation and The Athenaeum. See Manson.

2 For an instance of such interpretation of The Waves, see Phillips 173.
Works Cited


Shipwrecks along the Cornish Coast as the Continuing Chaos in Virginia Woolf's
*Jacob's Room* and *To the Lighthouse*

Masami Usui

In Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* and *To the Lighthouse*, shipwrecks along the Cornish Coast represent the continuing chaos caused by World War I and the decline of the British Empire. Throughout both these novels, Woolf interweaves the legends and local history of Cornwall with the modern history of Britain. The legendary sites and stories create mythology that Woolf evaluates as the universal truth, while the local history embodies the threshold of ideology. Woolf manipulates the local history of Cornish Coast shipwrecks to represent that turmoil that accompanies the change from the Victorian to the modern eras.

In her description of Jacob Flanders and Timothy Durrant's sailing trip from Falmouth to St. Ives in *Jacob's Room*, Woolf incorporates a series of mythological and ideological symbols associated with the rising and falling of the historical and literary monuments of the British Isles in the modern era. Her depiction of the Ramsays' sailing from St Ives Bay to the Godrevy Island in *To the Lighthouse* represents the path through which the British modern history travels before and after the Great War. Woolf's fictional sailors who attempt to overcome the difficulties of sailing boats in a crucially dangerous part are the British middle- and upper-middle-class people, the offspring of established Victorian gentlemen and gentlewomen and subjects of the British Empire. Thus, the coexistence of ideology and mythology interwoven in Woolf's fiction is founded upon the landscape engraved by the storm as a multilayered signifier from legend, local history, and modern history.

... But the Cornish hills have stark chimneys standing on them; and, somehow or other, loveliness is infernally sad. Yes, the chimneys and the coast-guard stations and the little bays with the waves breaking unseen by any one make one remember the overpowering sorrow. And what can this sorrow be? (JR 40)

In both *Jacob's Room* and *To the Lighthouse*, the Cornwall storm symbolizes the unavoidable crisis from ancient times that has formed the destiny of the land itself and its dwellers.

Among the legendary places associated with the sea crisis, the Isles of Scilly is the most remarkable. In *Jacob's Room*, Jacob and Timothy before World War I launch their voyage from Falmouth to St. Ives through the Land's End and the Isles of Scilly, the legendary place known as "Lyonesse" or "Lethowson." Immortalized in literature ranging from the Medieval epics to Tennyson's poems to Hardy's revision of Tristan and Isolde, Lyonesse boasts rich, fertile land and 140 Cornish churches, which were established, between the 5th and 8th centuries, by missionaries from Ireland, Wales, and Brittany (Deane and Shaw 152). It is said that after the great storm of 1099 washed away the kingdom and its inhabitants, its remains construct the Isles of Scilly. The lost land of "Lyonesse" has the invisible force to lead to a hidden space beneath the sea.

Like the Isles of Scilly, St. Ives is rich with legends. As some Cornish place names originate from saints' names, St. Ives is named after St. Ia. Legend has it that St. Ia came to St. Ives "floating on a leaf which she had increased to enormous size by touching it with her
staff” (Deane and Shaw 153). During the voyage to the lighthouse, Cam has a vision of a leaf on the waves to the diminishing island and creates an adventure story. “Small as it was, and shaped something like a leaf stood on end with the global sprinkled waters flowing in and about it,” Cam is convinced that the island has “a place in the universe” (TTL 205). Cam’s sense of the universe and imagination is guided by the legend. Established between 1410 and 1434 with a tower of four stages (Pevesner 180, See 12b), St. Ia still overlooks the St. Ives Bay.

Another legend is associated with the crucial sea around St. Ives. Ralph’s Cupboard is a huge cavern in the cliffs near Portreath, where one of the fiercest and most wicked giants, Wrath or Ralph of Portreath, lived and killed sailors. The giant waited for the ships to pass by, watching for any unfortunate sailors who drifted or were driven by storm into his cupboard. Once they were captured, he ate them. After the death of this man-eating giant, the roof of his cupboard collapsed leaving only an open chasm (Deane and Shaw 97). The deadly reef that stretches from Godrevy Head is still known as a dangerous place that St. Ives sailors avoid.

Gurnard’s Head, which is described in Jacob’s Room, is another mythological place. Located in Zennor, which is accessed from St. Ives, Gurnard’s Head is another legendary and mysterious place with a granite cliffs that attract hikers (Hudson 61-62) such as Leslie Stephen, who climbed these cliff while he owned Talland House from 1881 to 1896. Woolf describes the Gurnard’s Head as a challenging site with a magnificent view associated with the ancient ruins: “In one of these, to hold, an historian conjectures, the victim’s blood, a basin has been hollowed, but in our time it serves more tamely to seat those tourists who wish for an uninterrupted view of the Gurnard’s Head” (JR 43).

Named after an inelegant fish and known as one of the most beautiful headlands in Cornwall, Gurnard’s Head is blessed with rich yet violent legends. Across the peninsula from Gurnard’s Head, a famous Iron Age cliff castle named Treryn Dinas or Treen Dinas Promontory Fort is situated with the ruins of a mediaeval chapel, Chapel Jane (Paston-Williams 34). Located half a mile from Treen, Treen Dinas’s promontory is cut off by fine lines of fortifications, that is, three different structural stages (Pevesner 243). According to legend, the Iron Age cliff castle at Treryn Dinas, known as the Giant’s Castle, was ruled from beneath the sea by the Treryn Giant. In a holed rock in the cliff, called the Giant’s Lock, he placed a key in the form of a large round stone and prophesied just before he died that if ever it were removed, Trenyn and its castle would disappear beneath the sea. In another account, the Treryn Giant was slain by a younger giant, who lived in a cave beneath the nearby Logan Stone; the victor took over both his wife and his castle (Deane and Shaw 96).

The Cornish legends associated with the cruel sea originate from the wild and sublime landscape and climate. Some of these legends date from the Iron Age and the others are Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, and Norman. It is said that the reason that there are a number of Cornish giant legends is because the Anglo-Saxons and Normans appeared huge to the average Cornishmen who were relatively small (Shaw 18). The first Old Cornwall Society, established at St. Ives in 1920, published the handbooks of the Cornish language and as a result, Cornish people were aware of and took pride in their “inherent socio-intellectual background” that their traditional folk culture represented (Shaw 15). Cornwall is an independent historical, linguistic, social, and cultural place whose significance Woolf realizes and might have called “a land of its own.”
The cruelty of the Cornish sea illustrated by the frequent shipwrecks is proven in a series of transformations in the local and modern history. Cornish climate and landscape determine the local history as shown in the fact that the remains of the ships’ timbers that drifted after the storms were used to renovate the old houses in the parish and churchtown village of Gwithian ("Godrevy - The History of the Famous Cornish Lighthouse"). The extended traces of fishing port, its trade, town, lighthouse, and the coastguard station in Cornwall are molded into a history of its own.

The remarkable decline and transformation of the fishing ports and trade in Cornwall occurred in the years between the two world wars. In 15th century, St. Ives had the first stone pier to protect fishing boats. The pier was renovated in 1770 by adding the outer pier designed by a well-known architect John Smeaton (Kittridge 42). Protected by Smeaton’s pier, the general trade was restricted to beach landing. The 19th century extension of St. Ives pier coincided with the peak of the fishing trade in the 1830’s and 1840’s (Kittridge 42). Charles Tansley’s points about the fishermen’s hardships in To the Lighthouse are accurate. In 1905, there only two hundred registered fishing vessels in St. Ives; and by World War I, seining was almost over. Tansley mentions the crucial social change due to the decline of fishing: “That the fishing season was bad; that the men were emigrating. They were talking about wages and unemployment ” (TTL 102).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the fishing trade in Cornwall confronted an intense rival in the east-coast fishing trade. The east-coast fishermen introduced diesel engines to their fleets, whereas the Cornish fishermen still depended on lug sail (Du Maurier 175). St. Ives boats were designed for use in the short-breaking seas of St. Ives Bay and they show the tradition of St. Ives fishing trade. The larger vessels were used for drifting, following mackerel from March to June, then going right offshore into the Atlantic after herrings, staying away sometimes until the autumn, whereas the smaller boats carrying the seine nets for pilchards were harbour-based (Du Maurier 173). Due to the old-fashioned boats, St Ives witnessed the decline of fishing trade.

The decrease of the fleets made the fishermen find employment and other places to live; thus Tansley’s reference to the emigration of fishermen accurately reflects the times. Cornish fishermen’s emigration has to be recognized as comparable to Cornish miners’ emigration during the 19th century to the United States. The collapse of the tin-mining industry in Cornwall at the end of the 19th century caused mass emigration from Britain to the U. S. (Shaw 13). Less known than the miners’ emigration, the fishermen, as well as agricultural labourers and tradesmen, began to immigrate even to the colonies such as Australia. The early recorded example is that seven Cornish fishermen sailed from Penzance to Melbourne in a 16-ton fishing boat named the Mystery during 1854-5 (Noall 28).

According to Noall, both fleets and fishermen’s cottages faced dangerous decline and even destruction. As these fishermen and their families emigrated, the town people preferred purchasing the fishermen’s picturesque cottages. Unfortunately, too often, the Government’s policy of “slum clearance” destroyed many ancient buildings and streets. The view from the Durrants’ yacht in Jacob’s Room includes the white Cornish cottage that was rented by D. H. Lawrence and his German-born wife, Frieda, during World War I and that was again rented by Virginia and Leonard Woolf from Captain Short of St. Ives in 1919.
In the 19th century, the small fishing village of St. Ives at the end of the train line was transformed into a resort area. The village’s expansive hillsides with their breathtaking views of the sea were perfect locations for new residences and hotels. As most of Britain’s resort areas were developed during the latter half of the 19th century, Cornwall has become a leisure spot since the Royal Albert Bridge at Saltash opened in 1859 (Kittridge 1).

St. Ives is on the north side of the rounded western extremity of Cornwall, and from the little green hill, called the “Island,” which rises above and partly shelters the town, you look out upon the wide Atlantic, the sea that has always a trouble on it and that cannot be quiet; and standing there with the great waves breaking on the black granite rocks at your feet, they will tell you that there is no land between you and America. (Hudson 3).

In To the Lighthouse, the house is located on hill where a hotel is under construction and from which the view of the bay is magnificent. Though Woolf relocates the house in the Isle of Skye, the St. Ivis hill was nicknamed the “Island.” Tregenna Castle, located on the highest of St. Ives hills with a magnificent view of the sea, was remolded into the most elegant hotel in St. Ives in 1878 (Paston-Williams 44). Unlike the harbor and fishing village, the hill area of St. Ives was improved and transformed into the wealthy residential and accommodation area.

The history of the Lighthouse on the Godrevy Island located three and half miles across St. Ives Bay also represents the local history of the Cornish Coast. The Godrevy Island was known for “the Stones,” its dangerous reef outwards the island, on which many vessels had stuck. Not only many vessels but also lives were lost owing to the lack of a light erected on those stones. The most crucial incident was witnessed in 1854 when the 700-ton streamer, the Nile, failed to avoid the Stones, lost her control, and was consequently washed ashore. As a result, Trinity House decided to build the white octagonal stone lighthouse designed by James Walker at Godrevy in 1857 and completed 1859. The keepers had to maintain two lights; one is a bright flashing white every 10 seconds and the other is the fixed red light which marked the Stones Rocks (“Godrevy”). In the lighthouse, three keepers were stationed: two of them inhabit the lighthouse with the two-month rotation system.

The inter-war period witnessed the dual sides of the lighthouse. It is the most remarkable time of the lighthouse where some wooden cottages and a tea house were built for the weekend and holiday use for the visitors. The Ramsays’ intention to sail to the lighthouse is one of the popular summer excursions from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. This practice continued until the lighthouse was taken over by the National Trust in the 1930’s. The lighthouse keepers’ life, however, was hard as Tansley remembers his childhood days when he was almost imprisoned with his uncle as a keeper within the lighthouse during the stormy nights. The hardship continued at Godrevy by 1934 when it became officially unmanned and automatic because the shipping traffic had already decreased and they could not afford the keepers’ expenses.

The lighthouse storm that Tansley remembers from childhood corresponds to the 1925 Christmas storm that actually imprisoned two keepers at Godrevy. During this storm, one of the keepers became seriously sick and the telephone was broken, and consequently, the other keeper flew the flag and sent rockets. The James Steven’s lifeboat arrived at Godrevy and the sick keeper was taken to the land so that the other keeper had to manage
everything by himself for the next eight days of the storm ("Godvery -- The History of the Famous Cornish Lighthouse").

Like the history of the lighthouse, that of the lifeboat station conveys to us the local endeavor to escape from the repeatedly occurring shipwrecks. Cornish life-boat stations are managed and supported by local committees, but most of them are under the control and patronage of the National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck that was founded in 1824. As a result, Cornwall could have the Institution’s lifeboats stationed in nineteen places by 1870, in such places as Penzance in 1826, Padstow in 1827, Bude and Sr. Mary’s in Isles of Scilly in 1837, St. Ives in 1840, Sennen Cove in 1853, and Lizard and Polkerris in 1858 (Bird 27). The early lifeboats were managed by the local fishermen, boatmen, and coastguards. In St. Ives, there were remarkable records of lifeboats. In To the Lighthouse, an elder sailor, Macalister, tells a story of their lifeboat saving ten vessels in a stormy night in St. Ives. On July 29, 1921, the St. Ives lifeboat actually went out five times to save forty men from ten vessels in one day (Bird 91).

The local history of Cornwall that proves the crucial destiny of the landscape and climate reflected in mythology becomes the threshold to the modern history that the British Empire has to undergo. A series of historical documents associated with Cornwall examine the hardships that local people have to overcome. The storm in Cornwall symbolizes the continuing crisis on a global scale in the modern history of the British Empire proceeding World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-45); the hurricane at sea at the beginning of Jacob’s Room and the great storm that attacks St. Ives during the Ramsay’s absence in To the Lighthouse. The origin of the lighthouse suggests that the British Empire will face the crucial coming danger as is foreseen in “The Window” of To the Lighthouse. The sailing to the lighthouse on Godrevy Island, St. Ives, after World War I, moreover, represents the end of the conflicting period since it celebrates the transformation of the Lighthouse.

In To the Lighthouse, the three deaths in St. Ives Bay during the ten years including World War I imply three Ramsay deaths on the private level and at the same time connote the end of the wrong values of the British society. Mrs. Ramsay, Prue Ramsay, and Andrew Ramsay are dead during the stormy night as “the gigantic chaos” with “no light of reason” (TTL 147) that symbolizes the chaos of the British Empire whose wrong values suppress, imprison, and ultimately terminate its subjects. Mrs. Ramsay is victimized as the angle in the house as a Victorian norm and accordingly Prue as the Ramsays’ model daughter ends her young life by her first pregnancy. Along with these women victims, Andrew, the eldest son, cannot pursue his promising life as he sacrifices himself in a wrong code of behavior. After Andrew’s death is announced, there is an illusionary scene of the ships and “a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath” (TTT 145). The actual battle scene and its terrible consequence as ideology are entirely diminished into the mythological implication. The ideology is, however, strengthened as the inevitable fact that leads to the universal truth of human conflicts.

The Cornish coast which has been fortified became the target for the Germans during World War I. Especially, German submarines became more active along the Bristol Channel between Land’s End and St. Ives as the war goes by, and consequently suspicion increased with every ship and Cornish people believed that the Germans would invade them secretly by submarines on the Cornish beaches (Stevens 101). In both world wars, some Cornish ports such as Falmouth and Penzance became temporal Naval bases and the local
boatmen were in service because of their knowledge of Cornish coast; and especially during World War I, most of the casualties were caused by enemy submarines (Bird 12). At the end of World War I, no less than eight German submarines were sent to Falmouth as targets for gunnery practice; however, this fact was revealed by 1921 when two of them had been actually sunk (Mudd 6).

St. Ives as the fishing harbor was actually confronted with the war-time chaos. The crucial collision between the fishermen’s fleets and German submarines during World War I symbolizes the danger that Great Britain confronted. The most well-known incident involved the St. Ives drifter, Mary Ann, the first boat to commence the mackerel drift fishery in 1914 from St. Ives. Mary Ann encountered a German U-boat surfacing close to them and was sunk into the bottom of the sea by a U-boat. Though the Captain and his crew were rescued by a merchant steamer, Mary Ann was lost in the sea (Noall 36-37).

In spite of the local and modern historical crisis around Cornwall, ironically enough, it was a regular practice especially in summer to sail to the Godrevy Island and visit the keepers in the lighthouse as James expects in To the Lighthouse. Though Mr. Ramsay is frequently criticized as a cruel father who presents the fact to James, Mr. Ramsay’s prophecy implies the coming crisis of modern history. The pleasure and danger determined by the climate are the dual and conflicting meanings of the lighthouse. The duality of the lighthouse for the vessels and visitors connotes the light and shadow of the British Empire and its subjects in the modern era. The crisis of the keepers in stormy days during the Christmas in 1925 and the decline of the numbers of visitors eventually leads to the new condition of the unmanned lighthouse in 1934. The voyage to the lighthouse in “The Lighthouse” is the journey to the reality that was veiled and unrecognized before World War I. Beer insists that the island where they reach is “the place of intense life and the conclusion of that form of life, both private and the image of a community from whose values she was increasingly disengaged” (159). As James says that “the Lighthouse one had seen across the bay all these years; it was a stark tower on a bare rock” (TTL 220), the reality of the lighthouse in modern society is that of the subjects of the British Empire, especially the oppressed women.

The metaphorical and actual shipwrecks along the Cornish Coast are incorporated into the legends, the local history, and the modern history. As “a land of its own,” Cornwall is blessed with legends that sprang from its unique historical background, climate, and landscape. Cornish local history is “a history of its own” that guides us to the crucial turning point from the Victorian to modern eras. Woolf employs shipwrecks along the Cornish Coast as the continuing chaos of the British Isles and the global sphere.
To the Lighthouse: Virtual Reality and Retrieving the Mother

By: Rim and Razzan Zahra
To the Lighthouse:
Virtual Reality & Retrieving the Mother
By Rim & Razzan Zahra, English graduate Students, SSU
A methodology by which humans interface with multi-dimensional environment created from computer-based data.
VR does not refer to cyberspace & the Internet as virtual worlds.
- VR does not refer to cyberspace & the Internet as virtual worlds
- Refers to digital simulation technology

Universal Studios, LA
“The Essence of VR”
Michael Heim
"The Essence of VR"
Michael Heim

The Holy Grail

Michael Heim
Michael Heim

If the function of lit. is to create a better world
Michael Heim

If the function of lit. is to create a better world

VR is an inevitable consequence of fulfilling literature’s goal
Marie-Laure Ryan

Narrative as Virtual Reality

- Immersion
Marie-Laure Ryan

- Immersion
- Interactivity
**Immersion**

- Enables users to feel corporeally connected to 3-dimensional images
- Enables them to forget the medium and lose themselves in the virtual world
Immersion

✓ Enables users to feel corporeally connected to 3-dimensional images
✓ Enables them to forget the medium and lose themselves in the virtual world

Interactivity

✓ Enables users to feel corporeally connected to 3-dimensional images
✓ Enables them to forget the medium and lose themselves in the virtual world
✓ Enables users become like members of a theatrical audience
**Immersion**

- Enables users to feel corporeally connected to 3-dimensional images
- Enables them to forget the medium and lose themselves in the virtual world

**Interactivity**

- Enables users become like members of a theatrical audience
- March up on stage, become actors & alter actions by what they say and do
The Interactive Qualities of Literature
The Interactive Qualities of Literature

- Interrupting their immersion
The Interactive Qualities of Literature

- Interrupting their immersion
- Asking them to Engage their imagination
- Become active participants in the construction of the textual world
Stations are all alike; it doesn’t matter if the light cannot illuminate beyond their blurred halo, all of this is a setting you know by heart.
Ryan’s Analogy

- Points to a bridge between literature and technology
Ryan’s Analogy

- Points to a bridge between literature and technology

- Does not provide an in-depth analysis of modern literature or its role in relation to the immersive and interactive qualities of VR

- Undercuts the role that modernism played in merging the elements of immersion & interactivity
Ryan’s Analogy

- Points to a bridge between literature and technology
- Does not provide an in-depth analysis of modern literature or its role in relation to the immersive and interactive qualities of VR
- Undercuts the role that modernism played in merging the elements of immersion & interactivity
- Suggests that interactive narrative techniques were only made possible with the advent of postmodern literature

Presentation Key Points
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- Woolf’s narrative provides a framework for understanding the concepts of immersion & interactivity
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- Woolf's depiction of motherhood as a patriarchal construct manifests the immersive & interactive qualities of VR

- Interactive mechanism of Woolf's narrative disrupts immersion in the characters' worlds
Presentation Key Points

- Woolf’s narrative provides a framework for understanding the concepts of immersion & interactivity.
  - Woolf’s depiction of motherhood as a patriarchal construct manifests the immersive & interactive qualities of VR.
  - Interactive mechanism of Woolf’s narrative disrupts immersion in the characters’ worlds.
  - Invites readers to become co-creators in the construction of the text’s meaning.

Presentation Outline
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- How Woolf employs immersion to transport readers into the consciousness of Mrs. Ramsay
- Woolf’s interruption of the narrative to
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- How Woolf employs immersion to transport readers into the consciousness of Mrs. Ramsay
- Woolf’s interruption of the narrative to
  - Comment on her character’s actions, thoughts & feelings
- Shift from one character’s consciousness to the next
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  - Comment on her character’s actions, thoughts & feelings
  - Shift from one character’s consciousness to the next
    - Encourages readers to become co-creators of the textual world
    - Aroused “interactive curiosity”
Mind and thoughts of Mrs. Ramsay

Actuality
To be silent alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself; a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others. Although she continued to knit, and sat upright, it was thus that she felt herself; and this self having shed it attachments was free for the strangest adventures. When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless [...]. Her horizon seemed to her limitless. There were all the places she had not seen, the Indian planes; she felt herself pushing aside the thick leather curtain of a church in Rome. This core of darkness could go anywhere, for no one saw it. They could not stop it, she thought exulting. There was freedom, there was peace, there was, most welcome of all, a summoning together, a resting on a platform of stability (95-96).
To be silent alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrank, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others. Although she continued to knit, and sat upright, it was thus that she felt herself, and this self having shed its attachments was free for the strangest adventures. When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless [...]. Her horizon seemed to her limitless. There were all the places she had not seen, the Indian planes, she felt herself pushing aside the thick leather curtain of a church in Rome. This core of darkness could go anywhere, for no one saw it. They could not stop it, she thought exulting. There was freedom, there was peace, there was, most welcome of all, a summoning together, a resting on a platform of stability (95-96).

Her desire to transcend the limitations of time & space
Her desire to transcend the limitations of time & space

Double Consciousness

Immediate physical environment

Double Consciousness
Her desire to transcend the limitations of time & space

Immediate physical environment  Double Consciousness  Alternative world of unconsciousness

Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at—that light for example (97).
Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at—that light for example (97).
Sandy Stone

Cyber-Culture Theorist

- The physical does not disappear during VR experiences
- Reconfigured and redefined in virtual experiences

Negate their bodies Virtual space
She praised herself in praising the light, without vanity, for she was stern, she was searching, she was beautiful like that light (97).
She praised herself in praising the light, without vanity, for she was stern, she was searching. she was beautiful like that light (97).

Mrs. Ramsay’s pleasurable experience with the beams of the Lighthouse

Does Not Provide her

With a Permanent means of escaping gender
Success in her virtual journey

Transcend Physical body

Bring those experiences back into the physical body
Interactivity & VR

- Multi-personal voices
Interactivity & VR

- Multi-personal voices
- Shift from one consciousness to another
- Reflects the ways in which VR entails the deferral of human agency

According to Jay David Bolter & Richard Grusin, interactivity can be as little as allowing viewers to change their point of view.
Go on reading. You don’t look sad now, he thought. And he wondered what she was reading, and exaggerated her ignorance, her simplicity, for he liked to think that she was not clever, not book-learned at all. He wondered if she understood what she was reading. Probably not, he thought. She was astonishingly beautiful. Her beauty seemed to him, if that were possible, to increase.

Yet seem’d it winter still, and, you away,
As with your shadow I with these did play,
she finished.

“Well?” she said, echoing his smile dreamily, looking up from her book.
As with your shadow I with these did play, she murmured, putting the book on the table (182).
Will you not tell me just for once that you love me? He was thinking that, for he was roused, what with Minta and his book, and its being the end of the day and their having quarreled about going to the Lighthouse (185).
The thoughts attributed to Mr. Ramsay are an imaginary construct.

His consciousness is only present as an act of female creation.
The thoughts attributed to Mr. Ramsay are an imaginary construct.

His consciousness is only present as an act of female creation.

Woolf's Open-ended conclusion provides one of the fullest forms of interactivity.
The act of painting functions as a tool that

- Eliminates the emotional divisions and disharmony between the Ramsays.

- Provides a solution for accepting the mother as a fellow artist, while at the same time rejecting the patriarchal model of motherhood.
Lily’s Painting and VR
In VR, users are under the illusion that their actions determine the course of the plot.

Readers become co-creators, who place their own final strokes upon the canvas.
Open-endedness of the Narrative

- Testifies to the interactive nature of the text
- Testifies to literature's primacy over VR
- Woolf's narrative challenges the so-called division between new media and literary texts by encompassing the two key attributes of VR
Presentation Summary

- Readers immerse themselves with Mrs. Ramsay, who herself transcends the boundaries of the real world that Victorian patriarchal society has imposed upon mothers.

- Woolf’s use of multi-personal voices and her shift between Mrs. and Mr. Ramsay’s consciousnesses resembles the deferral of human agency that VR experiences entail.

- Woolf’s open-ended conclusion provides one of the fullest forms of interactivity.

Presentation Summary

- Mrs. Ramsay fashions her identity in relation to the virtual Mr. Ramsay to invent a “self” that can inhabit patriarchal structures without being subsumed by them.

- There is an interactive dimension in Lily’s attempt to represent the lives of the Ramsays.

- Woolf’s refusal to describe the canvas provides an implicitly feminine and thus more potent version of VR.
The Savage North: Tarrying with the Primitive in To The Lighthouse

Nels C. Pearson

Critical attempts to evaluate the nature and degree of Joseph Conrad's influence on Virginia Woolf have been an important, perhaps even exemplary, aspect of Woolf scholarship. As modernism was undergoing its formalism-driven canon formation, defenders of Woolf often argued, as did Thomas Vogler in 1970, that in the maturation of Woolf's style we also see the fruition of the modern project, initiated by James, Proust, and Conrad, of "mirroring . . . internal states" of consciousness and "exploring . . . the subjective world [of] Bergsonian, psychological time" (5-6). Responding to the postmodern backlash against the privileging of such apolitical orchestrations of form and content, more recent defenders of Woolf have revisited the close reading of her aesthetic strategies (often in tandem with, but as more subtly distinct from, Conrad's) so as to demonstrate the ways in which those techniques served as artistic manifestations of anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, or anti-patriarchal viewpoints.

In each of these defining eras of Woolf studies, critics have pointed to the rich connections between Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1899) and Woolf's The Voyage Out (1915), and have offered varied but convincing evidence of the subversive relationship both novels draw between the imperialist journey, the engagement with the primitive or native "other," and the liberating destabilization of normative Western selfhood. Feminist readings, also often drawn to these two texts, have advanced important and compelling evidence of Woolf's gendered subversion and refinement of the structural and thematic elements of space, time, movement, and identity in Conrad's works, and, again, in Heart of Darkness in particular.

It is certainly interesting, given these comparisons, that Woolf's work, especially relative to Conrad's, has so infrequently met up with postcolonial theory's critique of modernist aesthetics as being largely informed by an imperial-ideological resistance to conceiving other cultural histories and geographies as distinct totalities. Of course, such critiques usually train their sights on narratives that are both experimental/nonlinear and whose content significantly draws upon real or imagined contact between "modern" West and "primitive"/colonial other, especially in a setting beyond the pale of the imperial metropolis. While The Voyage Out falls into the latter but not the former category, the reverse is typically assumed to be true of Woolf's other major works, leaving us, it would seem, without a text where the dynamic of modernist internalization as a "response to the external pressures on culture from the imperium" (Said 228) would be evident. But this assumption brings us to another, perhaps more intriguing, feature of Woolf studies across the generations, which is the reluctance to consider the setting of To The Lighthouse, a novel that is a perennial candidate for the definitive prose work of British experimental modernism, as colonial.

That the African Congo and the islands of Scotland raise markedly different issues and experiences of race and empire in the 19th/early 20th century is hardly a contestable point. My aim in arguing for a more thorough inclusion of setting in political readings of the novel, however, is neither to point out the similarities in these experiences nor to suggest
that we readjust our critical estimation of the novel relative to how accurately it represents the socioeconomic realities of a setting with which it is manifestly unconcerned. Rather, my aim is to demonstrate that certain imperially-coded assumptions about that setting and what it represents, as well as about the relationship between history and geography more generally, are intrinsically tied to what the novel achieves stylistically, and that the novel thus reveals some of the more intractable relationships between space, time, and imperial ideology in modernist writing.

Of course, in order to do this, I will first need to consider the contrast between the political and cultural landscape of Skye during the years that the Ramsays travel to their home on the island and what we see of that landscape, or rather how we see it, in *To The Lighthouse*. In her 1981 forward to the novel, Eudora Welty celebrates the unfaltering subjectivity of Woolf’s style by explaining that “the physical surround [of the Hebrides], so continuously before us in its changes, its weather, its procession of day and night, so seducing in its beauty, is not here as itself” (vii-viii). This is certainly true. As accounts in E.J. Hobsbawm’s *Industry and Empire* and Christopher Harvie’s *Scotland and Nationalism* remind us, the northwest of Scotland that we do not see was, with southern and western Ireland, among the more economically devastated, malnourished, emigration-depleted and home-rule divested regions of the British empire during the Victorian era. In the 1880’s, probably just prior to the time that the fictional home was first inhabited by the Ramsay family, Skye was the stage for a series of violent uprisings led by native crofters who had continually been denied rights to fair rents or ownership of the land they farmed for absentee landlords and English markets (“Scots” 274-6). During the World War I years which “run shapelessly together” in “Time Passes,” Europe’s economic depression hit early and hard throughout much of Scotland, making the cultural losses it had bartered for economic success as the industrial engine of empire, such as “the absence of independence. . . the erosion and collapse of its native institutions, and notably of its educational system and religion,” all the more evident (Hobsbawm 308-9). While the Hebrides in Woolf’s novel bear little similarity to the environments along the Congo river in *Heart of Darkness*, it is safe to say that *To The Lighthouse* similarly renders them not “as they are,” but, to borrow a phrase from Chinua Achebe’s critique of *Heart of Darkness*, as “a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar,” or as mere “props for the break up of [the] European mind” (251-57).

A postcolonial critique of the novel might therefore be initiated by doing something as simple as considering the relationship between setting and plot. In doing so, we recognize that *To The Lighthouse* is not only, as Janet Winston uniquely points out, “a voyage narrative in the tradition of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Woolf’s own *The Voyage Out*” (“Out of Harmony” 43), but also a story that actually concerns, like Conrad’s novella, the maintenance of an “outpost” of late-Victorian/Edwardian society (though familial/domestic rather than individual) in the colonial periphery. Mrs. Ramsay, who worries that “No lockmaker in the whole of Scotland can mend a bolt” (TTL 27), who struggles to get a “stroke of work” out of Kennedy the gardener (who is “beautiful” but beset by “incurable laziness” (TTL 67)), whose concern for the caricatured local underclass (the bill poster whose “arm had been cut off in a reaping machine” (TTL 11)) leads her to wish for a “model dairy and a hospital up here” on Skye, and who worries about what books and supplies to send to the Lighthouse keeper and his diseased son, is not simply playing the role of “angel in the house.” She is also performing the more problematic role of the domestic
engineer in the colonial enterprise—the one to whom the true challenge falls of being able to “manage things in the depths of the country,” and to give the appearance of meaning to the family’s acting-out of an English lifestyle in a region that offers little in the way of an organic defense for those rituals of culture (TTL 100). Given that being at a great distance from the imperial center has its decentering affect on each member of the group, the project is all the more difficult. Mr. Ramsay (whom she must pacify) has become increasingly reflexive, nostalgic, and, following Matthew Arnold’s Celticism to the letter, desirous for the “sandy beeches where no one had been since the beginning of time” (TTL 69) to offer up a restorative atavistic truth. Meanwhile, the younger generation, who on a journey to the beaches symbolically lose a broach passed to them by the older generation (Paul ignorantly believes he can simply go to Glasgow, industrial realm of mechanical reproduction that it is, to replace it), and who begin to feel the Island’s “power sweeping savagely in,” are at risk of failing to return from their voyage out with the same cultural objectives (“they all must marry” (TTL 49)) that were bequeathed to them at their departure. Indeed, one can see why Lily, like Marlow relative to Kurtz, is so driven to find a suitable way of framing what Mrs. Ramsay represents: an ability to ensure “that barbarity was tamed, the reign of chaos subdued” within the social sphere (TTL 47) in spite of her awareness of the “core of darkness” (TTL 62) or “center of complete emptiness” (TTL 179) underlying the arbitrary constructs of gender, society and identity that would govern her role in such a project.

Like Kurtz, Mrs. Ramsay ends up giving in, not to “the native,” but, in death, to the “pool of Time that was closing over” the order she maintained (TTL 125)—the force of a timeless nature that resists and ultimately envelops all false structures erected in futile attempt to keep it at bay. Thus the project of keeping it together, of forming “one stream” out of “she . . . and this, and this . . . the sofa on the landing (her mother’s); . . . the rocking chair (her father’s); . . . the map of the Hebrides” (TTL 113-14) is passed on to Lily, not unlike how Kurtz’s desire for control over epistemological contingency is passed to Marlow, not as a literal but as an aesthetic, and therefore more portable, and ongoing, effort of recuperation.

Portable. Ongoing. Aesthetic recuperation. These terms are reasonable descriptors not only for Lily’s artistic vision of the Ramsays (which she resumes in Skye ten years after beginning it, and into which she incorporates signifiers of both the temporal and spatial dimensions of the years of separation), but also for To The Lighthouse itself. Insofar as these are also the terms used by postcolonial critics to define the means by which modernist “extremes of self-consciousness, discontinuity, [and] self-referentiality” create an effect of “spatiality [that] becomes . . . the characteristic of an aesthetic rather than of political domination” (Said 227-9), they also return me to the point that a more thorough reading of the colonial setting of the novel invites more stringent readings of the aesthetic strategies of the text relative to postcolonial criticism.

Forestalling such a critique is my inclination to agree with feminist readings of Woolf’s gendered revision of space and travel in Conrad, especially as articulated by Merry Pawlowski, who argues convincingly that Woolf’s “feminist echo of ‘Heart of Darkness’ in The Voyage Out “reverses and resists Conrad’s gendered production of both cultural and natural space.”5 I am concerned, however, about the more fundamental fact, which is perhaps fully realized only when the “incipient female modernism of The Voyage Out” comes to fruition in To The Lighthouse (Wollaeger 2), that the peripheral landscape Woolf
imagines, even as it is both feared and welcomed for its power to engulf (patriarchal) culture, is relentlessly conceived of as primitive. In lock step with the aesthetic of the primitive in Bloomsbury formalism, as well as Arnoldian views of the Gael and Celt, the landscape of Skye signifies a timeless-primordial entity that, paradoxically, symbolizes resistance to the same historiographic consciousness from which its surveyors, victims of modernity, feel unhinged.

Just as Woolf, in her diary, imagines her father’s “discovery” of Talland House in St. Ives (the likely source of the fictional home in Skye) as a home on “the toenail of England” by a “glistening bay which he must have found as it was at the beginning of time,” so to does To The Lighthouse link “the awesome power of distance” (the force that the cast of characters are “all swallowed up in” (TTL 68)) to the concept of a geography that suggests not just timelessness, but a synchronic, pre-historical “beginning of time.” Whether it is Mr. Ramsay “look[ing] into the hedge, into its intricacy, its darkness” (TTL 64), Cam running after “a vision . . . of a fairy kingdom on the far side of the hedge” (TTL 54), Minta surveying the landscape “like Constantinople seen through a mist” or Nancy sensing its “power sweeping savagely in [and] reduc[ing] her own body, her own life, and the lives of all the people in the world, forever, to nothingness” (TTL 75-6), To The Lighthouse persistently figures the landscape of the Hebrides, beyond the home and demesne, as a source of a history-engulfing primitive mystery that is at once threatening and liberating. Importantly, one of the most notable examples of this motif is in Woolf’s description of the momentary vision that allows Lily to complete her painting:

Suddenly, as suddenly as a star slides in the sky, a reddish light seemed to burn in her mind . . . . It rose like a fire sent up in a token of some celebration by savages on a distant beach. She heard the roar and the crackle. . . . she loathed it. But for a sight, for a glory it surpassed everything in her experience, and burnt year after year like a signal fire on a desert island at the edge of the sea. (175)

To imply that the Island’s “savage” power to engulf the contingent social world being enacted in its midst is now absorbed by the artist’s recuperation of a timeless essence within that contingent world is to heap paradox upon paradox. For what is “timeless” is merely the reflection given back by a terrain that has been aesthetically mapped in terms of the temporal crisis of imperial modernity. In this sense, the text reveals the ironic limitations of a mobile, or spatially projected, social critique (especially of empire): Like a “wedge-shaped core of darkness [that] could go anywhere, for no one saw it” (TTL 62) it invariably fragments the worlds that it surveys.

Especially from a postcolonial perspective sensitive to the ongoing erasure of the experiences of “internal” and racially unidentifiable forms of colonization, such as the actual disjunctive temporality and splitting off of culture (e.g. the historical romances of Scott) from historical progress (e.g. the industrial slums of Glasgow) that characterized the uneven development of Scotland, To The Lighthouse thus seems to me to offer an unique case, as far as the textual terrain of the British Isles are concerned, of the problem Said identifies above. Although undeniably revised from the Conradian vision to include substantive critique of gendered power relations within modern British society, the text nonetheless projects (spatializes) that critique, along with the belatedness and temporal reflexivity which afford psychological depth to that critique, onto a peripheral culture whose sense of space
and time has already been altered by empire and modernity. Though not always applicable, Kumkum Sangari’s argument—that “modernism is assembled, in part, through the internalization of jeopardized geographical territory—which is now incorporated either as ‘primitive’ image/metaphor or as mobile nonlinear structure” (Politics 182-83)—certainly seems valid here.

In The Islands of Scotland (1939), Hugh MacDiarmid, the central voice of the Scottish literary revival of the 1920’s and 30’s, makes a comment that seems especially poignant in the present context. “It is impossible to write about the Scottish Islands,” claims MacDiarmid,

without recognizing civilization’s urgent need today to refresh and replenish itself at its original sources, and realizing that it is precisely the chief characteristic of the area with which we are concerned that if its history could be fully recovered, the very basis of our conceptions of British history would have to be torpedoed and very different conceptions take their place (ix).

Rather than torpedoing a singular British historical aesthetic, Woolf seems instead to revisit, albeit through modernist style, the paradox that Simon During points to in his analysis of Johnson and Boswell’s 1775 Journey to the Western Islands, the same text that weighs heavily upon the cultural-nationalist paradox of authenticity MacDiarmid faces in the foregoing passage. During’s argument is that both the act and the style of English writing about the Hebrides takes the place of an otherwise fluid boundary between the two societies, for while the latter is transformed as it is written about into a collective signifier of the pre-modern, the status of the writer/observer as existing in a mobile frame of reference knowable only by contrast as “modern” is affirmed by the same process (“Waiting” 24-5).

Just as Conrad’s style reflects the epistemic disjuncture experienced by travelers who are “cut off from the comprehension of [their] surroundings; . . . because [they] were too far . . . traveling in the night of the first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories” (HD 37), Woolf’s vacationers are “shut off by panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished, waterily.” Indeed, once the family and guests become “conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island” they also recognize “their common cause against that fluidity out there” (TTL 146-47).

If the novel’s final vision amounts to a retrieval of the Ramsay cast from this fluid time and space (hence recuperating in art “that strange no-man’s land where to follow people is impossible,” with its echoes of both empire and war, that Lily presciently feared in part one (TTL 84)), it is only because the physical labor of Irish and Scottish women, summoned into action by the Ramsay’s telephone in London, has sutured the spaces of Empire. “Discrepant cosmopolitans” if ever there were,6 “the toothless, bonneted” Mrs. McNab and the “red-haired cook, quick-tempered like all her sort” provide a “painful[]” labor that saves the home from the “downpouring of immense darkness” and “pool of Time that was closing over it” (TTL 125).

Beyond the ruthless stereotypes, it is difficult, I think, to see native laborers, likely summoned from Edinburgh by the same forces that summoned their families to its
industrial slums, motivated by a dire economic need partly generated by imperial history, as representing an unconscious or feminine-universal force acting within human nature to (re)construct its sustaining orders (Moore 77-81). The remarkable irony in their unselfconscious “fetching up from oblivion all the Waverly novels” suggests, at first glance, the connection between women whose artistry invariably maintains the frail structures of the male world (such as the historical romance novels of Scott, nostalgically debated by men throughout the novel, and unread by women) that in turn occludes them. But the fact that the native laboring women, “thinking no harm” (TTL 135), do not (can not?) psychologically entertain the crisis in which they participate, and who in so doing also make possible the time-collapsing “vision” that eventually obscures them, remains troubling. It is clearly a major concern that seems unresolved by the novel’s notoriously all-encompassing conclusion.

The novel concludes with a contact between the lighthouse inhabitants and Mr. Ramsay, whose voice takes on a “tinge of Scottish accent” (TTL 164) as Macalister rows him toward his destination and who is last seen by Cam “as if he were leaping into space . . . lightly like a young man, holding his parcel, on to the rock [of the lighthouse island]” (TTL 207). The scene suggests a gradual deflation of the romantic view of the laboring, deprived inhabitants and the spatial cloud of interiority and self-scrutiny generated in the ongoing plans to “reach” the symbolic structure. But it also suggests that, somewhere between Lily’s “they have landed” and Mr. Carmichael’s “They will have landed,” lies the necessarily deferred tense of the actual contact— a tiny gap within the vocabulary of time, projected into a still unrealized space, that, to adapt a phrase from E.M. Forster, “push[es] the light of the English language a little further against darkness.”
Analyses of Conrad's work, such as Frederick Karl's *A Reader's Guide to Joseph Conrad* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1969), often echo these fundamental observations. “Most readers and critics are aware that Conrad, Virginia Woolf, Joyce and Faulkner,” asserts Karl, “were and are preoccupied with breaking up conventional time, refracting it, and finally creating a ‘poetic time’ in which the clock is servant of the mind” (62). These speculations about time and narrative form are relevant to my later analysis of the relationships between time/history, space/geography, and the timeless ”primitive” in both *To the Lighthouse* and the modernist aesthetic more generally.

As Lois J. Gilmore has recently noted, “the use of the primitive” in both *The Voyage Out* and *Heart of Darkness*, “serves to signify the fragmentation of the personality and the fragmentation of civilization” (“Virginia Woolf, Bloomsbury, and the Primitive.” *Virginia Woolf and Communities: Selected Papers from the Eighth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf, New York*: Pace UP, 1999. 127-35. 135). Gilmore thus offers an important cultural-materialist framework in which to reconsider the observations of Rosemary Pitt, who has noted that the “the strongest link between The Voyage Out and The Heart of Darkness” lies in how “the voyage [to a colonial territory] becomes a voyage into the self” (“The Exploration of the Self in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness and Woolf’s The Voyage Out.” *Conradiana: A Journal of Joseph Conrad Studies* 10 (1972): 141-54).

Marianne DeKoven, in *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1991), offers an influential comparative interpretation of *The Voyage Out* and *Heart of Darkness* in which she analyzes “the patriarchal maternal” (138) as a cultural construct that Woolf’s proleptic generation of what Julia Kristeva would later term a non-symbolic language works, more thoroughly than Conrad’s symbolic one, to deconstruct. Her conclusion that both novels ultimately reinscribe this dominant construction of the feminine because they are unable to articulate the genuine non-patriarchal feminine voice that their aesthetics of negation may otherwise point to or posit, has been revisited by many feminist readings of Woolf and Conrad and/ or Woolf and empire.

In the recent, pioneering studies of Woolf and empire by Jane Marcus, Kathy Phillips, and Janet Winston, only passing attention is paid to the Scottish setting of *To The Lighthouse*. Janet Winston, in “Something out of Harmony: To The Lighthouse and the Subject(s) of Empire.” *Woolf Studies Annual* 2 (1996): 39-70, notably reads the historical subtext of TTL as an “imperial allegory” wherein “tropes of imperialism” are (often ironically) juxtaposed to reveal the “conflicting ideologies” of the colonial enterprise (162). She also demonstrates that the syntactic contingency of *Heart of Darkness* and *To The Lighthouse* contribute in similar ways to the unraveling of their explicit and implicit imperial contexts. In *Woolf Against Empire* (Knoxville, U of Tennessee Press, 1994), Kathy Phillips also offers a thorough and crucial analysis of the historical contexts of empire treated in the novel, and of how the latter “uproots social assumptions” of empire. I find it surprising that, as in the analyses of Said and Frederic Jameson, who have written so admirably on Ireland and Empire, these closer analyses of Woolf and empire do not consider that Scotland offers historically and politically specific evidence of English imperial presence and cultural suppression.
For Pawlowski, Woolf accomplishes this by infusing real women and their more material relationship to space into every level of the narrative, thus deflating, at times satirically, Conrad’s symbolic feminization of nature, and the cultural geography of the other, as mysterious, threatening, and devouring.

The term is borrowed from James Clifford’s “Traveling Cultures” (in Cultural Studies, Grossberg et al., eds., New York: Routledge, 1991. pp. 100-119). Clifford’s work focuses on the “emergence of diasporic migrant cultures”—non-European or American “cultures of displacement and transplantation [which] are inseparable from specific, often violent, histories of economic, political and cultural interaction” (108; my italics). For Clifford, such a consideration forces us to conceive of “discrepant cosmopolitanisms” formed of diasporas, refugees, migrants, and involuntary exiles within and beyond the colonial world—“traveling cultures” that are defined by unresolved tensions between a disrupted, native home and a transhistorical “monoculture,” and which therefore challenge both localized ideas of cultural essentialism and “the overly global vision” of exilic mobility and cosmopolitanism in the climates of modernism (“Traveling” 180).
As a hybrid novel, *Orlando* participates in several literary traditions: biography, picaresque fiction, travelogue, and oriental tale. With antecedents ranging as far back as Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and continuing, to cite only a few random examples, through Daniel Defoe's *A Continuation of Letters Written by a Turkish Spy at Paris*, William Beckford's *Vathek*, Adolphus Slade's *Turkey and the Turks*, Elizabeth Ramsay's *Ordinary Life in Turkey*, and John Buchan's *Greenmantle*, *Orlando* indeed belongs to a long line of British literary texts set, or partially set, in Turkey.

*Orlando*'s most famous oriental ancestor, however, is probably Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*. When Montagu's *Letters* were published in 1763, they were immediately successful. Montagu's *Letters*, along with the publication of the tales of the *Arabian Nights* in translation earlier in the eighteenth century, popularized a literary interest in Turkey in Britain that continues to this day, and that, I believe, provides one of the impetuses for Woolf's writing of *Orlando*.

The resemblances between them and *Orlando* are really striking. Set between 1717-1718, around the time when *Orlando* was in Constantinople, Montagu's letters provide a vivid picture of her life and a glimpse of that of her husband Edward Wortley Montagu, who, like *Orlando*, was the Ambassador Extraordinary to Constantinople. Just as Edward was recalled to England—in his case, for incompetence—so is *Orlando* is driven out of Constantinople—in his/her case, by an uprising against the Sultan. Montagu and Woolf wrote their works with both private and public audiences in mind. Begun in 1717, The *Turkish Embassy Letters* were reworked and rewritten by Montagu for a more public audience. Primarily a work of fiction, *Orlando* has also been famously called "the longest and most charming love letter in English" (Nicolson 202). In *The Turkish Embassy Letters* Lady Montagu "developed into a fictional narrator, assuming diverse voices and different masks to convey to her audience different points of view, in accordance with the person (or character) she addressed. And the recipients of the letters were no longer merely 'real' readers, but 'implied' ones as well, [. . .] characterised and fictionalised" (Melman 79). The fictional narrator in *Orlando* could be considered to mask a real person, Woolf herself. Montagu must be wary of the verbal skewers of her former friend Alexander Pope. When *Orlando* returns to London, she must also beware of the wits, who would impale her on their tongues. Finally, both Montagu and Woolf delight in the notion of cross-dressing, and the theme of the variability of gender identity is pronounced in both texts.

That Turkey becomes the stage upon which Montagu intimates her interest in women, and the setting for *Orlando*'s sex change, seems hardly a coincidence either. Rather, the choice of this setting is borne out of the genre of the Turkish Tale, of traditional representations of Turkey, or what Edward Said has popularly theorized as orientalism. One dimension of orientalism is its use of the East—as the Middle East—as a backdrop against which a westerner realizes his— or her—sexuality. Even by the time Montagu wrote *Turkish Embassy Letters*, the East had long been a commonplace trope for wanton and unbridled
sexuality. Indeed, writes Said, the Orient "had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (1). Thus, it is hardly surprising that the West should regard the East as a gigantic harem, an impermanent tent but with seemingly permanently recognizable qualities reconstructed at will in the imagination of the westerner.

In Orientalism Said emphasizes the notion that the East is "almost a European invention" (1). The Orient is a place in the Western imagination; the Turkish Tale as a figuration of the Orient is a construction of the Western imagination. The Orient, according to the West, does not exist outside of its conception of it; orientalism, then, is "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience" (1). Of course, both Montagu and Woolf do come to terms with Turkey based on their own personal experiences with it. Montagu did live there with her husband, and she did get to enter a few of its harems. Woolf visited Turkey, and Vita not only accompanied her husband Harold Nicolson when he worked there as a member of the diplomatic staff, she traveled to the Middle East a number of other times. Critics such as David Roessel and Krystyna Colburn are right to argue on behalf of the personal significance of Constantinople/Istanbul to Woolf.

Though Montagu and Woolf had direct experience of the Orient, their representations of it are largely based on orientalism, a discourse that extends well outside of their immediate frame of vision. Repeatedly throughout Orientalism Said emphasizes the notion that the world of orientalism is a "textual" one; knowledge about the Orient is a "second-order" one, "lurking in such places as the 'Oriental' [or Turkish] tale, the mythology of the mysterious East, notions of Asian inscrutability— with a life of its own, [...] 'Europe's collective day-dream of the Orient'" (52). In her letters, Montagu refers to other travelers to Turkey who preceded her. Anxious as she was to make hers the accurate and true account of Turkey, "Montagu's accounts of the Orient, Oriental women, and their customs," argues Meyda Yegenoglu, "cannot be disentangled from the masculinist and imperialist accounts of the Orient offered by male travellers" (82). The direct origin of Orlando, notes Karen Lawrence, might be the letters Woolf and Sackville-West wrote when Sackville-West traveled East in 1926 and 1927 (183). Lawrence continues to write that Woolf drew relatively little from her own trip to Turkey in 1906; rather, she relied on other writing by Sackville-West, such as Challenge, Passenger to Teheran and Twelve Days. In a larger sense, "the Orient functioned for Bloomsbury— and more generally in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discourse— as a code for androgy, bisexuality, and homosexuality" (Lawrence 187).

One could easily argue—and many critics, including Lisa Lowe, Elizabeth Bohls, Rebecca Chung, Billie Melman, among others, have, in the case of Montagu— that Montagu and Woolf seek to critique and expose stereotypical representations of the East. Montagu is quite clear about her desire to challenge the writing of the male travelers whose accounts she refers to in her own letters. For example, she writes to her sister, "Your whole letter is full of mistakes from one end to the other. I see you have taken your ideas of Turkey from that worthy author Dumont, who has writ with equal ignorance and confidence" (104). In Virginia Woolf against Empire Kathy Phillips offers a postcolonial analysis of the sex change scene: "Woolf [...] exposes a direct correlation between Orlando's sex change and the presence of the British in Constantinople. Orlando becomes a woman for the imperial age because the British Empire needs a woman" (188-9). But Yegenoglu is right to point out
that one should not be "too quick to spot sites of resistance to Orientalism" (80); anyway, critiquing is not enough. Continues Yegenoglu,

the symbolic universe of Orientalism is not without any contradictions, displacements, or contestations. Orientalism establishes its unity despite the polymorphous nature of the texts that constitute it. The Orientalist universe, in its unity, is a multifarious or voluminous textuality, but these characteristics [. . .] do not in any simple way constitute a subversive challenge to its power and unity. On the contrary, they enrich the Orientalist discourse. (81)

Indeed, it is through the "citationary process" that Orientalism "anchors its hegemony" (91). In any event, in spite of the two centuries separating them, the East remains for both Montagu and Woolf the milieu in which they could locate the realization of Western sexual identity. The "inner" space of the Orient, [. . .] its women, [. . .] its harem, [. . .] is the very ground upon which [a Westerner's] identity is anchored and founded" (93), Yegenoglu insists. Writing about Montagu, Yegenoglu notes that her "desire to see the veiled and concealed Oriental woman and the consequent attempt to rip off the veil is one that starts and ends with the question of herself and her identity" (93; italics in text; boldface emphasis mine). One might argue that Orlando also represents the East as a harem in which a Western woman is able to indulge in her desire.

Desire is manifested as a gaze, as a look, but it is also aestheticized into an appreciation of beauty and of truth. To see beauty and to arrive at truth, one must remove obstacles; the sine qua non Eastern obstacle is the veil. Quoting Mary Harper, Yegenoglu notes that the veil is "the most characteristic aspect of the "mysterious East"—the quintessential Orient" (48). Yet the veil also functions as an empowering disguise, allowing women to move about, masqueraded, in a state of freedom, realizing their desires.

In the second part of my paper, I will highlight the treatments of the gaze, the veil as barrier, and the veil as enabling contrivance in both texts. I will emphasize that although Montagu seeks to overturn anti-Turkish stereotypes, she is not able to avoid the masculinist and Orientalist gaze, language, and mindset. Although Woolf parodies Orientalist conventions, she, like Montagu resorts to Orientalist tropes and shows more interest in Western than in Eastern identity. Nonetheless, as I will conclude, Woolf's critique of Orlando and the gypsies at least suggests the possibility of engaging with otherness.

Shortly after Montagu arrived in Constantinople, she met a woman named Fatima. Montagu gushes at great length about Fatima's appearance; the following lines are representative: "[. . .] I was so struck with admiration that I could not for some time speak to her, being wholly taken up in gazing. That surprising harmony of features! That charming result of the whole! [. . .] Every turn of her face discovering some new charm!" (89) The effusive and erotic tone of this impression dissipates, however, by the next paragraph, in which Montagu claims that women too, like men, are entitled to appropriate the gaze. What finally matters is not so much Fatima's beauty, as Montagu's right to gaze upon it. In her chapter on aesthetics and orientalism in Montagu's letters, Elizabeth Bohls notes, "The connection between the privilege of being the looker, rather than looked upon, and controlling one's own property and space is at the heart of early British aesthetic theory. The prerogative of the 'Man of a Polite Imagination' both depends on the class and gender privilege of property ownership, and mimics it: aesthetic contemplation emerges as a kind of
visual appropriation” (40). Moreover, as Malek Alloula and others have noted, part of the
tropos of the harem—in which this description is located—is "oriental sapphism" (qtd. in
Lowe 47-48). "In orientalism, the female harem, forbidden to male spectators and travelers,
is invented as the site of limitless possibilities for sexual practices among women" (Lowe 48).
Thus, though Montagu does indeed wish to express genuine affection for and admiration of
Fatima she is not able to avoid the discourse of orientalism.

In an earlier scene (TEL 58-60), when she is in a bath filled with naked women,
Montagu uses the same idealized literary language that one might find in Paradise Lost; the
language functions as a veil here, in a scene that is written to show what is behind the veil of
the mysterious orient. Similar to the scene described above, we see here how Montagu
coopts the gaze; she is here in place of the painter Charles Jervas; "She takes up the
masculine, phallic position and employs his frame in enjoyment, 'wickedly'" (Yegenoglu 91).
Critics return again and again to the end of this scene to discuss the way Montagu, making a
cross-cultural observation, turns the gaze on herself, and represents herself as the
imprisoned one. But just as she does not lift the veil on the bath scene, nor does she truly
reveal herself; her stays stay on.

Montagu prided herself on wearing Turkish clothing, and offered detailed
descriptions of what she wore (e.g., TEL 69-72). As such, she "rhetorically identifies her
position with that of Turkish women" (Lowe 41). She then goes on to reverse the binary
opposition established by earlier writers, and bursts out with how much freer Turkish
women are than their Western counterparts. Turkish women's "perpetual masquerade gives
time liberty of following their inclinations without danger of discovery" (TEL 71).
These inclinations are to indulge in affairs, something that the unveiled British women, such
as herself, cannot do as readily. (Notably, elsewhere Montagu represents herself disguised as
a Turkish woman walking about freely on the streets.) But this claim by Montagu is
reminiscent of that by male travel writers, such as Gerard de Nerval, who traveled to Egypt
and wrote, "in reality, the mask and uniformity of dress would give them much greater
freedom than Europeans, if they were inclined to go in for intrigues . . ." (qtd. in Yegenoglu
89). When Montagu concludes, at the very end, that "the manners of mankind do not differ
so widely as our voyage writers would make us believe" (72), she is more interested, one
suspects, particularly if one considers this quotation in the entire context of the
Letters, in affirming class identity than she is in promoting the late twentieth-century feminist rallying
cry that sisterhood is global.

The sex-change scene in Orlando (133-8) compresses many of the motifs found in the
above passages from Turkish Embassy Letters. In this section, Woolf delightfully parodies the
importance of the veil in a variety of ways. There is the Alexander Popean, mock-heroic
description of the Ladies of Purity, Chastity, and Modesty, a tripartite version of the Angel in
the House whom Woolf as a writer had sought to kill elsewhere. These ladies, of course,
represent the social mores that would forbid a direct treatment of the truth. There is the
final paragraph, in which the truth is not elaborated upon. My own memory of this scene did
not serve me, because I went looking for an inch-by-inch description of the detailed truth of
the ravishing sight of Orlando. There was no detailed picture; I realized this scene was
constructed like a veil, which prompts the imagination to supplant that which is not shown.
My own imagination attempted to fulfill the promise of the passage.
Then there is the long, four-page deferral between the first exclamatory statement, "And now again obscurity descends, and would indeed that it were deeper!" (O 133) and the revelation of the truth that "he was a woman" (O 137). But, anti-climatically, the transformation from a man into a woman seems not to matter to Orlando; she "showed no such signs of perturbation" (O 139). If Montagu is eager to hold up Turkish women as a model for sexual liberation relative to their British sisters, Woolf emphasizes another matter of gender: in Turkey, gender differences are not all that important. "It is only when she leaves for England that Orlando even considers the differences the sex change will make on her life" (Roessel 404): "It is a strange fact, but a true one that up to this moment she had scarcely given her sex a thought. Perhaps the Turkish trousers, which she had hitherto worn had done something to distract her thoughts; and the gipsy women, except in one or two important particulars, differ very little from gipsy men" (O 153).

Though, in conclusion, Montagu seeks to overturn anti-Turkish stereotypes, and Woolf parodies Orientalist conventions, both writers nonetheless resort to Orientalist tropes and in any event are far more interested in using Turkey as locale in which to address Western identity than they are in addressing questions of Eastern identity. At least Woolf however makes a nodding recognition of the effect this kind of ethnocentrism and orientalism must have on an Easterner. We see this recognition in Orlando's sojourn with the gypsies. At first at home with them (141), she soon alienates them when she fails to conform to their lifestyle (142) and shows obliviousness to their daily rigors. Worshipping, in classic Wordsworthian Romantic fashion, the god nature, Orlando fails to realize its significance for the gypsies: as "the vilest and cruelest among all the Gods" (143), with a destructive power to remove limbs and wreak havoc (144). Rather than communing with the gypsies on their own terms, Orlando demonstrates an orientalist attitude, using their lives as material for her own poetic musings. No wonder they are exasperated with, and finally murderous toward, her for turning "[e]verything" into "something else" (143); she is refusing to see them for who they are. Woolf's critique of Orlando here at least suggests the possibility of engaging with otherness on its own terms instead of using that otherness as a means of constructing oneself— or of writing just another "Turkish Tale."

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1 I am still searching for evidence that Woolf read Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*. 
Wilde, Wilde Woolf: the Romance of Dorian Gray and Orlando

Tracey Sherard

Virginia Woolf seems to categorize Oscar Wilde with the Victorian effusion she parodies as Orlando experiences the nineteenth century: “Modern literature, which had grown a little sultry and scented with Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater, revived instantly from her nineteenth century languor when Samuel Butler and Bernard Shaw began to burn their feathers and apply their salts to her nose. She awoke; she sat up; she sneezed” (“Poetry, Fiction, and the Future” 433-4). Woolf’s relationship with Wilde’s texts, however, deserves a more complex delineation than she herself or other critics have offered. There is little evidence that Woolf was significantly influenced by or concerned with Wilde’s work; yet she did see his aestheticism as significant (EVW, “Caution and Criticism” 303). The superficial similarities alone between Orlando and The Picture of Dorian Gray suggest affinity if not direct influence. But along with structural, biographical, and episodic parallels to The Picture of Dorian Gray, Orlando’s vacillation among various constructions of gender draws directly on Wildean expressions of the relation between art and reality, as well as the decadent imagery he used to signify that relationship.

Both Dorian Gray and Orlando are modeled on, or refer to, real lovers of their authors: John Gray (Ellman 307-8) and Vita Sackville West. Both prefaces playfully, sometimes brutally, mock culturally dominant views of what art should be or accomplish. In fact, each text addresses head on the relationship between life and art. While The Picture of Dorian Gray’s subject matter, semi-autobiographical according to some critics, is a portrait of its protagonist, the novel itself can also be seen as a verbal likeness rendered in words. Orlando is a mock biography, a verbal likeness rendered in words but which also uses portraiture and mirrors to explore the relation of art to reality. Both are written from the third person point of view and often utilize free indirect discourse, a technique that blurs traditional notions of selves as separate, singular, distinct modes of consciousness. And in a further parallel, both texts have been used in the study of sexual lives of their authors.

Despite these similarities, however, comparisons of the two works are rare. Denis Denisoff offers a brief but provocative parallel:

the image of a privileged androgynous youth swinging a knife at a head hanging in an attic incorporates portraiture by bringing to mind the climactic scene . . . [of The Picture of Dorian Gray] . . . in which the hero slices at his own likeness.

Orlando and Dorian could have been brothers. Both of the knife-wielding men are wealthy, handsome, and sexually unconventional, and both maintain a youthfullness far beyond the powers of any skin-care products of their time. (258)

Denisoff’s observations here are subsidiary to his larger project, which concerns Woolf’s selective adoption of Vernon Lee’s aesthetic theories. It is his view that Woolf’s “comic” allusion is a “jab at the aestheticist penchant for idealizing the human body, a practice that was anything but novel when directed at women” (Denisoff 258). In short, Woolf was mocking Wilde and “male aestheticism” but not Lee’s. The implications of Denisoff’s
argument are not the subject of this paper; nevertheless, his comparison between Dorian and Orlando may serve as a starting point for an admittedly preliminary study. If Orlando slashing at the head of a moor at the beginning of Woolf’s text is a parallel, similar, or even obverse image of Dorian’s action at the end of Wilde’s, the Moor’s head might be seen as either his likeness or his complete opposite—or an amalgamation of both. Woolf achieves her mock-serious critique of various “official” discourses—those of gender, race, sexuality, and nation, and I would add, even capitalism—through references, direct and indirect, to Wilde’s influential text.

Wilde’s view that life imitates art is well documented, by himself, along with his critics and characters. In The Picture of Dorian Gray, Lord Henry Wotton, or “Harry,” remarks: “I hate vulgar realism in literature . . . [t]he man who could call a spade a spade” (Dorian Gray 142). Virginia Woolf’s protests against materialist writing focusing on buttons and rooftops is also common knowledge (“Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” “Modern Fiction”). Yet both use a lot of detail in their writing to describe the physical appearance of their protagonists as well as their surroundings. Both authors, however, immediately depart from such detail to try and capture something ephemeral or interpretive about their protagonists. Basil Hallward says to Harry: “. . . his personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style . . . The merely visible presence of this lad . . . Unconsciously he defines for me the lines of a fresh school . . .” (Dorian Gray 8). Manner, mode, presence, lines . . . one could even add gesture, in which Wilde was extremely invested, as something ephemeral yet somehow key to personality or even soul. The narrator of Orlando occupies the same position as Basil, an artist trying to capture the “truth” of his subject.

Harry says to Dorian, “You are the type of what the age is searching for, and what it is afraid it has found” (Dorian Gray 160), type meaning not only a cluster of physical traits, but a sort of Platonic ideal encompassing particular traits of personality, spirit, or soul as well—in other words precisely those aspects of human beings so difficult to characterize in fiction, and with which Woolf herself was occupied. Whereas Harry describes Dorian as a “type,” Queen Elizabeth describes Orlando as “the very image of a noble gentleman. But inwardly? She flashed her yellow hawk’s eyes upon him as if she would pierce his soul” (O 24). The souls of both Dorian Gray and Orlando are at stake from the beginning. Basil’s last name, Hallward, has connotations of soul ward or guardian, and in sense he is just that for Dorian, as the portrait he paints houses the true personality, spirit, or soul of Dorian’s self. Queen Elizabeth’s concern with the inward qualities of Orlando, with his soul, even, is a more complicated matter, one which I shall address shortly.

While Woolf seems to place Wilde squarely in the nineteenth century, his free indirect discourse rendering of Dorian’s views on the self are very modernist:

He used to wonder at the shallow psychology of those who conceive the Ego in Man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence. To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead. (Dorian Gray 104)

Note the repetition of myriad here, similar to Woolf’s description of “an ordinary mind on an ordinary day,” receiving “myriad impressions— trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved
with the sharpness of steel” (“Modern Fiction” 2150). Orlando has a revelation similar to Dorian’s about the myriad, multiple nature of the self:

“What a phantasmagoria the mind is and meeting place of dissemblables. At one moment we deplore our birth and state and aspire to an ascetic exaltation; the next we are overcome by the smell of some old garden path and weep to hear the thrushes sing.” And so bewildered as usual by the multitude of things which call for explanation and imprint their message without leaving any hint as to their meaning upon the mind, she threw her cheroot out the window and went to bed. (O 176)

Despite Woolf’s disparaging comment grouping Wilde and Pater, the latter’s impressionistic criticism seems to be an influence on her as well. Also noteworthy in this passage is Woolf’s mixture of free indirect discourse with direct quotation. Throughout the novel we have been experiencing Orlando’s character from within and this passage is no different. The quoted self is only one of many among whom Orlando vacillates, as the well-known scene in the motorcar near the end of the novel demonstrates (O 308).

While Woolf has traditionally been categorized as high modernist, and Wilde as late Victorian aesthete/decadent, Dorian’s free indirect discourse speculations on the multiplicity of subjectivity is distinctly modern—if not “post” so—and presages Woolf’s own representations of multiple subjectivity. Sheldon W. Liebman argues that Dorian is “a major figure in the development of the modern novel” (297), and Rachel Bowlby suggests that Wilde’s character “looks less like a late Victorian Symbol than a prototype of something much more contemporary,” a “walking advertisement,” a symbol even of “the connection between experiences and commodities” (152). Bowlby examines the economic language of the novel’s theories of pleasure and sensation, expressed in words such as ‘surplus’ and ‘price.’ Advertising is a clear instance of life imitating art, since it propagates the belief that purchasing a particular commodity will allow participation in a certain image; it is, in a sense, an instance of culture marking the body physically, stylistically, or even ephemerally.

Dorian’s speculation on the multiplicity of the human Ego occurs just as he is looking at “the various portraits of those whose blood flowed in his veins” (Dorian Gray 104), a strange, compound image of physicality and representation, evocative of English aristocracy, that links blood with money. He asks himself, “[w]as it young Herbert’s life that he sometimes led? Had some strange poisonous germ crept from body to body until it had reached his own?” (104). Earlier Dorian describes the text given him by Harry—an allusion to Huysman’s A Rebours (1884) (and perhaps Wilde’s novel itself)—as “poisonous” (92). Art, popular or high, has an uncanny way of getting into our very biology, Wilde’s metaphor suggests, of marking the body both inwardly and outwardly. In Orlando, Woolf employs this decadent metaphor of germ/poison/disease for art in the description of Orlando’s relationship to literature; he is “a nobleman afflicted with a love of literature” (O 73; emphasis added). Also evocative of Wilde’s decadent metaphor of decay and disease is Orlando’s biographer’s reference to literature as an illness or malady capable of altering physical reality: “It was the fatal nature of this disease to substitute a phantom for reality, so that Orlando, to whom fortune had given every gift . . . had only to open a book for the whole vast accumulation to turn to mist . . . The disease gained rapidly upon him” (O 74; emphasis added).
Significantly, Orlando makes use of decadent ideals of death and decay in the scene where Orlando, recovering from his relationship with Sasha, habitually “perambulates” the house. Mrs. Dupper speculates that it is the “sins on his conscience” which drive him to his wanderings. The narrator notes that “Orlando now took a strange delight in thoughts of death and decay, and, after pacing the long galleries and ballrooms with a taper in his hand, looking at picture after picture as if he sought the likeness of somebody whom he could not find” (O 70). Whereas Dorian’s sins drive him to view and review Basil’s portrait of himself, Orlando’s state of mind leads him to speculate, as Dorian’s free indirect discourse rendering puts it, on the portraits “of those whose blood flows in his veins” (Dorian Gray 104). The proximity in Orlando of sin and standard decadent vocabulary to Orlando’s viewing of portraits of his ancestors is striking.

Along with viewing the portraits, Orlando visits the actual crypt of his ancestors, encountering here a thigh bone and there a rolling skull of a Lord that seem to testify to Orlando “how all pomp is built upon corruption” (O 71), images which turn the type of representation of death and decay we see in The Picture of Dorian Gray into remnants of actual physical bodies. This emphasizes the materiality and structures of oppression upon which the English aristocracy rests, as Orlando’s house rests on the foundation of the crypt. It also brings to mind the head of the moor Orlando slashes at the beginning of the novel during the Elizabethan period.

It was after all under Queen Elizabeth that modern capitalism saw its inception, and Woolf’s novel traces the complexity of Orlando’s subject formation from this moment in English history to scenes of department stores near its conclusion. The exploits of the British empire, as well as Orlando’s privileged position within it—at least before he changes from a man to a woman—are also indicated by references to tea and tobacco throughout Woolf’s novel. In both novels, Orlando, Lord Henry, Dorian, and various other characters smoke frequently and significantly, either cigarettes or cheroots, often as part of “the aristocratic art of doing absolutely nothing” (Dorian Gray 23). Consider the following quotations, the first about Lord Henry, the second about Orlando: “Then he lit a cigarette, and flung himself down on the sofa” (Dorian Gray 34); “About seven he would rise, wrap himself in a long Turkish cloak, light a cheroot, and lean his elbows on the parapet” (O 120). Rachel Bowlby traces the relationship of aestheticism to advertising and consumer culture, focusing on the cigarette, which could connote “the indolence of the beautiful life of the dandy but also, in another context, the sexually transgressive associations of the independent ‘New Woman’ of the period” (148). What is interesting about Woolf’s use of smoking, and I think Orlando smokes more than any other of her characters, is that it occurs in conjunction with notions of aristocratic leisure and gender, as well as with Eastern imagery.

Karen Kaivola traces how theories of homosexuality during Woolf’s time employed orientalism in their definitions, and notes that Woolf “regularly invokes Eastern (“oriental”) imagery to code gender and sexual irregularities as . . . exotic,” racializing “sexuality in order to eroticize (rather than demonize) ‘transgressive desires’” (248). Significantly, Orlando’s change of sex happens in Constantinople. Such orientalism is extremely prevalent in The Picture of Dorian Gray as well, though I would argue in a much more insidious way, as it becomes increasingly pejorative, denoting the debauchery in which Dorian engages as the novel progresses. Inasmuch as this orientalism allows both Wilde and Woolf to allude to transgressive desires, in the case of Orlando it serves, perhaps even primarily, as a genealogy
of the British imperial subject, of which Orlando’s biographer, and arguably Orlando himself, are aware. If we follow the logic of Denisoff’s comparison of Orlando slashing at the head of the moor at the beginning of Woolf’s text with Dorian’s stabbing of his portrait at the end of Wilde’s, it seems that Orlando too attacks a representation of who he really is, even on the inside; a subject, participant, and benefactor of the British Empire.4

But Woolf also uses portraiture itself “to interrogate how established notions of . . . gender” and “inheritance . . . reinforce one another” (Denisoff 257). In Orlando, Woolf takes “advantage of portraiture’s inflexibility for gender- and sex-based political purposes,” argues Denisoff, pointing to the narrator’s insistence that Orlando’s change of sex has little to do with her identity since their portraits remain “practically the same” (O 138). But along with the idea of portraiture as it is used by both Woolf and Wilde, comes the at times nearly indistinguishable symbol of the mirror5. Within each text both symbols seem to morph into each other. Whereas in Dorian Gray it is the portrait that gets marked, in Orlando Woolf uses the idea of portraiture and of mirrors to suggest that Orlando’s newly biological female self is marked as a woman by her clothing and culture. While the narrator’s comment that “[c]lothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath” (O 188) may seem to undermine this view, “at the same time a space is opened up for that construction of femininity to be examined” (Taylor 215).

The Picture of Dorian Gray is full of the language of economics, as Bowlby points out, and just as Dorian must “pay” for his sins or crimes with his once beautiful portrait becoming debased and sinister looking, Orlando’s change of sex, confirmed by the “looking glass” (O 138), comes with a price. While some aspects of being female do not phase Orlando in the least, at points she becomes flabbergasted. On the boat back to England, trying to figure out how she is supposed to behave, Orlando “remembered how, as a young man, she had insisted that women must be obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled. ‘Now I shall have to pay in my own person for those desires,’ she reflected; ‘for women are not (judging by my own short experience of the sex) obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature’” (O 156-7; emphasis added).

Lastly, Woolf may use Wilde’s very name as shorthand for his ideas and reputation. During the 19th century Orlando comes across Nick Green, who bemoans the state of literature as “marked by precious conceits and wild experiments” (O 278). “We live in degenerate times,” he remarks (O 278). Decadent literature was often seen as sick, diseased, and degenerate. Orlando, disappointed in Nick’s prosperity, “had thought of literature all these years . . . as something wild as the wind” (O 279-80). The complicated affair of The Picture of Dorian Gray and Orlando’s experimentalism suggests a “Wilde Woolf” behind these words.
Notes:

1. While working on Three Guineas, Woolf was reading Vincent O’Sullivan’s Apects of Wilde (Brenda Silver, VW’s Reading Notebooks). Surprisingly, the index to Beverly Schlack’s Continuing Presence: Virginia Woolf’s Use of Literary Allusion does not include Wilde. Camille Paglia, interestingly enough, sees a parallel between The Picture of Dorian Gray and Woolf’s To the Lighthouse: “Dorian Gray is like Woolf’s To the Lighthouse, which I suspect it influenced, in the way that a painting and a novel are coterminous, developing in tandem, with the last brush strokes applied to the canvas in the last paragraphs” (529). The Woolf Collection at Washington State University owns De Profundis (1905) signed by Leonard Woolf, The Picture of Dorian Gray (1908), Poems by Oscar Wilde (1909) signed by Virginia Woolf, and The Works of Oscar Wilde (1949), which would be after Virginia Woolf’s death (interestingly, a London Transport bus ticket marks page 1089, the first page of The Portrait of Mr. W. H.).

2. See Karen Kaivola.

3. Joseph Bristow argues that The Picture of Dorian Gray “can be understood . . . in relation to Pater, Ruskin, and Hegel” (48).

4. Kaivola writes: the image seemingly insists upon a radical different between the ‘savage’ African and the ‘civilized’ English lord. The ‘otherness’ of the disembodied head serves as a reminder of the imperialist if closeted conditions of Orlando’s prosperity; the fact that the dead sways ‘perpetually’ in the attic of the house—hidden away from public spaces—suggests that the family is not especially eager to have this ‘constant reminder’ be an open spectacle. Orlando’s swinging at the head with his sword links him with a long line of imperialist ancestors, underscoring his masculinity while suggesting an ongoing need for the English upper class to obfuscate the brutal conditions of its wealth and privilege. (252)

5. Donald Dickson points out that “[t]he metaphor of the mirror establishes . . . a key to the structure of . . . [The Picture of Dorian Gray]” (13).
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(Re)figuration of Gender and Generation in Woolf’s Orlando and Strachey’s Elizabeth and Essex

Tomoko Ohtani

1

Barbara Hodgdon argues that, by drawing Elizabeth the Queen into the space of psychoanalysis, Strachey’s text interrelates her figure with the changing negotiation of gender and race (122). According to Hodgdon, there are two different representations of the Queen in popular culture: one is “the figure whose body bears masculine and feminine identities simultaneously and who is marked by the desire to pass as a man but not to be a man”; the other is “the subject of narratives that work to erase such contradictions and to reinscribe her within the binaries of dominant heterosexuality” (112). That is, the ever oscillating multiple subjectivity of the “unwomanly” Queen, who rules the male-subject, and Virgin Queen who repeatedly refuses state marriage because of her private love for the Earl of Essex. Despite the cultural differences, however, these representations are enclosed in ideological mythologies of the unstable female body and sexual subject, thereby rearticulating the gender contours of national history. Focusing upon its different reception in Britain and America, Hodgdon examines Strachey’s text through binary oppositions between authentic culture in a masculinized Britain and mass culture in a feminized America. Hodgdon points out that Strachey’s ending reveals the text is refigured or remasculinized by way of dehistoricizing Elizabeth’s multigendered social identities. Rather, it is Sally Potter’s Orlando that is finally celebrated as a text imagining “multifaceted subject positions and alliances” (170). My aim here is to reconsider the relationship between Elizabeth and Orlando in Woolf’s Orlando, historicizing the transcultural space in which postmodernist celebrations of androgyny are produced and circulated. Woolf’s representation of androgyny can be regarded as a fantasy of eternity crossing the boundary of gender and generations, yet this seemingly eternal figure is inevitably related to death. Strachey’s text literalizes this fantasy in the execution of the Earl of Essex by Elizabeth the Queen.

This essay is primarily concerned with the representations of gender and generation in Lytton Strachey’s Elizabeth and Essex as well as Woolf’s Orlando. I would like to interpret the two texts by focusing upon the various contradictory representations of Elizabeth the Queen in relation to her subjects, such as Essex and Orlando. My intertextual reading will show that Elizabeth and Essex go beyond the typical male/female duality and even the androgynous subject, to consider older/younger generations of males which Strachey links to the problematics of fundamental historical changes, that is, that of premodern/modern/postmodern. Strachey’s text, I will argue, refigures Queen Elizabeth by emphasizing the roles of gender and generation in such historical and cultural restructuring.

2

Hodgdon’s analysis of Elizabeth and Essex shows that the ending of the text represents succession from one generation to the other, from the generation of feudal ideal to that of a neo-aristocracy of proto-modern statesmen, respectively represented in the characters of two
men, the Earl of Essex and Elizabeth’s minister Robert Cecil (124). This succession between the generations is suggested at the beginning of the text.

The English Reformation was not merely a religious event; it was also a social one. While the spiritual mold of the Middle Ages was shattered, a corresponding revolution, no less complete and no less far-reaching, occurred in the structure of secular life and the seat of power. The knights and ecclesiastics who had ruled for ages vanished away, and their place was taken by a new class of persons, neither chivalrous nor holy, into whose competent and vigorous hands the reins, and the sweets, of government were gathered. (Strachey 1)

Initiated by Henry VIII, this crucial change from one generation to another generation was completed during the reign of Elizabeth I. The rebellion of the Northern Earls in 1569 was marked as the moment of transition from the premodern to the modern. “Yet the spirit of the ancient feudalism was not quite exhausted. Once more, before the reign was over, it flamed up, embodied in a single individual—Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex” (Strachey 2). Thus, the text seems to foreground Elizabeth and Essex as the titular figures. Nevertheless, the structure of the text betrays the title: the relationship between Elizabeth and Essex occupies the central space neither at the beginning nor at the ending.

The narrative of succession and historical change closes neither at the climax of their contradictory relationship, i.e. the execution of the Earl, nor at the Queen’s deathbed. The brief epilogue belongs to Cecil, seated at his escritoire. It is Cecil, not Elizabeth, who writes the history; “reflecting upon the revolutions of kingdoms, and dreaming, with quiet clarity, of what the hours, even then, were bringing—the union of two nations—the triumph of the new rulers—success, power, and riches—a name in after ages—a noble lineage—a great House” (Strachey 286), the desire and power of man, not those of woman, generate and reproduce the modern nation states. Thus, the desire of Queen Elizabeth is precluded from Strachey’s Elizabeth and Essex.

While Strachey’s text suppresses multigendered social identity, Woolf’s Orlando seems to celebrate androgynous figures by presenting many cases of sexual indeterminacy. The most obvious instance of all is Orlando’s switch from man to woman: “Orlando had become a woman—there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity” (O 127). Orlando’s gender ambiguity or androgyny is also remarked by not only Orlando her/himself but also her spouse Shelmerdine, shortly after their engagement: “‘You’re a woman, Shel!’ she cried. ‘You’re a man, Orlando!’ he cried” (O 227). Furthermore, as recent feminist readings have shown, the vision of androgyny in Orlando produces a “new” biography to parody the canonical forms of biography, putting into question the demarcations taken for granted between genders and writings. Woolf’s feminist rewriting of the visionary subjectivity dissolves the various gaps between man and woman, and between fact and fiction.

Nonetheless, such a reading remains to be historicized by taking into consideration the social differences between generations as well as genders. While Woolf’s androgynous figures critically re-insert the issues of gendered subject and gender hierarchy, the often discussed elements of metafiction and the presence of a postmodern, self-conscious
narrator, I suggest, function to evade and even marginalize the question of succession and historical transition. Apparently, in contradistinction to Strachey’s text, the theme of generation does not seem to be fully explored in Woolf’s Orlando. Yet, as my intertextual reading will show, the theme of generational change is shrewdly thematized in Orlando, and the representations of Elizabeth the Queen are in fact deeply connected with Woolf’s revision of social formation and history.

3

In Woolf’s text, the appearance of the Queen, sending for her subject, Orlando at her throne, seems to be merely a momentary one. However, at its close, when Orlando sees Shelmerdine again, the sign of the Queen reappears: not her living body but the dead. “All was phantom. All was still. All was lit as for the coming of a dead Queen. Gazing below her, Orlando saw dark plumes tossing in the courtyard, and torches flickering and shadows kneeling. A Queen once more stepped from her chariot” (O 29495). Without ceasing to repeat in the narrative of historical transition and sex change, the Queen figure exists as the most important factor that determines the whole structure of the text of Orlando.

In rewriting Woolf’s ending, Potter’s film text shrewdly frames her narrative with the angelic figure, stressing a different kind of shift from one generation to another. At the closure of Potter’s film, Orlando tells her daughter to look up. Above them the angelic figure, who, in the film, sang a song in honor of Queen Elizabeth as she approached in the royal barge four hundred years before, now sings that s/he is free of the past and is neither a woman nor a man (Potter 62). It is not only the demarcated category of gender that is disrupted and destabilized in the textual practice of androgyny; the desire of Orlando within the pre-Oedipal mother-daughter relationship can be connected with multiplicities of sexual desires and pleasures across the generations. There an imagined community between performer and spectator emerges. At the closure of Potter’s Orlando, a figure of nostalgia, that is, the angel in the garden, presides over that regenesis, a temporal and referential shift that joins two moments of origin. “Present at Queen Elizabeth’s progress toward death and at Orlando’s birth into mortality, he speaks with pressing urgency (‘I am being born and I am dying’) to the post-Elizabethan age of AIDS, of the need for envisioning multifaceted subject positions and alliances which recall Orlando’s and Elizabeth’s desire for company as well as Elizabeth R’s final image of the Queen in the good company.”4 By focusing on Jimmy Somerville and Quentin Crisp’s Queen, contradictory representations of gender and generation, which Strachey’s text suppresses, seem to be rediscovered in the film.

To put it differently, we can find the issues of generation, or, more properly, the trace of social differences inscribed in the text of Potter’s Orlando: the death image of Elizabeth in the scene of the Elizabethan era. The Queen gives Orlando the Order of the Garter, telling him to be “the son of [her] old age... [her] favorite and [her] mascot” (Potter 8). And in the later scene, he is summoned to the Queen’s bedchamber, where Elizabeth seduces him into his inheritance. Elizabeth, beckoning him to her bedside, pulls his face in her lap, kisses him sensually. Then, she, from her bodice, takes a rolled parchment which she tucks sensuously into his garter; giving him and his heirs the deed to the house, but on one condition: “Do not fade. Do not wither. Do not grow old” (Potter 9). The death image of Elizabeth is represented as the contrast between the ageing Queen and the young Orlando. Apparently, the issues of generation as well as those of gender and sexuality are interconnectedly represented; Orlando’s immortality is also emphasized. Orlando’s
androgyny seems to be characterized by his/her eternal youth; unlike Queen Elizabeth, Orlando continues to live into the 20th century.

In Woolf’s text, however, that androgynous figure contains the image of death. The thematic connections of gender, sexuality and generation, I want to remark, are crystallized around the image of death, more powerfully insinuated by reference to Orlando’s betrayal.

One day when the snow was on the ground and the dark panelled rooms were full of shadows and the stags were barking in the Park, she saw in the mirror, which she kept for fear of spies always by her, through the door, which she kept for fear of murderers always open, a boy—could it be Orlando?—kissing a girl—who in the Devil’s name was the brazen hussy? Snatching at her golden-hilted sword she struck violently at the mirror. The glass crashed; people came running; she was lifted and set in her chair again; but she was stricken after that and groaned much, as her days wore to an end, of man’s treachery. (O 27)

Seeing a youth who looks like Orlando kissing a girl, Elizabeth destroys his image by smashing the mirror which reflects the image of the boy. This figurative execution caused by “man’s treachery” shows that the seemingly eternal figure, crossing the boundary of gender and generation, is inevitably connected to death. In order to historicize postmodern and ahistorical subjectivity of androgyny, Orlando should be reread by paying attention not only to issues of gender but also those of generations. And I urge that the Queen figure plays a very important role in historicizing apparently ahistorical and postmodern representations of androgyny.5

Such figurative death, I will argue in the final part of my paper, is literalized by Strachey’s text in the execution of the Earl of Essex by Elizabeth the Queen, and that the scene of the execution is concerned with the very theme of generational difference in connection with gender and sexuality. Facing Essex’s betrayal in every possible way, Elizabeth “felt her father’s spirit within her... and a dark inevitability, a ghostly satisfaction; her father’s destiny ... was repeated in hers; it was supremely fitting that Robert Devereux should follow Anne Boleyn to the block” (Strachey 263). Different from the metaphorical execution in Orlando, not merely Essex’s image but his body itself is destroyed with his head cut off. The violent action of the execution is indeed depicted.

The headman whirled up the axe, and crashed it downwards; there was no movement; but twice more the violent action was repeated before the head was severed and the blood poured forth. The man stooped, and, taking the head by the hair, held it up before the onlookers, shouting as he did so, “God save the Queen!” (Strachey 268)

And the dismemberment and annulment of the male subject does not merely symbolize sexual castration. The scene embodies not only the punishment of the perfidy of those Elizabeth loved, but the female ruler’s punishment of her male-subject for his high treason.

What is to be noted here is that this primal scene of execution engenders and signals the transition from premodern to the modern political order. It is in this signifying process of disfiguration, making literal the figurative and imaginary act of punishment, that the text
of Elizabeth and Essex goes beyond the conventional gender polarities, and even the androgynous subject, to consider previous and forthcoming generations of males. Strachey links the generational difference to the problematics of fundamental historical changes, that is, that of premodern/modern/postmodern. The contradictory relationship between Queen Elizabeth and her subjects should be re-examined in the context of succession from one generation to another.

Such historical examination of the texts will be done in the transnational context of Europe in a transitional moment in which two distinct modes of production coexist. Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, for instance, in their sophisticated feminist studies of early modern culture, Engendering a Nation: a Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories, examine the place of gender in contesting representations of nationhood in early modern England. Howard and Rackin argue that “the transition from dynastic kingdom to modern nation was integrally connected to shifts in cultural understandings of gender... The cultural centrality of the Elizabethan theatre made it an important arena for staging the diverse and contradictory elements of this transition” (iii). Their argument is focused upon the gendered relationship between England and France, both of which are construed as emerging nation states in early modern period. I myself, extending the merely international relation of England and France, have re-read Henry V in terms of the contradictory relationships between England, France and the Duchy of Burgundy, which constitute the more richly complex and transnational context for the transition from the premodern to the modern social formation.
Notes

1 Such exclusion of female body and power has been repeated in the reception history of Anglo-American culture, except in some representations of psychoanalytic texts. “But while Freud, in a congratulatory letter, praised Strachey’s understanding of Elizabeth, professional historians were clearly uneasy about psychoanalytic readings of her ‘character’” (Hodgdon 124). Among such instances are included J. E. Neal and G. B. Harrison. Even Virginia Woolf writes, “though I am (&I think we all are) secretly pleased to find Lytton’s book a bad one, I also feel depressed... that Lytton whom I loved & love should write like that”; seven month later, she speaks of “how I had no longer anything to envy him for; & how, dashing off Orlando I had done better than he had done” (D 3 208-9,234). Yet, it is not Hodgdon’s aim to critically examine Woolf’s comment on Strachey’s book and put her into male-dominated tradition of high culture and history writing. Such a gesture is most clearly shown in her postmodern reading of the text(s) of Orlando.

2 Carolyn G. Heilbrun points out that the resemblance between Strachey’s Elizabeth and Essex and Virginia Woolf’s Orlando should be understood not in terms of the general perversity of the Bloomsbury group but with regard to the same understanding of the androgynous mind, which pervades both books. According to her, Virginia Woolf suggests that the androgynous mind, possessed by Elizabeth, saved England once and might yet save the world (149). In spite of such seeming resemblance, however, Woolf’s text does not make the figure of Elizabeth the Queen central in the narrative of historical change. The significance of this decentering, I think, needs to be explicated in relation to representations of gender and generation.

3 As Pamela L. Caughie suggests, for example, “[with] its eponymous character who changes from a man to a woman halfway through the novel, with its capricious narrator who at times speaks in the character of Orlando’s male biographer and at others sounds suspiciously like Orlando’s female author, this novel assumes … a ‘double discourse.’ This double discourse is one that is oscillating and open... ‘a text that alternately quotes and comments, exercises and critiques’” (483). Recent studies on Woolf, gender and androgyny which should be mentioned here include Minow-Pinkney, Burns, Bowlby and Hankins. Perhaps, these feminist interpretations and Hankins’ cultural study of mass production and commodification in particular, might be further reexamined and supplemented from the viewpoints of post-colonial theory and transnational cultural studies.

4 I am indebted here to Hodgdon’s analysis (169).

5 As for the postmodern cultural representations of the Queen figure, I would like to introduce an example which represents sexual indeterminacy or gender ambiguity in Japanese popular culture (Figures 1,2,3 and 4). The figures show the Queen Elizabeth in a shōjo comic, Nanatsu no El Dorado (Seven El Dorados) (Figures 2 and 3). The representations of gender and sexuality are embodied not only by the Queen herself; they are also (re)figured by the protagonists of the story, who are identical twins (a girl and a boy) and whose sexual identities are hidden from people within the text (Figures 1 and 4). What should be noted here is that the variously disseminated female figures in this comic are represented as sexless
or ‘cute’ (even the figure of the Queen looks cute) while those in the modern Western (high) culture, such as Strachey’s Elizabeth, appear to be excessively sexualized. These representations of the Queen can be interpreted from the viewpoint of shōjo culture that is Japanese version of postmodernism. As an example of transnational cultural studies of shōjo culture, the Takarazuka Revue Company and Shakespeare, see Ohtani, “Juliet’s Girlfriends” 162-63. See also Robertson.
Works Cited


Moments of Greening: Ecofeminism and Human Ecology in Between the Acts

Kathryn Miles

Six thousand years ago prehistoric cultures in what is now Europe began to cultivate cereals and domestic herds as a way of subsidizing hunting and gathering. The rise of agriculture in Europe created an entire cultural revolution, as these early societies began to dig clay from the earth to fashion early dwellings and pottery and to clear forested areas for arable farm land. This shift from hunter/gatherer societies to Neolithic farm settlements set the stage for many twentieth and twenty-first century land use patterns. It also, even in its most primitive form, exacted a lasting and profound effect on the European landscape.

Though our relationship with the land has been a long-standing one, the effects of that relationship are of very modern interest. The rise of technology, particularly aviation technology in the 1930s, allowed us to re-envision our place on the earth and the cost of our presence on nature. Virginia Woolf embraced this new perspective with a sort of nervous enthusiasm. In her essay, “Flying Over London,” she marvels at the way in which physical distance offers a different vantage of our presence on the earth. Imagining a plane ride, she exclaims: “nothing more fantastic could be imagined. . . . The River Thames was as the Roman saw it, as Paleolithic man saw it, at dawn from a hill shaggy with wood, with the rhinoceros digging his horn into the roots of rhododendrons” (CDB 204). But this vantage in all its imaginative splendor also proves disturbing, as it leads Woolf to question the ways we have encroached upon natural land and the detours we have made from our original state: “Everything had changed its values seen from the air. Personality was outside the body, abstract. And one wished to be able to animate the heart, the legs, the arms with it . . . so as to give up this arduous game. . . . of assembling things that lie on the surface” (CDB 210).

Woolf uses this change in perspective, this awareness of the indelible footprint we have left on the natural world, as the basis for Between the Acts. In the opening scene of the novel, a drawing room conversation about the state of affairs in the village leads the Olivers and their guests to the topic of a proposed cesspool. Bart Oliver, the family patriarch, explains that “the site they had chosen . . . was . . . on the Roman road. From an aeroplane, he said, you could still see, plainly marked, the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabeth manor house; and by the plough” (4).

The decision to begin the novel here might have simply been a way for Woolf to playfully express her own frustration—after all, her composition of Between the Acts was interrupted several times as she and Leonard protested a proposed Sewage Pump in their own backyard.1 Nevertheless, the scene also serves an important narrative function. Acting as a sort frame through which the rest of the novel is viewed, this scene establishes a crucial ecological context and point of reference for characters and readers alike as they await the presentation of Miss La Trobe’s annual pageant.

Much has been made of the allegorical nature of Woolf’s pageant, particularly to its allusions of war and her own pacifism.2 While these elements are certainly present in the
pageant, it is important to recognize that they exist in concert with Woolf’s ecological concerns as well. La Trobe’s pageant, a nod to E. M. Forster’s environmental polemic England’s Pleasant Land, traces the history of land use in Britain and offers its own brand of human ecology. Through the construction of this pageant and the highly gendered response it garners from the audience, Woolf demonstrates a sophisticated version of early ecofeminism: an awareness of the interconnectedness of rural management, nature, and gender politics.

This interconnectedness is the vision of Miss La Trobe, whose dedicated commitment to the town pageant brings Woolf’s ecofeminist polemic into dramatic relief. To this end, the pageant serves a variety of functions both for La Trobe and Woolf. First, it offers La Trobe a medium through which she might make sense of her own life. As Betty Kushen suggests, La Trobe’s pageant “offers the only escape from the painful separateness of life and the destructive potential of this sentient state in which each organism struggles for survival” (290). But the pageant also allows La Trobe to offer her own form of environmental advocacy by denouncing this very “separateness” of our lives and the natural world. La Trobe’s pageant provides a brief history of the ways in which different ages have altered the environment through description and practice; in so doing, she “heals and by healing restores the severed fragments of reality” (Kushen 292).

The sense of unity that La Trobe achieves out of these fragments is one that connects contemporary (read: developed) England with its primordial history. An example of what Gillian Beer calls prehistory or “pre-narrative domain”, the pageant “creates its own past, suggesting a continuity between an unrecorded previous existence for the characters and the language of the text that makes them be” (9). The effectiveness of this connection depends upon not only La Trobe’s liminal subject position, which ultimately grants her the distance necessary to critique the existing society, but also her sense of place and narrative. Through this three-tiered system, La Trobe invokes that pre-narrative domain described by Beer.

La Trobe offers no apologies for her lack of objectivity in rendering her green depictions of England. Characterizing herself as “an outcast” who had been “set apart from her kind” by Nature, La Trobe enjoys a close relationship with the natural world. She perceives herself as floating beneath the “earth’s green waters,” and thus able to cultivate meaning in landscape (210). She plants words of “one syllable” in mud made fertile by her presence; these words yield sentences as her “dumb oxen” plows through the mud, farming the land and her ideas (212).

The crop of words rising out of the primordial ooze is, of course, her pageant, and its connection to the land is reaffirmed throughout the text. The narrator, for instance, describes the backstage—a metaphoric oomphalus for characters and productions—as an ancient swamp:

> beyond the lily pool the ground sank again, and in that dip of the ground, bushes and brambles had mobbed themselves together. It was always shady; sunflecked in summer, dark and damp in winter. In the summer there were always butterflies; fritillaries darting through; Red Admirals feasting and floating; cabbage whites, unambitiously fluttering round a bush, like muslin milkmaids,
content to spend a life there. Butterfly catching, for generation after generation, began there. (56-57)

Space becomes place in this description: the location of the swamp, removed from the rest of the Pointz Hall grounds and “sunken” suggests a division from the modern world, as if years of culture had built up around it. The generations of butterflies— one of the earliest of modern-day organisms to arrive on the prehistorical scene— reifies its timelessness and almost palimpsestic connection to early geological eras.

The production and characters born out of this primordial setting mirror the creation of their subject: the rise of England. Empowered by their progenitor, La Trobe, they too possess the tools needed to excavate the history of that tenuous relationship between humans and their environment. Established through the chorus’s refrain, the raison d’etre of the pageant is clear: “Digging and delving we break with the share of the plough the sod” (139). In so doing, they offer an informed critique of England’s ploughs and their ability to scar the island.

This critique relies on gendered characterizations for its effectiveness. Following the miraculous birth of England, who is “Sprung from the sea,” the ambiguous infancy of its land is soon replaced with a sexualized femininity, as depicted, again, by the chorus’s narrator:

With roses in her hair,
Wild roses, red roses, 
She roams the lanes and chooses 
A garland for her hair” (80).

The audience responds in kind: England is going a “maying, nutting,” they exclaim (80). An allusion to Medieval fertility rituals, this depiction suggests that England’s fair land is courting humanity.

Though this is certainly not a novel way of looking at England, or the earth in general, it is nevertheless important in terms of Woolf’s environmentalism. By calling attention to these depictions of nature, Woolf also calls attention to what many contemporary ecofeminists— such as Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein— cite as the primary cause of environmental misuse. The problem, they explain, is not only that we create an anthropocentric view of nature— scholars have been telling us that for hundreds of years. No, they insist, the real problem is that we, as a culture, also create an androcentric view of the natural world that is formed through patriarchal systems and values— a decidedly male vision of the world. We treat nature the way we treat women, and both suffer as a result.

The chorus of the pageant emphasizes this characterization of Nature. Cast members serving as everymen proudly announce that, after “Cutting the roads” that will remain for thousands of years, they “wore ruts in the grass . . . built the house in the lane” (80). The imagery here can also be read as highly sexualized: early man cuts roads as if breaking England’s hymen, then takes her repeatedly, creating a rut in her “grass” or metaphorical pubis. The sexual tone of the passage is supported by the pageant’s chorus, who proudly proclaim the success of their conquest:
I kissed a girl and let her go,
A nother did I tumble,
In the straw and in the hay” (81).

This tryst between the pilgrims and the land, is a fertile one. Man impregnates England with houses and other accoutrements of civilization, which become their “ashen hair babe.” Gendered male, this child stretches out his arms invitingly as warrior, fighter, Oxford don, and seafaring men establish residency. It’s a questionable sort of existence, though, as the ashen-haired babe seems to belie a real finality or mortality through his premature gray.

La Trobe has shown us her environmental vision here: man, figured as a sort of sexual predator, seduces young Nature and leaves her with an unruly and spoiled child who throws raucous parties for his teenage friends. As the ashen child matures and grows into a sort of heightened—and reductive—masculinity, his behavior becomes less excusable. Consider, for instance, the pageant’s account of early modern capitalism: “Commerce from her Corunopia pours the mingled tribute of her different ores. In distant mines the savage sweats; and from the reluctant earth the painted pot is shaped. . . . The violet and the egglantine over the riven earth their flowers entwine. No longer fears the unwary wanderer the poisoned snake” (123). Nature has lost its mystery, as the snake has lost its archetypal status and no longer seems mythological to the wanderer. Meanwhile, indigenous peoples are forced to continue the violence against the “reluctant” earth, demanding it hand over its bounty. Market economy has made Nature little more than a tool for the advancement of civilization. And, again, La Trobe’s choice of language here—“reluctant,” “riven”—suggests not only sexuality, but violent sexuality. Rape.

The explicit violence in La Trobe’s characterization of land use in England resonates powerfully with the women in the novel. Isa, who has just read about a rape committed by British soldiers, finds that she is unable to relinquish the image of violence perpetrated against women. The nature of the events leading up to the rape only reify the connection in Isa’s mind. The victim of the rape had been skylarking with soldiers before being lured inside by the promise of a horse with a green tail. This fertility imagery—reminiscent of the symbolic green horse in Sir Gawin—suggests fecundity and vitality. It is used quite differently by the soldiers, however, who see it as an opportunity for further conquest and destruction.5

The image of this scene continues to haunt Isa throughout the afternoon, and all subsequent encounters occur through the lens of her rape thoughts. This is particularly poignant in a conversation about the weather—about the threat of nature on the pageant. As those around her discuss whether it would “be wet or fine,” Isa hears a sort of countermelody of the news story with details such as “The girl screamed and hit him about the face with a hammer” (22). Violence against women and the natural world become entwined in Isa’s mind, and the rape story becomes a burden she must carry, as she joins the audience of the production.

This response to the rape is strengthened by the environmental focus of La Trobe’s pageant. Already weighed down by the knowledge of the attack, Isa finds herself further affected by the action on stage. Questioning the tragic nature of the production and its focus on the land, she laments, “How am I burdened with what [the pageant] drew from the earth; memories; possession. This is the burden that the past has laid on me” (155). Not surprisingly, the scenes she dwells on are those of violence. This fixation creates a sort of
environmental estrangement for Isa. During the intermission of the play, she attempts to free nature of its burden, offering to shoulder it herself: "Fly then, follow," she hummed, 'the dappled herds in the cedar grove, who, sporting, play, the red with the roe, the stag with the doe. Fly, away. I grieving stay. Alone I linger, I pluck the bitter herb by the ruined wall" (112).

That evening, after Isa has paid the bills and finished ordering the luncheon, she tries to reestablish her sense of place within the natural world, but again the violence interrupts her thoughts and severs her connection: "The girl had gone skylarking with the troopers. She had screamed. She had hit him . . . . What then? When Isa looked at the flowers again, the flowers had faded" (216). The connection between the rape of the young woman and the rape of the landscape becomes clear, and Isa finds herself no longer able to participate in the frivolous appreciation of nature voiced earlier that day. She has, instead, adopted La Trobe's vision of the exploited land though the exploitation of the young rape survivor. And, as Catherine Wiley explains, "her intuition concerning the significance of the girl's rape connects her to the feminist conclusion about the disappearing woman" (18). The connection between the disappearance of the natural world and women is made clear for Isa and offered to the reader as a universal truism.

Lucy Swithin, Isa's aunt by marriage, shares in her response to the day's events. Haunted by the ghost of a childhood memory in which her brother, Bart, chastised her for empathizing with a dying fish, Lucy seeks to reestablish a primordial and virgin landscape. As Bonnie Kime Scott has argued, Lucy serves as a double to Miss La Trobe and her primordial connection (381). This connection is made largely through Lucy's fascination with the estate pond, which as Stephen D. Fox suggests, serves as the "symbolic center of the novel" (470). Lucy's history with the pond is a long one, as it serves as a retreat for her where she can reflect upon the nature and the cosmos. It is here that Lucy recognizes that "the two groups, fish and men, are equally small in comparison with the great physical powers of the universe" (471).

When Lucy is not musing about the cosmos at the fish pond, she can often be found armed with her copy of "An Outline of History," a geological account of the natural world and our small place in it. Lucy remains fascinated with the idea of a prehistory, an ecological system existing well before homo sapiens ever wandered the globe. To this end, Lucy bears a striking resemblance to Woolf in "Flying Over London" as she seeks evidence of "rhododendron forests in Piccadilly" and "iguanodon, the mammoth, and the mastodon" throughout the countryside (BTA 8). She seeks, unsuccessfully, an untouched England, one existing prior to its sexualization, which leaves contemporary critics such as Catherine Wiley wondering why she "finds prehistory more appealing than recorded time, apparently preferring mastodons to mud" (11). The answer, I would suggest, is that prehistory is appealing in that it makes sense of recorded time and offers an alternative, ecological system, rather than a sociopolitical one, through which one might view the world. Lucy seeks this connection in everything: viewing starlings in the barn, for instance, she muses, "they come every year . . . From Africa." As they had come, she supposed, when the Barn was a swamp" (103). This awareness is shared by no one, as Lucy is ignored and speaks only "to the empty air" (103). Nevertheless, Lucy returns to the fact like a mantra, time and time again throughout the novel, deriving comfort from the idea of eternal return and connection with an untrammeled wilderness.
The conclusion of *Between the Acts* suggests that Woolf saw herself as a sort of Lucy figure, offering warnings about the earth that no one would hear. Horrified by the scars left by the mounting war on the landscape, Woolf spent much of her last years trying to share that concern with others. Nevertheless, the novel belies a real concern about the reception of ecofeminist ideas by her audience. In the final scene of the pageant, as La Trobe and her company attempt to hold a mirror up to the human condition—asking all the while if the creation of Mr. M’s bungalow didn’t murder by dissecting the landscape—the audience turns away, evoking Jonathan Swift’s maxim that we are unable to see ourselves in satire or embedded critique.

It might be tempting to do the same today, as Woolf’s generation of environmental criticism does seem provincial or overly essentialistic at times. But are her concerns really all that different from ours? In an age when war continues to threaten large portions of the earth, when land misuse still mirrors the exploitation of women, Miss La Trobe’s pageant continues to have currency, if we allow it—a belief held, at least instinctually, by characters such as Isa who fidget in their seat, concerned of a “future disturbing” her “present.” The question remains, though, how we will respond when faced with this mirror. Will we, like the characters in *Between the Acts*, turn away from the ugliness of our reality, or will we, finally, be willing to confront this visage, monstrosities and all?

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1. Specifically, Leonard was at odds with the Chailey Rural District Council, who sought to reclaim land surrounding Monks House as the site for a sewage treatment system. (D5 page)


3. Kushen goes on to suggest that it is this act of creating art out of the chthonic that gives meaning to every human’s existence. She writes, “each man is an artist insofar as he perceives the living patter on objects, however inarticulate and intuitive his perception. On the level of primary process, ordinary people are poets and ordinary life a fit subject for art” (290).

4. This definition of ecofeminism owes much to Deep Ecology, a concept and movement first established by Norwegian Arne Naess in 1972, which emphasized the importance of removing one’s self from anthropological biases before making pronouncements on the natural world.

5. Woolf based this moment of the novel on an actual account printed in the newspapers. For more on this crime, see Stuart N. Clarke’s “The Horse With The Green Tail.” *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 34:3 (1990): 3-4.
"Orts, Scraps and Fragments": The Postmodern Legacy of Between the Acts

Bruce Gilman

We are always, it seems, catching up to Virginia Woolf. Between the Acts may be the prime example of what our various critical communities have wrought over the past 60 years, since Woolf's last, thin, apparently harmless novel appeared. In fact, this one small volume has caused informed readers a disproportionate amount of discomfort; it has, according to Edward Bishop, "occasioned a more disparate critical response than any other of Woolf's major novels" (116).

How can this be, we ask? On the face of things, Between the Acts is a lark - a tragicomic tale of community history, of rural folk always at odds, yet always in love. To be sure, it is a stylistic experiment, which, with its adaptation of divergent modes of discourse, has alerted postmodern readers to the still-advanced, ever-innovative technique of an aging artist. But how can such a seemingly simple narrative tale prove so provocative? How is it that we, the critical community, have "agreed to disagree" over the form, the content, and ultimately the meaning of this brief work?

As a means of illustration, let me first recount what appear to be a few steadfast areas of agreement concerning the book. For most readers, Between the Acts is clearly a historical document: the communal ethos of Pointz Hall, with its medieval, even classical allusions to tribal behavior, points to Woolf's fascination with the carnival of social ritual. We agree, too, that the book is in part a fictional political manifesto: with its panoply of potentially oppressive forces, ranging from the looming presence of German aeroplanes, to the personal, angst-ridden violence of Giles Oliver, to the inane, empty cant of the Reverend Streatfield, it is clear that Woolf fears any moves to disrupt communal order in the name of a personal agenda or a cultural cause.

But there are many more places where the novel's legacy remains contentious -- where our critical chorus lacks all signs of harmony. Two areas of disagreement are of particular interest. Each, in its own way, is illustrative of the fractured nature of our response to Woolf's novel; each, in a different way, questions our basic critical assumptions about the work we do. First, is the mood of the book itself. Surely, practiced critics of Woolf's oeuvre should have little trouble assessing the tone and atmosphere of this last book, especially considering the mood of the author herself in the years 1938-1940. But such is not the case. "From the outset," Edward Bishop tells us, "readers have disagreed whether the mood of the book is bleak and despairing [...] or affirmative and comic" (116). A sampling of fifty years of criticism only confirms Bishop's observation. Early on, Jean Giguet found the novel "bitter ironic," laced with "a deep disillusionment, akin to despair" (326), while for Joan Bennett, Woolf's tale owed much to "comic spirit" (131). More recently, Pamela Caughie has declared that "from the perspective of postmodern art, the mood of Woolf's last novel is not one of despair but one of affirmation" (56). Yet Gillian Beer finds no fixed tenor to the story: "the mood," she contends, "is [...] questionable: it remains vacillating" (144).
More difficult still, for critics, is the question of meaning. To clearly understand the fixed polarities of interpretation, we need only recall Mitchell Leaska's eloquent opinion that Between the Acts is "the longest suicide note in the language" (451), as opposed to Susan Kenney's belief the story confirms that "the life instinct triumphs over chaos" (279). In like manner, Pamela Caughie finds that Woolf's pageant is the locus "where nothing is concluded and no one takes responsibility" (54), while for Alan Wilde, "the novel [...] affirms [...] the possibility [...] of new modes both of expressing and believing in the world" (161).

Clearly all of the writers quoted above are "correct," in the larger sense that they have "passed the test" offered by Woolf's text -- which is to engage the novel, to grapple with its ambiguities, its fragmentation, its seemingly endless stream of contradictions, and to offer their best narrative interpretation. This is the practice of our critical craft: to organize, to elucidate, to interpret. That work has been done effectively by many who have shared their incisive, provocative commentary at these very conferences. So we celebrate the story of Between the Acts. It is, despite our disagreements, a complete story, a comprehensible narrative. In her last complete creative effort, Woolf successfully tweaks our collective imaginations, and in our collective, authoritative response, our work is accomplished, as both readers and as critics.

Or is it? Is our work with Between the Acts really done? Really satisfactory? Is it possible that a part of Woolf's intent lies neglected -- that this small piece of literature has something tangible, even momentous, to say beyond the finite limits of its covers? Is Woolf's last novel simply a pleasing, lyrical "swan song," meant largely as entertainment? Or is it, in fact, a serious satire of our literary and critical communities, meant to critique our collective presumptions about our discipline?

With Woolf and her book as examples, my intent is not to join the ranks of the established critical discourse on Between the Acts, but to attempt, at least momentarily, to step outside that discourse. I believe that Woolf's last effort is nothing more or less than a radical departure from the modern -- a purposeful, altogether calculated attempt to introduce new notions of reflexivity, of ambiguity, and of indeterminacy to the canon. My contentions are threefold. First, Woolf's effort is a serious lampooning of all critical authority. Second, Woolf means to call into question the primacy of the novel itself -- not simply to "undo the canon," as Gillian Beer would have it (134), but rather to raise doubts about the efficacy and viability of the narrative itself -- that vehicle which ironically ensures Woolf's continued literary stature, which certifies her very own creative "self." Last, it is my contention that Woolf's final novel is an early, purposeful, even revolutionary argument for one of the primary thrusts of postmodernism -- what Jean Lyotard has repeatedly called the "dissolution of the narrative." In Between the Acts, Woolf playfully derides the central notion of all critical discourse, that underneath every story lies the verifiable primacy and dependability of language. In this, her last novel, Woolf ironically parodies all that her life's work as a progenitor of the "modern" stands for, including the coherence of narrative structure, the unity of style and form, the transcendence of language. For Woolf, finally, there is no singular, believable, identifiable story to tell. Rather, hers is a multiplicity of stories, conjured in ambiguity, executed without any guarantee of legitimacy or philosophic coherence. Shockingly, this is the last tale she means us to hear.

For evidence of Woolf's biting assault on literary criticism, we consult the novel itself. In a constant search for authority, Between the Acts continually juxtaposes the "text" -
- which we may read as Woolf's continual intertextual references to poetry, to historical literature, and to the pageant itself -- with representations of the "reader" or "critic," embodied in the local gentry, or the more "common reader" found in the audience. Yet despite this considerable range of material, and a significant cast of characters, no one coherent, reliable standard serves; no one interprets with accuracy or legitimacy. The assembled guests at Pointz Hall quote verse continuously -- often inaccurately, more often out of context. The reporter from the paper is virtually anonymous; he reports only the facts of the performance; he seems, perhaps like other critics of the time, interested only in the explicit details of the event. Finally, when the fractured looking glass has exposed the collected assembly as angst-ridden and intellectually barren -- "was that voice ourselves?" (p.189) -- the audience turns to Woolf's pompous, outmoded icon of interpretation. Ironically labelled "our representing spokesman," Reverend Streatfield stutters a barely articulate response, which eventually formulates the rhetorical question, "What message was our pageant meant to convey?" Woolf's sardonic caricature of authority is all too easy, given the speaker, and his pitiful laments: "Am I too presumptuous? Am I like angels, where as as a fool I should absent myself?" "As the play or pageant proceeded," the Reverend confesses. "my attention was distracted. Perhaps that too was part of the producer's intention [...] I leave that to you, I am not here to explain" (p.191-192).

A plainer, repeated diatribe against criticism -- against "ourselves" -- parallels Between the Act in Woolf's late diaries, specifically during the summer of 1940, when she is close to finishing the novel. "I wish I could invent a new critical method," the author laments, "something swifter and lighter and more colloquial yet intense: more to the point and less composed: more fluid" (Diary 6/ 22/ 40). Woolf's complaint is clearly against turgid, class-inspired prose, against stricture and artificiality. Later, after visiting the London Library, she recalls a telling incident with potentially devastating results: "Yesterday [...] I took down a book of X's criticism. This turned me against writing my book, turned me against all literary criticism: these so clever, so airless, so fleshless. Is all that kind of exhausted air?" (9/ 17/ 40)

Woolf's two-pronged attack on her own means of livelihood continues throughout her last novel. Not only does she admonish her own critical discipline, she also repudiates the validity of the novel form itself. As Gillian Beer observes: "Between the Acts comes to no conclusions;" it is "without closure [...] opposites exist alongside, and cancel each other's meaning" (130). More, says Beer, Woolf has given us a work where "cliche carries as much meaning as does meditation" (135). Woolf's methods of pastiche and fragmentation serve to continually unsettle, to satirize our expectations of sense and sensitivity from the modern novel.

Again, the diaries which parallel the formative moments of Between the Acts offer much in the way of explanation of Woolf's contrary disposition. Before she begins the book, Woolf exclaims: "I don't want to write more fiction. It's to be dialogue: and poetry: and prose" (Diary 8/ 6/ 37). Lest we think this declaration a whim --little more than a poetic flight from what she describes as "the horror of The Years" (5/ 27/ 38) -- Woolf articulates not only a significant change in style, but also a radical change in perspective for her new undertaking. "I rejected," she proclaims; "We substituted," she contends. "We' composed of many different things [...] we all life, all art, all waifs and strays" (4/ 26/ 38). Woolf's intent is not only to question the stylistic parameters of novel writing, but also to critique the very purpose of historical narrative. Rather than employ the "I" of historical power and privilege,
the "I" of the established ruling class aesthetic, Woolf anticipates the postmodern move toward equanimity, with its insistent inclusion of the combinatorial voices of pluralisms: the "we" of her own "waifs" and "strays."

In another diary entry, dated three weeks later, Woolf's opinion is typically guarded, but altogether clear, especially when we consider that her life span has but four months remaining. "I am a little triumphant about this book," the author muses. "I think it's an interesting attempt in a new method. I think it more quintessential than the others. A richer pat" (Diary 11/23/40). This, with the world apparently collapsing around her, with recurring demons slowly invading her psychic consciousness for the last time. Ironically, this little book -- which has proven so troublesome an obstacle for critical analysis -- this slim novel is, in the author's own words, the quintessence, the "purest essence" of her writing. Of all her works, Woolf contends that it is her most perfect in form.

Perhaps our best clue to this paradoxical conundrum lies in author's last, seemingly insignificant refrain: "a richer pat." A pat, of course, is a small, molded form -- and so Woolf has systematically broken the old "molds" in Between the Acts, and contrarily established "the new method." Reflecting on this "new" style, while still early in the composition process of the novel, Woolf challenges herself to dismantle the old parameters of writing: "Let it be random and tentative," she declares, a kind of writing characterized by "perpetual variety and change" (Diary 8/6/37). Two years later, having finished the better part of the manuscript, the author sums up in her typically concise, wholly suggestive manner: "scraps, and fragments, as I said in Pointz Hall. I am playing with words" (5/31/40).

Here, stated with such a casual, matter-of-fact off-handedness, is another telling indicator of the most radical of Woolf's late compositional strategies. Were her native language French, she might have chosen that very word which has ironically come to symbolize the rigors and potential disjuncture of contemporary analysis. Had she said "jouissance," then we could easily make the link from Between the Acts to any number of radical, ground breaking theorists - in particular those French who will, some thirty years after Woolf's declaration, hail the advent of rhetorical "play," which concretizes the notions of ambiguity and indeterminacy as legitimate stylistic forms. If we look carefully at the pages of Between the Acts, we find a careful, "playful, but altogether calculated assault on the centrality of the word itself, and the assumed coherence of "logos." Woolf not only "plays" with language and its systematic order, she calls into question its efficacy as the legitimate vehicle for communication. Further, she questions our continuing belief in the sacred repository of language, the book itself.

Woolf's critical assault on the rhetorical and the literary begins early in the novel, and never abates. We are lead first by that "foolish, flattering lady" to what was once "the heart of the house" -- "the library." Our guide offers a "telling" cliche: "Books are the mirrors of the soul" -- a soul, the narrator quickly rejoins, which is "tarnished" and "spotted." This a modern soul, we are told, which may perhaps be still "sublime," but it is much more likely "bored" (p.16). Soon, we are joined in the library by Isabella Oliver, who adds another cliche to Woolf's conversation, by claiming "The library's always the nicest room in the house." Yet as she examines the library shelves, the narrator observes: "There they were, reflecting. What? What remedy was there for her at her age -- the age of the century -- in books?" (p.19) Systematically, Woolf debunks the mythology of the written word: here, books -- poetic compilations of our oldest primal desires and our most ennobling historical
fantasies, served up in storied volumes by the likes of and Keats and Spenser, reflect -- reflect what?, the author asks. At mid-century, books found in *Between the Acts* represent our own ennui, our own disillusion, our own impotence.

Woolf's barrage of cliched innuendo grows more specific as the novel progresses. Lost in "his irritation, his rage [...] with old fogies," even the "whole of Europe," G. Giles Oliver realizes that the word no longer serves; summarily, our narrator observes that Oliver has "no command of metaphor" (p.53). Within only seconds, confronted by her peers' inability to articulate Shakespeare, Mrs. Swinton laments, "We haven't the words -- we haven't the words" (p.55). As if these central characters' powerlessness isn't enough, the condition of the audience as potential readers and critics is equally disillusioning; as they wait for the pageant to begin, the state of the assembled crowd is expectant, but undetermined: their "books (are) open," the narrator confides, and then warns: "no conclusion to come to" (p.59). Thus, the fate of "the book," the disempowerment of "the word," are really Woolf's story. Woolf's parodic thrusts at our language, and our belief in the systemized use and value of that language, never waiver. As Isabella Oliver searches for the word that Giles can not "speak in public," her inner poetic voice falters once again, in a most revealing manner: "Do we know each other?" she asks. "Not here, not now," is her sad rejoinder. "But somewhere," she opines, "this cloud, this crust, this doubt, this dust -- She waited for the rhyme, it failed her; but somewhere surely one sun would show and all without a doubt would be clear" (p.61). Perhaps more than any other moment in *Between the Acts*, this instant illustrates the power and coherence of Woolf's cultural and linguistic critique. Here -- in the continuing collective failure of the novel's protagonists to articulate their affect, to complete their sentence, to find their "word" -- is what can only be labelled a postmodern critique. For, as Jean Lyotard tells us, the postmodern is "that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia of the unattainable" (340).

And what is it we would "attain?" What is it we and our companions at Pointz Hall, in June of 1939, long for? We desire nothing more or less than the meaningful, articulate phrase, the clearly enunciated substance of "the word," the determinant meaning of "the book." This is the wreckage of Isabella Oliver's unending yearning for completion and wholeness; this is the nostalgia for Lyotard's "unattainable," which is the subject of Virginia Woolf's "play." And play she does -- with form and meaning, with rhyme and echo, with spirit and speech. *Between the Acts* tells us that our mythified "pageant" -- our own rhetorical and theatrical "play" -- is nothing more than a fantasy towards coherence, which is both soothing and horrifying, but also ambiguous and indeterminant, in its origin and nature.

As Alan Wilde has suggested, *Between the Acts* "accepts the contingent and unresolved in a way we recognize as postmodern" (161). Put another way, Woolf's diminutive book testifies in a profound manner to the postmodern constructs of impermanence, of change. And change, Ihab Hassan tells us, "has no disciplinary bounds; (it) reveals itself best in mutations of genres [...] disjunctions [...] dispersals of discourse" (10). Thus, "dispersed are we"-- as are our notions of the primacy and the inviolability of our word. "Let us talk in words of one syllable, without larding, stuffing, or cant," cries the director of Woolf's metaphorical pageant. "Let's break the rhythm and forget the rhyme" (p.187). In a phrase, Woolf's subversive alter ego declares an end to the style and content of the modern. So, we understand that Miss LaTrobe, ever the mouthpiece and reflection of
her creator, must end her day alone, in search of "a new plot," waiting for "something" to rise "to the surface," bound always by "words without meaning -- wonderful words" (p.212).

It is La Trobe's and Woolf's final predicament, and their singular challenge to those critics who will attempt to follow their creative lead, which are perhaps best explained by the French critic, over 30 years after the completion of Between the Acts. "The postmodern artist," declares Jean Lyotard,

is in the position of the philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not [...] governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged [...] by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules are what the work of art is itself looking for. The artist and the writer are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done. (341)

We are always, it seems, trying to catch up to Virginia Woolf. Yet, as she warns in the early moments of her composition of Between the Acts, "the pack may howl, but it shall never catch me" (Diary 5/20/38).
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Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* as Political Satire

Wayne K. Chapman

This is a paper that visualizes writing spatially in the context of ideas and processes dramatized as the world squared off for a sequel to the Great War of 1914-1918. The world is a stage. War is a theater. A revolution involves the overthrow of governments but also the turning or spinning of a body around a center or axis, as in the revolution of the seasons. Add a tangent—or a horizontal axis to the vertical one—and discrete instances of displacement over time resolve into the abstract evolutionary curve we call history. In a satiric play and a satiric play-novel, respectively, the two Woolfs—Leonard and Virginia—made similar efforts to dramatize the tumultuous state of a polarized civilization between 1938 and 1941. So let us consider one Woolf and then the other, allowing that a necessary amount of plot summary is carried in the account of the lesser-known and earlier of the two works.

Making a play of the idea that T. S. Eliot had implemented in the poem "Gerontion," Leonard Woolf found that the house of Europe in the spring of 1939, when The Hogarth Press published *The Hotel*, came to the seedy state of the symbolic but ironically named Grand Hôtel de l'Univers et du Commerce, microcosm and remainder of the formerly magnificent Grand Hôtel du Paradis. The play was a labor that took Leonard a long time to finish. It was, according to Virginia, "the one he's brewed these 10 years & more" (Diary 5: 133) but lately brought into being in reaction against German, Italian, and Soviet intervention in the Spanish Civil War, which cost their nephew Julian Bell his life. In April 1938, she began working on her novel (see Diary 5: 133 n. 3). By August, Pointz Hall, as it was then called, posed its own creative difficulties like those with which Leonard wrestled, though she perhaps made light of them both:

I cant unstring my mind after trying to write about a lily pool. P.H. is to be a series of contrasts. Will it come off? Am I in earnest? It[']s to end with a play. L. is writing his in the garage room. I note he doesn't like to be asked when will it be done? He has, amusingly, all an artist[']s sensibilities. (Diary 5: 159)

It seems too much of a coincidence, for Leonard's "artist's sensibilities" and his work on behalf of international government with Shaw, Sidney Webb, and the Fabians during World War I, that Shaw's apocalyptic drama *Heartbreak House* (1919), about reaching the end of civilization in an era of revolution and darkness, was partly indebted to Leonard and Virginia, if unwittingly, for the characters of Hastings and Ariadne Utterword, a colonial governor and his wife. Shaw acknowledged the debt generally in a letter of 1940, quoted in full by Leonard Woolf (Beginning Again 126) when recalling relations between the Woolfs, Shaws, Webbs, and Wellses at the time of the 1914 war. In June 1916, three of those couples (excluding H. G. Wells and his wife) spent the weekend together in the country house Wyndham Croft, in Sussex, the setting of *Heartbreak House* (Gibbs 10-11). Shaw's play enjoyed a revival in 1937 and 1938, as German soldiers were again on the march across Europe.
The Hotel occupies a pivotal place in Leonard Woolf’s memoirs as the twilight of both his public and private life. Recalling life near sixty and downhill erosion by death, he struggled with this play “about the horrors of the twilight of Europe, the kind of hush that fell upon us before the final catastrophe” (Downhill 248). But he was eighty-seven when the memoir was published, and he failed to recall that in 1938 writing a play was a way of transmutating words into action in a theater of ideas. Like the experimental (and politically socialist) theater of Rupert Doone, W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, Leonard’s play dealt with revolution as an articulated and demonstrated process. In September and October 1938, it seemed that the Group Theatre of Doone might actually provide the necessary leftist platform for a London production (VW, Letters 6: 287, 296). "Intent as a terrier," Maynard Keynes "gravely approved" (VW, Diary 5: 180), and Stephen Spender evidently conveyed the play to Doone, thinking it "a roaring comedy & very original" (183). As Virginia noted that Leonard’s "play will be tried by the Group," she simultaneously noted in her diary that Victor Gollancz had offered him £500 to write Barbarians at the Gate (1939) in double quick time, a feat of journalism that Leonard found less difficult than writing an original play.

"[W]ritten in the tension of those horrible years of Hitler's domination and of the feeling that he would inevitably destroy civilization," The Hotel took for its main scene the revolving door of the foyer "through which a string of heterogeneous characters would have their entrances and their exits"--a Conservative British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and various Fascist, Nazi, and Communist agents, among others, to make a "scene in real life" seem "infinitely dramatic" ("Introduction," Hotel 5). Peter Vajoff, the proprietor of the hotel, atheist, underground arms merchant and father of Christopher, pacifist, Christian (as his name too obviously signifies) and martyr to an evil deed "that good may come of it" (48), learns what it means to "pay the price," a simple creed that holds that the "bed bugs" of the play, the foreign agents to whom Vajoff has sold the same merchandise, must pay "in good honest English pounds or American dollars" (29). According to the proprietor, they are people who come in through that revolving door and . . . go out again. I bow them in and I bow them out. I am ready to provide them with anything which they demand and I can obtain, bombs or beds, machine guns or mayonnaise--it is all one to me. What they do with their bombs is no more concern of Peter Vajoff than what they do in their beds. I am proprietor of the hotel; my affair is business, the business of the hotel. (35)

This commercially abased Hotel of the Universe is otherwise Eden on the Adriatic coast, fallen tragically victim in Act III to waylaid villains from a ship of fools bound for an international conference in Ravenna. The hotel's Jewish refugee, Samuel Jacoby, offers the only real sympathy to Vajoff and Christopher's mother, the chambermaid, Mary. Jacoby knows what it is to experience "the end of one's world, so to speak" (88), having lost his son in a concentration camp. The "modern kind of God" is no good because there are so many fools and knaves whom one can see all round one turning the world into hell that there's no point in taking the trouble to invent an invisible super-fool or super-knave to put the blame on him. (89)
Like damned souls on the Last Day, "going out, one after the other, through the revolving door," the knaves and fools file out past the questioning Vajoff. The audience understands that a son has saved a father from a fatal double-cross. Fritz Schwarzer and Virginio Antonelli, burlesque spokesmen for the "Berlin-Rome axis" (28) are guilty, and so is the Russian Vassilevsky, who instigates a bungled hijacking that destroys the hotel. But the chief fool, Sir George Hepburn Jones, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, is complicit in unconsciously leaking privileged information. Trained by Balfour for diplomatic service, Jones seems unaware of the left-handed nature of Balfour's observation that "It doesn't matter how slow and stupid you may appear, Hepburn . . . provided always you see . . . what the other fellow is getting at" (53). Jones doesn't see enough, but he is largely a device to allow the playwright to complain about the Baldwin Government's noninterventionist policy so far as brilliant young intellectuals joining the Loyalist struggle in Spain is concerned.

Though pacifism had been officially repudiated by the Labour Party after Italy's invasion of Abyssinia, pacifist intellectuals such as Aldous Huxley and Julian Bell drew the line against Franco and his Axis supporters (Sontag 309-11). What Julian's Uncle Leonard worries about are the young Oxbridge poets of the Hogarth Press series, Auden included, who, like Sebastian Smith in the play, volunteer for the International Brigades to find themselves ensnared in the Communist fight against Spanish Trotskyites and anarchists--decidedly not the idealistic struggle against the Barbarian they'd signed up for! Jones takes on Smith's case only to have something with which to embarrass the German, Italian, and Russian delegation at Ravenna and, at the hotel itself, to raise suspicion between the British and Irish Communists. What will the spider do but "Suspend its operations," T. S. Eliot wrote in "Gerontian" (66). And Leonard repeated the indictment in 1939 as he published the play and Gollancz brought out the Left Book Club Edition of Barbarians at the Gate, choosing freedom over despotism and warning that the real
danger to civilization is not in Hitler, Mussolini, and the Nazi and Fascist systems, not in the barbarian at the gate, but within the citadel; it is in the economic barbarism of France and Britain and the ideological barbarism of Russia. For both these barbarisms destroy freedom and make the idea of a community in which the freedom of each is the condition of the freedom of all an illusion and a sham. (219)

This was after the Group Theatre, the Westminster Theatre, and even the Co-operative Society declined to produce the play, as Virginia Woolf reported to their mutual friend the actress Elizabeth Robins (Letters 6: 343).

Both Tom Eliot and Leonard Woolf directly influenced the play-novel, Between the Acts, and, after them, there was H. G. Wells. Eliot's philosophical play The Family Reunion opened in March 1939 at the Westminster Theatre, and Virginia Woolf seems to have been in good spirits about the competition:

Tom sent me his play, Family Reunion. No, it dont do . . . It starts theories . . . He's a lyric not a dramatic. But here there's no free lyricism . . . as stiff as pokers. And the chief poker is Tom: but cant speak out . . . A clever beginning, & some ideas; but they spin out: & nothing grips: all mist--a failure . . . I'm of course . . . selfishly relieved: why? Had it been a success would it have somehow sealed--my ideas? [D]oes this failure confirm a new idea of mine--that I'm evolving in PH about the
drama? Or is it jealousy? & then there's L's play. A mixture of motives. . . . (Diary 5: 210)

So, not by accident, Virginia Woolf's last novel experiments with the theory and practice of giving a play, technically an interlude or pageant, in which mirrors are turned on the audience in a revelation sequence, as in early twentieth-century adaptations by the Masquer's Society of English court revels. The mechanical voice of the gramophone ("Dispersion are we. . . .") gurgles, ceases; darkness looms; and Mrs. Swithin reads about evolution in H. G. Wells's *The Outline of History* and the Paleolithic role of the "Old Man," or Patriarch, in light of mysteries interpreted by Freud and Jung and with the Swastika glaring from a nearby page. Identified as a "good luck" token, the "odd little symbol spins gaily round the world," Wells observed, ironically; "it seems incredible that men would have invented and made a pet of it twice over" (Wells [1921] 113). To be sure, if Leonard thought "Hitler and Stalin and Mussolini--the nazis, communists, and fascists-[had] finally destroyed the world in which [his play] was written," his wife gives the impression in her novel that the future, by 1941, might look too much like the primordial past--a revolution being a reversion or setback to England in its days as a swamp. And Wells endorsed that view in his 1940 edition of *The Outline of History*: "The world is as dark today as it was during the visitation of the Black Death," a setback in "a halting and blundering progress" (13).

In *Virginia Woolf and Fascism*, edited by Merry Pawlowski, Natania Rosenfeld articulates a handsome comparison between Leonard and Virginia that focuses on the "inefficacy of pacifism in certain situations": the recollection of a jungle experience in Leonard's *The War for Peace* and the "monstrous inversion" of birth in *Between the Acts*, when Giles Oliver encounters and stomps on the snake that has gorged itself on a toad too large to swallow. The scene dramatizes Giles's personal crisis of arrested action, his fear to stand on his beliefs, angry at the apathy of the older generation while "the whole of Europe--over there--was bristling . . . with guns, poised with planes" (BA 53). I would add that young Giles, a London stockbroker, had better learn to take a stand on his convictions or prepare to pay a terrible price--the price Peter Vajoff pays in *The Hotel*, the price civilization pays not only to the barbarian at the gate but to the economic and idealistic barbarians in the citadel. Giles has been unfaithful to his wife, Isa, who, however, does have the courage to force the Prufrockian moment to its crisis:

> Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they 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. (219)

As political satire, the politics are figurative and sexual; as satire, the novel is optimistic. As Auden has said of Byron's genius, "it believes that the evil it attacks can be abolished" (xi). Taken as a whole, the several acts of Woolf's pageant means what the audience thinks: "let us . . . keep together, for there is joy . . . in company", "we all act all parts", "we need . . . something to bring us together" (BA 196, 197, 198).

"England am I," one of the players intones and the villagers sing, "half their words . . . blown away," but music has the ability to join the community together, seemingly inspired by the Piltdown man, Silbury Hill and Wiltshire uplands sections of every edition of Wells's book through 1940. (See Wells 53, 83, 105). Their words echo ones "old Swithin," "Old
Flimsy," "the old girl" (BA 27) has been reading or recalling at various points in Woolf's novel:

Cutting the roads... up to the hill top... we climbed. Down in the valley... sow, wild boar, hog, rhinoceros, reindeer... Dug ourselves in to the hilltop... Ground roots between stones... (78)

Before the pageant advances to the Canterbury pilgrims and scenes of Merry Old England, the prehistoric antecedent of Pointz Hall as a center of social life is suggested. It is like Wells's account of Silbury Hill, where "people, widely scattered... over the west and south and centre of England... assembled at some particular season of the year in a primitive sort of a fair" (Wells 83). The basis of civilization depends on agreement between the rulers and the ruled, between the patriarchs and matriarchs, between the generations, and between the sexes.

Times change. The tribal chief might not be the feared leader that the savage Neanderthal or Reindeer man grew up fearing in his squatting places about Europe. An irreverent "old man" might sham the Primal Law to frighten a child, as Old Oliver does, springing "from his hiding place behind a tree," his newspaper "cocked into a snout" (12) to entertain a grandson. Brother and sister, husband and wife, grandchildren--three generations of Olivers occupy an ancestral house with a seven-hundred-year-old garden. Human relations being what they are, happy endings are uncertain and must be negotiated. The international darkness closing like a storm, the dark ages, or the Black Death might be endured if outfaced. The interval between the wars might only have been an interlude, after all, between the main acts of a tragedy. But Virginia Woolf closes by allowing that survival is possible for civilization as for a family:

It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks.

The curtain arose. They spoke. (219)

Those words give hope.
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Virginia Woolf has long been identified as a modernist, while more recently she has also been championed as a forerunner of postmodernism. However, accounts of *Between the Acts* that place it in one of these two categories fail to account for the novel’s complex view of history and the ramifications it has for our contemporary world. Rather, we must see the novel as intensely “post-postmodern” in its prediction of and deployment of postmodern historical constructivism, its ultimate rejection of the most extreme ramifications of this type of theory, and its suggestiveness for a new direction.¹

T. S. Eliot’s description of Joyce’s *Ulysses* provides one common definition of what modernism is: the construction of unified and autonomous “art” objects which lie outside of, or function as protection from, the corruption of “contemporary history,” or what one might provisionally call “reality” itself. Woolf also praises Joyce’s novel, but for different reasons. Where Eliot praises Joyce for his unity of form, Woolf rather appreciates his disregard for formal demands in his pursuit of “reality” itself (“Modern Fiction” 107). Here, Woolf notes the fundamental disparity between the novel’s duty to represent “life” in all of its complexity and the traditional provinces of art: unity and beauty.

*Between the Acts* is characterized by this typically modernist tension between the unity of artistic achievement and the chaos or dispersal of reality. Lucy Swithin is prone to “one-making,” while Miss La Trobe attempts to provide a structural unity with her pageant. When there is an unexpected gap in the unified whole of her artistic creation, La Trobe bemoans its loss, “Illusion had failed. ‘This is death,’ she murmured, ‘death’” (*BA* 99). For La Trobe, the absence of artistic shaping is tied to a vertiginous loss of meaning, a confrontation with the “real” that is analogized with death itself.

While this tension between the unity of art and the dispersal of reality is typical of Eliotic modernism, by making the center of the novel a historical pageant, Woolf moves into the territory of the postmodern novel. *Between the Acts* clearly suggests how history itself is not a mimetic reflection of an inviolable “real,” but is rather a creation of retrospective and concurrent signification. In this, the novel reflects Lyotard’s claim that the postmodern age is characterized by the “withdrawal of the real” in which a referentiality outside of influencing signification is impossible, and that, indeed, reality itself can be seen to be a production of textuality. Where Eliot opposes the form and function of art and history, through La Trobe’s pageant, Woolf presents the telling of history itself as an artistic creation and art itself as constituted by history. In addition, it initially presents “Scenes from English history” (*BA* 61), but later conflates English history with the history of English literature, presenting history proper alongside pastiches of historical literary styles like the Renaissance drama and Restoration comedy.

Although this overlapping of history and literature partially deconstructs the separation of art and life, the novel does this more aggressively in other ways. The most clearly “postmodern” moment occurs when Miss La Trobe retires to the local pub to
contemplate her next artistic creation. “There was the high ground at midnight; there the rock; and two scarcely perceptible figures... She set down her glass. She heard the first words” (BA 147). At first, this passage merely seems to be a description of Miss La Trobe’s artistic inspiration and how she “hears” how her next pageant will begin. At the end of the novel, however, Giles and Isa Oliver confront one another and echoes of La Trobe’s vision become evident as they prepare both to fight and, perhaps, to make love: “It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among the rocks. Then the curtain rose. They spoke” (BA 152). This closing passage does more than close the chapter on the contentious relationship between the Olivers for the day; it puts their very status as independent agents into question. The reference to the “high place” reflects the “high ground” that Miss La Trobe envisions, while the “two figures” in La Trobe’s vision are certainly the Giles and Isa presented here. When the final sentence encloses the Oliver’s on a stage, where the curtain rises, we are presented with the possibility that Giles and Isa are part of a play, rather than merely its observers, that they are artistic creations as opposed to “real” agents. These final lines of the novel cement the multiple ways that the novel dissolves the distinction between the constructed world of the pageant and the “real” world of its observers.  

This is not, however, mere textual game-playing, nor is it merely a commentary on the fragility of ontology that is often associated with postmodernism. Rather, we can look for the importance of these moments in the politics of the novel’s treatment of history.

Postmodern historians like Hayden White have postulated that historical discourse cannot have any claim to representing reality because of its allegiance to a narrative form that expresses the “truth” of what happened, while, in fact, being based on elisions, selections and erasures, which create a unified whole. This whole cannot be an accurate representation of reality, White argues, because it excludes and omits all that does not fit into its “explanation,” the chaos and inconsistency of “reality.” As White argues, “In this world, reality wears the mask of meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine...” (“Value” 21). Here, White argues, the “real” past is a chaos of uncertainty and random events, while “plotting” and narrative give it the illusion of completeness and meaning. Through narration then, and particularly through its unity and coherence, we deform any access to reality in an attempt to help us cope with the present.

Similarly to Woolf’s analysis of the disjunction between “reality” and “art,” White here sees the unity, coherence and “beauty” of historical narrative as incompatible with the chaos and uncertainty of “reality.” From this perspective, Miss La Trobe can easily be seen as both an example of White’s historian and a Woolfian “artist.” In fact, for constructivist historiographers like White, there is little difference between these functions, as both take raw material and shape it into the form of a narrative through exclusions, erasures and selections, falsifying and fictionalizing that which might have purchase upon empirical reality. Miss La Trobe, then both creates a work of art and a historical text, attempting to create order and unity out of chaotic raw material.

Although La Trobe may be seen as “modernist” in her attempts to impose unity and order, she can also be seen as “postmodern” in her efforts to expose history as mediated and constructed.  

Like much feminist criticism influenced by poststructural and postmodern theory, Between the Acts, (via La Trobe’s pageant) both re-presents and parodically deconstructs traditional patriarchal histories, exposing how what had been naturalized as the subject matter and formal presentation of “history” are actually discursive productions of
patriarchal ideology, affirming how historical discourse itself is complicit in the oppression of women. As Woolf points out in *Three Guineas*, it is a masculinist paradigm that defines the great “acts” of great men, particularly in the field of battle, as the central subject matter for (particularly historical) narrative. In this case, it is impossible to prevent war when battlefield exploits are given the privilege of place as the central element to be immortalized. In *Between the Acts*, however, traditional historical subject matter is either absent (as in the case of the military history Colonel Mayhew would like to see) or parodically deflated (as in the case of colonial history and the idealization of the Victorian domestic). Where history (and narrative itself) is dependent on climactic “acts,” usually of violence or conflict, Woolf’s novel suggests that it is more important to look “between the acts,” to find not only our past and present, but also, and fundamentally, reality itself. By excluding the traditional subject matter of historical discourse, Woolf (via La Trobe) points to how historical discourse has been inextricably linked to acts of violence, domination, warfare, and bloodshed. La Trobe’s omission of these elements offers the possibility that there are other stories to be told or, indeed, that an absence of “stories,” may be preferable. Woolf’s novel illustrates how patriarchal assumptions about what is valid and important construct what is included in history and what is then perceived to be reality.

In this vein, much contemporary criticism has turned postmodern historicism to radical political advantage by noting how history, once taken to be a more or less transparent representation of the past, is actually a discursively constructed contributor to various hegemonic dominations. Here, certainly, La Trobe’s pageant and Woolf’s novel help to transform the patriarchal “history” of great men into a “story” with limited purchase on material reality and which contributes to patriarchal domination. Nevertheless, constructivist historicism has also been criticized for implying, or insisting, that the “real” past, as such, is inaccessible, while all versions of it that we possess are tantamount to fiction in their reliance on narrative coherence.

The criticism is often justifiably based on political, social and ethical concerns that argue that the radical relativizing of the historical record damage the ability of marginalized peoples to build community identity and to fight hegemonic power. Certainly the contention that history is parallel to or equivalent to ideologically charged fiction disrupts the possibility of marking certain versions of history as true and others as false, making the invalidation of such ludicrous “stories” as holocaust denial somewhat more difficult. As Norman Geras argues in the *New Left Review*, “If there is no truth, there is no injustice... if truth is wholly relativized or internalized to particular discourses or language games... there is no injustice....” (qtd. in Jenkins 23). So, while a postmodern view of the world as drenched in textuality and signification can help us dismantle existing power structures, it may also limit our access to resistance. Woolf’s novel is foresighted in seeing this problematic and offering us some tentative ways to deal with the problem.

As we have seen, certain elements of Woolf’s historical novel lend themselves to a postmodern reading, particularly in its dissolution of the boundaries between history and fiction and its exposure of the ways in which historical representation is more politically charged social construction than mimetic reflection of reality. Still, however, I believe that Woolf’s novel demands a post-postmodern reading both in its denial of the possibility of a cohesive and united artistic purity independent from reality and in its denial of a radical relativism that denies any possibility of access to the “real.” In doing so, it makes a claim for
feminism based not only on a denaturalization of patriarchal discourse, but also based on a
claim for a more accurate history that affirms the reality of women’s oppression and the
possibility of a resistant politics with a purchase on material reality.

Just as Hayden White sees history itself as coherent and unified, a fabrication
constructed from narrative that excludes the “real,” Woolf’s novel notes the political
repercussions of such arbitrary unity, indicating to us how what once was acknowledged as
mimetic history, actually operates through the perspective of the patriarchal dominant and its
storytelling forms. Unlike White, however, Woolf offers us the possibility that there is a
reality beyond the “plot” of patriarchal discourse that allows us to see beyond and beneath
narrative construction and gives us a basis for fighting oppression. Several times in the
novel, there are irruptions of chaos and uncertainty, which interrupt and challenge the unity
and coherence of the “story” of patriarchal history and the pageant that both reflects and
critiques it.

The first irruption occurs when Isa reads of the rape of a girl by barracks officers at
Whitehall. The soldiers, clearly representative of patriarchal British society, tell the girl of a
horse with a green tail, making Isa imagine a fantastic fairy-tale story with romantic knights,
but leads on to the gang rape of the girl which is neither romantic nor fantastic. Instead,
“That was real; so real...” (BA 19). Here, the “reality” of the girl’s rape allows Isa to have a
vision of her trauma, which although mediated by the newspaper account, exceeds that
account and allows her direct access to this traumatic moment. Another irruption of the
“real” occurs toward the end of the pageant, when Miss La Trobe attempts to release her
hold on the unity and coherence of the pageant and to merely present the “reality” of
present time itself. Like John Cage’s musical experiments, she presents nothing on the
“stage” of the pageant itself and instead, she “douche[s] them, with present-time reality” (BA
126).

Reflecting the earlier passage, death is in this scene analogized with reality itself.
However, while several critics point out that the failure of Miss La Trobe to achieve formal
unity functions as a critique and a commentary of fascist and patriarchal politics, few mark
that the disruption of this formal unity is achieved by reality itself. Critics who see the novel
as a postmodern attempt to “celebrate... the impossibility of final meaning” (Joplin 89) and
to propose “truth and reality as negotiable concepts” (Caughie 54), fail to account for this
insistence on a “real” accessible through trauma and non-narrative form. Although this
reading of Between the Acts as a postmodern celebration of the indeterminacy of meaning is
necessary to a world haunted by the specter of Hitler and threatened by a violently imposed
unity, it also forwards the notion that the novel encourages the dissolution of the real and
that access to historical and present reality is impossible. We can see, however, that while
the novel does juxtapose chaos and order, part of this juxtaposition is the analogizing of the
chaotic and the dispersed with the real itself, visible in the final act of the pageant and the
rape at Whitehall.

Here, the idea of the real is essential to Woolf’s feminist politics. While it is powerful
for both Woolf herself, as well as contemporary critics, to identify and expose history itself
as constructed from various hegemonic discourses, at times this is counterproductive in
attempting to construct oppositional identities or an agreed upon past in which to identify
oppression. While Woolf is adept in Between the Acts at both exposing and parodically
exploding the discursive nature of history itself, she also insists on a “reality” that is both
fragile and fragmentary (illustrated in the pageant’s use of broken mirrors). In fact, while these momentary encounters with the real do not provide us with a “final meaning,” they do remind us to attend to the material reality of oppression and to acknowledge the possibility that while textuality and signification may be a powerful force in our world, they cannot completely obscure material existence or oppression, giving us hope both for resistance and for a provisional ethics. It is for this reason that it is important to see Woolf’s novel not strictly as an example of modernist art that shields us from chaotic reality, or as a postmodern fiction that relativizes all notions of truth and reality, but as an essential contributor to our post-postmodern world in its complication of notions of truth, while still insisting on the access to a “reality” necessary for a radical politics and a pragmatic ethics.
Notes

1 The majority of historical criticism of *Between the Acts* is in one of two modes (although they often overlap): 1) Criticism that analyzes the relationship of the novel to its historical context, particularly that of WWII. 2) Criticism that comments upon the novel’s theorization of the practice and function of historical discourse. Although most readings of the novel takes its historical context into account, for some exemplary examples of the former mode see Zwerdling (1977), Joplin, Scheider, and Pawlowski. For the latter, see Deiman, Lyons, Marder (Spring 1988), Hussey, Ames (1991), McWhirter, and Wiley. The latter mode, particularly recently, has a tendency to place Woolf’s novel in a “postmodern” context, noting how it works to deconstruct traditional models of history, revealing their construction and implication in patriarchal hegemony. While this mode effectively reveals the problems of historiographic discourse, it also often suggests that any strategy for the representation of the historical past cannot reach the “real” or actual referent of the past itself. As this paper indicates, however, there are ethical and political pitfalls inherent to this perspective on history to which Woolf does not succumb. It is this “post-postmodern” perspective that I attempt to delineate over the course of this paper and in my forthcoming work on the novel.

2 For more substantial accounts of how the novel works to dissolve the boundaries between the “real” and the constructed, see Caughie, Joplin, McWhirter, Hussey and Lyons. While my focus is on this scene’s capacity to break down the walls between the purportedly “real” world and its constructed counterpart, others contend that the scene’s repetition is the result of the novel’s assignment of primitive, natural, and/or essential natures to humanity (see esp. Marcus 77). While these two interpretations seem mutually exclusive, I believe that the novel is complex and contradictory enough to embrace both. Importantly, several critics also see the focus on repetition, both here and in the “digging and delving” of the villagers in all eras of the pageant, as a lyric contrast to the narrative and temporally progressive history of “great men.” For certain critics, like DiBattista, Little, and Barrett, this continuity provides a source of festive continuity and renewal to contrast with the violence and domination inherent in masculine “plots.” See, in particular, DiBattista’s reading which notes the rejection of plot and teleology in favor of “underlying generative rhythms” that are transhistorical (209). Although, these readings do have some similarity to my own contrast of the narrative and the non-narrative in the novel, I see these readings as allied to a notion of lyricism (see DiBattista 231) that is somewhat problematic. While these moments do provide non-narratable moments of unity, they do so in nostalgia for a pre-lapsarian past that cannot be revisited. While there is undoubtedly some of this in the novel, its ethical thrust is not towards losing oneself in a pre-narrative paradise, but in pushing beyond the current patriarchal plots towards the future. In this way, a focus on the lyricism of the lily pool (see both Battista (231) and Barrett (30)) seems less important than a focus on the final act of the pageant. See my forthcoming dissertation for a more complete rebuttal of lyrical readings and a more extensive reading of the final act of the pageant. See Friedman, Wallace, and Abel for more on the connection between anti-narrativism, lyricism, and pre-Oedipal modes of narration in Woolf.

3 As is usually the case, the labels of modern and postmodern are more terms of convenience than strict dividing lines. Certainly, much modernist works focuses on the mediating power
of language and the difficulty of accessing a historical “real,” and to divide the two terms completely would be unnecessarily reductive.

4 Many feminist studies of Woolf have explicated her feminist deconstruction of history. Although a comprehensive list of such criticism would be impossible, one singular champion of reading Woolf’s novel through the lens of her feminist essays is Jane Marcus, especially in “Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny.” In 1987, Eileen Barrett made a useful list of groundbreaking feminist studies of Between the Acts. In addition to Marcus’ work, she mentions Little, Moore, Eisenberg and Sears. There has been an explosion of feminist studies of Woolf in general and Between the Acts in particular in the fifteen years since Barrett’s article. I cannot begin to undertake a complete listing of such studies. Several of the ones that proved most useful to me are Joplin, Wiley, and Scheider.

5 Crucial to the novel’s critique of narrative is, of course, Isa’s assertion of the unimportance of plot (BA 67).

6 Crucial to my understanding of Isa’s reading of the rape is the work of Wiley, Marcus, and Marder. Wiley notes how this type of behavior by soldiers is precisely the type of history that is not “historicized,” (13) while Marcus pinpoints the rape as precisely that which we must not forget (76). Marder notes how the traumatic moment is transformed into a comfortable narrative by the horse with a green tail (“Alienation Effects” 431-32). The juxtaposition of these three readings helps us see that while the “real” and the historical may not be the same, we cannot abandon the former just because the latter is subject to discursive construction.

7 Here, Lucio P. Ruotolo’s reading of the novel (205-30) is an important precedent for my own. Ruotolo notes the tendency for Woolf to be attracted to moments of unity throughout her work, but to also “interrupt” those moments in an anarchic spirit, refusing the comfort such moments allow. I extend this reading to note how the refusal of unity is, in effect, an insistence on the historical real for which neither narrative nor lyrical unity can account. In addition, like Sallie Sears, I see this moment as an effort to shock the audience (227) out of a complacent acceptance of hegemonic patriarchal plots and into an observation of the real. While Sears sees this attempt as an ultimate failure, I see it as a qualified success, particularly in the connection Isa experiences to La Trobe and the pageant as a whole (BA 126).
Seeing Woolf Differently/ Seeing Different Woolfs: The Place of the Personal in Lesbian and Bisexual Readings of Virginia Woolf

Karen Kaivola

I trace much of the inspiration for this paper back to the 5th Annual Virginia Woolf Conference, hosted by Otterbein University in 1995. For it was there that I came to a new understanding of just how many Virginia Woolfs there really are, even among those of us who have spent years studying her novels, essays, letters, and life. I also came to understand just how deeply attached we can be to own particular Woolf, who, after all, can seem much like an old friend we have come to know intimately and well over the years. The particular event that became an impetus for this paper occurred when Louise DeSalvo, who had been scheduled to speak to the conference participants about the impact of abuse on Woolf, was unable to join us. In her absence, others interested in this issue agreed to offer their thoughts. Initially, there appeared to be broad consensus, with everyone—at least those who spoke up—talking more or less about the same Virginia Woolf. Then, suddenly, someone in the room stood up and exclaimed, quite energetically, something to this effect: “The Woolf you’re describing is simply not my Virginia Woolf! My Woolf is not a victim. If we reduce her life to the abuse, or filter everything about her through that experience, we diminish who she really was.” I don’t remember much of the ensuing discussion, only that it seemed to reveal almost incommensurable understandings of Woolf’s life as well as her art—and to trigger very deep and powerful emotions from all sides of the room.

More recently, I was reminded that my own feelings about Woolf can be just as strong and possessive. I had been invited to join a women’s reading group, and the first book on the list was Michael Cunningham’s The Hours. Even while I admire much about Cunningham’s novel, as I read I couldn’t seem to keep myself from assessing the extent to which Cunningham got it right—or wrong. Indeed, I felt strangely critical when Cunningham’s portrayal of Woolf or Clarissa Dalloway and her circle seemed to misrepresent or distort my own understandings—as if I believed, in spite of myself, that there actually is an authentic Woolf or Mrs. Dalloway, that I know them as they are, and that Cunningham should stick as closely as possible to both. Like the woman at the Otterbein conference, I wanted at times as I read to cry out “That’s not my Woolf!” My point here is not that I have it right and that Cunningham has it wrong—if at anytime I were so narrow-minded, my academic training and experiences in the classroom have long ago drummed any such reductive understandings out of me—but rather that in crucial ways Cunningham’s Woolf (or my reading of Cunningham’s Woolf) and my Woolf are simply not the same.

All this led me to ask what is it about Virginia Woolf—and not only her writing but her life—that evokes such strong feeling in me as well as in others. What is it about her life and work that invites—from so many different readers and across the generations—such powerful identifications? What is it about her words that leads to such divergent, even contradictory, convictions—and not only about what a text means but about how we should or might understand the actual historical person who went by the name Virginia Woolf? These reflections led me, in turn, to consider the place of the personal in Woolf scholarship and in my own. This paper is my first attempt to bring these reflections together.
In 1995, at the time of the Otterbein conference, I was just beginning to work on issues of sexual identity in Woolf's writing— for reasons that had much to do with my own life experience. Obviously I knew this from the start, though until now I have not chosen to position myself explicitly or publicly in relation to this work. This omission of the personal now strikes me as somewhat odd, given how personally invested that work has been, even though I recognize that the conventions of academic discourse most of us learn in graduate school lead us to present our work as if our investments in it were purely intellectual or intellectually pure. Of course, as Cathy Davidson reminds us in the 1996 special issue of PMLA devoted to the personal in scholarship, the personal always infuses our work as scholars: in Davidson's words, "Whether we put ourselves in or think we are leaving ourselves out, we are always in what we write" (1072). This is, of course, equally true of lesbian and non-lesbian critics, though my focus here will be on the former. At the same time, in the late 20th and early 21st century—a point in history when the rights of sexual minorities are being fiercely contested outside the academy and the idea of identity itself has been contested within it—Woolf's life and art have provided especially suggestive arenas for debates about sexuality. For women with lesbian experience, as for many others, that debate is necessarily, understandably, and inevitably personal. How could it be otherwise, when, as Catherine Stimpson has suggested, during this time lesbians both within and outside the academy have worked to create a lesbian tradition “not for money, not for fame, but for the sustenance of the soul” (379)?

The resulting scholarship on sexuality in Woolf’s writing reveals not only different understandings of Virginia Woolf's work but, at times, profoundly different Virginia Woolfs. Some of these Woolfs are lesbian, others are not. Collectively, these Woolfs map unresolved debates within contemporary lesbian thought as well as within the culture at large—debates that sometimes are informed by generational differences but that are just as often intra-generational. For despite the ground-breaking contributions collected in Eileen Barrett and Patricia Cramer’s 1997 book, *Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings*, which will surely change the way a new generation, both gay and straight, reads Woolf, what Joanne Glasgow and Karla Jay wrote in the introduction to *Lesbian Texts and Contexts* remains as true in 2002 as it was in 1990. They write,

> Central to [lesbian studies] is an awareness of the interaction of author/text/reader, at least one of which is identified as lesbian. Such identification is, of course, problematic. . . . Even in 1990, a generation after the debate began, thoughtful and concerned feminists do not, perhaps cannot, agree about just who is a lesbian. . . . And if this term is so problematic, how can one ever hope to define or label a lesbian text? Who is the lesbian writer or the lesbian reader? Are lesbian texts, readers, and writers so hopelessly unknowable that we can only shout each other off the page? (4)

In what follows, I don’t want to reduce the complexity of any critic’s evolving understanding of Woolf, and I want to be very clear that I do not think that any reader’s experience precludes understandings of perspectives different from his or her own. What’s more, my aim is not to make an argument for my Woolf as the most authentic Woolf. (Rest assured: I won’t be trying to shout anyone off the page here.) Rather, in examining the relationship of the personal to differences among Woolf scholars with lesbian experience, I want to suggest that in these sexuality debates, a historical or authentic Virginia Woolf is often invoked in ways that ground significantly different positions on sexual identity—sometimes as if these
constructions of Woolf were not fundamentally textual; as if they were not subject to as many multiple and contradictory interpretations as any of her novels.

The first essay in Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings is by Toni McNaron, now professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota, who has long identified as a lesbian feminist scholar. But as McNaron makes clear, her introduction to Woolf in the 1960s, after completing the PhD, preceded both the institutionalization of Woolf studies and lesbian feminism. It also followed a decade or more of personal struggle in which she tried (unsuccessfully) to fit herself into established heterosexual institutions. McNaron describes her decision to live as a lesbian as inseparable from her commitment to live authentically, despite the social stigma attached to doing so. Interestingly, it was McNaron’s non-academic (though “very literary”) lover who introduced McNaron to Woolf, and that introduction included knowledge not only about Woolf’s writing but about her life—in particular, her love affair with Vita Sackville-West. So even before she learned to read the centrality of Clarissa’s relationship to Sally in Mrs. Dalloway— and there’s a wonderfully poignant moment in the essay in which McNaron admits it took her several years to be able to do so—Woolf’s lesbianism, at least, was clear to McNaron from the beginning of her acquaintance. “I knew I was in the presence of a lesbian even if she did live with Leonard all those years” (11), she writes. “I knew…even if….” In short, McNaron seems to understand Woolf’s identity through the lens of her own sense of herself as authentically lesbian. She also reminds us of the personal stakes for lesbian readers in search of knowledge that heterosexual institutions and heterosexist assumptions would hide when she admits: “I desperately needed writers like Virginia Woolf to render lesbian characters in a positive light” (13). McNaron’s description of the Woolf she discovered more fully as the journals and letters were published is framed within the discourse of the lesbian feminism that emerged during that same period: she writes, “I also found a woman-identified woman, beyond any doubt” (16).

Eileen Barrett begins “Unmasking Lesbian Passion: The Inverted World of Mrs. Dalloway” by recalling her own personal relationship to the historical moment in which the idea of the “woman-identified woman” gained prominence in lesbian feminist culture. “I came out in the early 1970s,” Barrett writes, “when, as for many other women, my lesbianism was inseparable from my feminism. I came out as a ‘woman-identified woman’ who agreed with the Radicalesbians that lesbianism ‘is the primacy of women relating to women, of creating a new consciousness of and with each other, which is at the heart of women’s liberation, and the basis for cultural revolutions’” (146). Starting her essay with this personal reflection suggests a link between Barrett’s experience and her perspective on Woolf. Indeed, Barrett states that “as with many of us who came out in the 1970s and 1980s, Woolf’s lesbianism is inseparable from her feminism” (147). While acknowledging that lesbian identity may (like marriage) take different forms in different historical times and places, lesbian identity remains central to Barrett’s perspective, an understanding shared by co-editor Patricia Cramer, who argues that “Woolf’s lesbian identity belongs within a ‘particular lesbian tradition’ of writers who ‘adopt the homoerotic self as a center from which to oppose patriarchal values and to reimagine self and community’” (177). Indeed, lesbian feminists tend to insist on the term “lesbian”—if not “lesbian identity” or “lesbian feminist identity”—as a defining and empowering concept, one that not only accurately reflects their experience of self but reframes and reshapes interpretive practices while performing important feminist political work. For my purposes here, though, the important point is the connection Barrett suggests between her own life experience and her
understanding of Woolf’s identity. Indeed, despite generational differences, both McNaron and Barrett identify as lesbian feminists, and their experience as lesbian feminists seems inseparable from their understanding of Woolf.

The fact that we received our undergraduate degrees within 5 years of one another leads me to suspect that if generations are defined simply by age, Eileen Barrett and I probably belong to the same one. Yet, while I trace my commitment to feminism to the 1970s, it wasn’t until the early 1990s that my interest in Woolf merged with a more personal stake in debates about sexual identity. For, as an undergraduate in the late 1970s and through most of my graduate work in the 1980s, I never gave my heterosexuality a second thought. However, in 1991, when I unexpectedly fell in love with another woman, all of a sudden my interest in understanding sexual identity became acute, even as that understanding became more complex than I would have previously thought possible, as I endeavored to make sense of my life in a way that would honor both who I had been and who I seemed to have become. Historically, politically, and theoretically, the early 1990s provided a very different context from that of the 1970s and early 1980s in which to understand that experience, for this was a moment shaped by poststructuralist ideas about identity, Foucault’s revisionary study of sexuality, and the emerging challenge of “queer theory” to established categories of identity. These perspectives not only shaped my understanding of Woolf, they provided a way for me to work toward an understanding of myself though my scholarship on Woolf. Central to this understanding—both of myself and Woolf—was a conviction that our lived experiences could not be fully understood or categorized within conventional binary understandings of sexuality and erotic attachment. I explored this idea more fully in the essay “Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West, and the Question of Sexual Identity,” in which I tried to negotiate a place for Woolf (and, of course, myself, though I don’t position myself explicitly in the essay in relation to the ideas I discuss), arguing for a more fluid understanding of Woolf’s erotic attachments than lesbian feminists have generally allowed.

The different understandings of Woolf I’ve sketched here are part of the ongoing debates about identity among women with lesbian experience—debates that remain unresolved and thus get reintroduced by each generation, drawing upon but not reducible to the historically-specific discursive and theoretical paradigms that shape the thinking of each generation of critics and scholars. As Leslie Kathleen Hankins has argued, “The 1990s did not invent conflicts between lesbian feminism and other voices in gay and lesbian culture; they were there for Woolf in the 1920s” (182). Part of Hankins’ point is that we cannot assume, in the face of queer theory’s contemporary challenge to some of the assumptions that underpin lesbian feminism, that lesbian feminism has been relegated, in Hankins’ words, to the “recycling bin of literary history” (182). Similarly, there were critics in the 1970s who, like Barbara Fassler, argued before the advent of queer theory that later 20th-century categories for understanding sexual identity should not be applied to quickly to those who, like Woolf, lived within a different cultural and historical moment. About these issues, the stakes can feel—and feelings can run—quite high. After all, they reflect some of our deepest convictions about who we are and who we love. Hence, perhaps, McNaron’s conviction when she writes, “So I, as the lesbian I am, will go on reading Virginia Woolf, as the lesbian she was, for as long as I go on reading at all” (20). Or Barrett’s confidence when she claims that “Virginia Woolf is one of the twentieth century’s best-known lesbians” (3). Or my own assurance when I wrote that if we choose to consider Woolf lesbian, we should remember that this is not how she understood herself (35).
Brenda Silver has suggested that Woolf provokes “contradictory, often vehement, responses” because of her cultural location on multiple borders that trace various unresolved feelings and anxieties, both individual and collective, about high culture and popular culture, art and politics, masculinity and femininity, intellect and sexuality, and heterosexuality and homosexuality (11). Indeed, it is surely Woolf’s position along these various borders that makes her so uniquely situated to evoke, in Silver’s words, “responses that transform her features into a mirror of the viewer’s own” (128). But it is also Woolf’s own and considerable resistance to restrictive definitions or representations of human experience—including but not limited to those of sexuality—that enables so many readers with such different convictions and life experiences to claim her as their own. Consistently, Woolf’s representations extend rather than narrow the range of interpretive possibilities.

Silver provocatively argues that what is often at stake in competing interpretations is “not an authentic text, but an authentic Virginia Woolf, whose representation can be used to support particular social, cultural, and/or political ends” (212). If she’s right, then it’s easy to understand why there are, first of all, so many different Virginia Woolfs—and second, why people can be so resolutely attached to their own particular Woolf. For, in that case, we’re not always or necessarily or only arguing about Woolf or her texts, we’re engaging cultural debates that remain unresolved—and may indeed remain unresolved for some time to come.

What we’re left with, then, are multiple Virginia Woolfs, none of which has a privileged claim to authenticity and none of which is authoritative, for each “has been formed by the various historical forces that have formed the landscape that makes those observations possible” (Berube, 1065). Each of us is shaped by those forces, though not in the same ways. And so those forces, together with our own experiences, lead us to perceive very different Woolfs. However unshakeable our convictions, Woolf resists efforts to contain, claim, or fix her meaning. As Hermione Lee writes in her 1996 biography,

Virginia Woolf’s story is reformulated by each generation. She takes on the shape of difficult modernist preoccupied with questions of form, or comedian of manners, or neurotic highbrow aesthete, or inventive fantasist, or pernicious snob, or Marxist feminist, or historian of women’s lives, or victim of abuse, or lesbian heroine, or cultural analyst, depending on who is reading her, and when, and in what context . . . .[T]he disputes she arouses—over madness, over modernism, over marriage—cannot be concluded, and will go on being argued long after this book is published. (769)

We may not always agree with these interpretations; indeed, sometimes they might frighten us. But as Silver reminds us, “nothing can stop . . . readers . . . from reappropriating . . . images or texts, recombining them, and using them” for various ends (234).

The resulting multiplicity may not be such a bad thing, though such interpretive plurality is not without its own set of problems. Like Silver, I would not want to advocate it as a final destination, where all we are left with is interpretive play marked by “an uncritical acceptance of a pluralism of versions, interesting only because they differ from one another” (Silver, 214). For one thing, to embrace such pluralism uncritically is not to engage seriously with others—or, by extension, with other understandings, whether of Woolf or the world. Silver points us in the right direction, I think, when she suggests that we should instead ask how any particular claim functions at a particular point in time, discursively and materially, and what it authorizes or precludes. For if texts and authors like Woolf are one means by
which a culture works to resolve points of conflict and debate, how these debates are resolved matters and will have an impact on how we teach and live.

Similarly, I would suggest that the personal is a point of departure for critical understanding but not a final destination. Unless we articulate, theorize, and scrutinize the connection between the personal and our work as scholars, we run the risk of lapsing into what Michael Berube has called “the worst form of subjectivism—projecting [our] own interpretive idiosyncrasies onto [our] research while blithely believing that [we've] finally grasped the object as in itself it really is” (1066). Indeed, the ability to reflect on the history of her relationship to Virginia Woolf with a critical eye is one of the aspects of McNaron’s essay I most admire: McNaron is willing to acknowledge that she has, at times, identified with Woolf “in what now seem distinctly dangerous ways” (11). What results from an articulation of the personal, however, is a more complex and provocative understanding of the relationship between scholars, our lives, and our subjects than would otherwise be available to us.

Still, it is ultimately a good thing that there are so many Woolfs— that situation, however fraught it might sometimes be, definitely seems preferable to the alternatives. It increases Woolf’s significance, while challenging us to move beyond the confines of our own experience into more empathetic and ethical relationships to others, and thus more complex understandings of the world, of others, of ourselves, of Woolf, and of interpretive practices more generally. It also seems strangely appropriate, and perhaps especially from a lesbian perspective, that there should be so many different Woolfs, and that critical efforts to capture the authentic Woolf should leave us in much the same position as Orlando’s biographer, who ultimately cannot fully contain or fix Orlando’s identity, any more than any of us can fully claim or fix Woolf’s. After all, as Sherron Knopp reminds us, the central relationship in Orlando is between the Biographer and Orlando, not between the historical Virginia Woolf and the historical Vita Sackville-West, even though the text is Woolf’s celebration of this very real and very lesbian relationship (29). In this sense, it is also one of Woolf’s most personal and autobiographical novels, which further encourages an analogy between Woolf’s representation of Vita and lesbian scholars’ representations of Woolf. The analogy invites us to recognize Woolf’s multiplicity, and perhaps our own, just as Woolf’s Biographer recognizes Orlando’s— or, as I like to think, Woolf understood Vita’s. For, as we know, Orlando “had a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many thousand” (309). To some extent, then, the Biographer— and, as I’m suggesting here, the Critic—must ultimately acknowledge the partiality of her (or his) own perception and the failure of any one version to stand for the unpredictable complexity of Orlando— or Woolf. That there should be as many Virginia Woolfs as there are Orlando’s may be the most appropriate outcome of all.
Queering Virginia: How d'you do it?
Karyn Z. Sproles

This paper is a celebration of women who love Woolf. To put us in the mood, here is one of my favorite moments from Woolf’s letters to Vita Sackville-West. Little quoted, it is the moment in which Woolf is outted by her sister, Vanessa Bell. Woolf writes:

I told Nessa the story of our passion in a chemists shop the other day. But do you really like going to bed with women she said—taking her change. “And how d’you do it?” and so she bought her pills to take abroad, talking as loud as a parrot. (5 April 1929, Letters 4:36)

There is much to say about this public exposure, but for the purposes of this paper I want to note how little anyone seems to have noticed it. Not in the least surprised by her sister’s revelation, Vanessa Bell demands erotic details. Presumably everyone else continued to wait patiently in line. There is little reaction—except from Woolf herself, who happily turns the incident into copy for the amusement of Sackville-West.

I think this scene illustrates the way readers of Woolf of my generation—those of us who started reading Woolf in the 70s—handled Woolf’s sexuality. Guided by Quentin Bell, I learned to “know” without knowing, while continuing to wait patiently in line, hoping for an insight into Woolf’s work that she had not already had herself.1

How could we ignore Sally Seton’s kiss and Lily’s head on Mrs. Ramsay’s knee? Toni McNaron asks herself the same question in the first essay of Eileen Barrett and Patricia Cramer’s important anthology Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings:

I cannot remember what I told myself from my closet about the significance of Sally Seton’s kissing Clarissa [. . .]. Perhaps I read that moment [. . .] through tightly fitted heterosexist blinders, which prevented me from attaching sexual or intimate excitement to anything other than a male-female liaison. (11)

Each year, it seems, when I call their attention to it, my students more readily see this kiss as central to Clarissa’s life—as she says it is. But, as far as I can tell, they do not notice it at first. Perhaps they are not sure that they should point it out in class, or perhaps there is something about the way the novel works that helps us know and then not know about Sally and Clarissa. Quentin Bell taught us to repress our knowledge of Woolf’s sexuality. It is a lesson Clarissa seems to have learned as well. Sally’s kiss is marked as “the most exquisite moment of [Clarissa’s] whole life” (52), but she behaves as if she does not know this. Woolf gives us plenty of clues. When we go back to the novels, it is right there on the page. It is typical of my experience of Woolf that when I think I have figured something out, and go back to look for evidence, she has said outright: this is how you do it. Then I realize that I have known all along.

The clues are especially thick in Orlando, where we are told: “Orlando enjoyed the love of both sexes equally” (221). But in the reading experience, it feels as though what is given with one hand is covered over with the other. Borrowing a phrase from Jane Gallop,
Pamela Caughie calls it “Virginia Woolf's Double Discourse” in her analysis of Orlando's rhetoric as unstable, ambiguous, and contradictory. Even in novels that oscillate less rapidly, something distracts us. Peter Walsh interrupts Sally and Clarissa (53), and our attention, like Clarissa's, is diverted. In class my students inevitably start to speculate that Peter is too demanding and self-absorbed and therefore not right for Clarissa—a speculation that is surely beside the point if we can stay focused on the kiss he interrupts.

Many critics have suggested that self-censorship was a deliberate strategy used by Woolf to protect her work from being banned as Radclyffe Hall's was. Marcus argues that the in-jokes of A Room of One's Own seduce readers into a conspiracy “of women in league together against authority” (166). Feminist anger is useful in distracting from even more dangerous ground, and Orlando, like A Room of One's Own, gives us plenty of material with which to distract ourselves. Elizabeth Meese suggests that androgyny itself is a distraction from sexuality. Similarly, Bell's biography taught me that whatever might have been going on between Woolf and Sackville-West, it was the emotional intensity of the relationship that was the important part.

How did we come to KNOW? Our knowledge of Woolf has been transformed by the publication of her diaries and letters and by the remarkable feminist critics whose imagination was stirred by Woolf. For me it was reading Victoria Glendinning's biography of Vita Sackville-West followed by DeSalvo and Leaska's edition of her letters to Woolf. Jane Lilienfeld argues persuasively that Woolf's relationship with Violet Dickinson was “a consummated lesbian love” (41), but the nature of Sackville West's relationships with women requires no persuasion. Even Woolf says of Sackville-West: “These Sapphists love women; friendship is never untinged with amorosity” (Diary, 21 December 1925, 3:51).

Unlike Woolf, Sackville-West resists repression. I think this was a function Sackville-West also performed for Woolf herself. During their affair, Woolf's work becomes more openly sensual, more overtly sexual in topic. This is the time in which Lily (mirroring a favorite pose of Woolf and Sackville-West's) remembers “sitting on the floor with her arms round Mrs. Ramsay's knees; close as she could get” (78). This is the time in which Orlando “was seen to dance naked on a balcony” (222) and in which “Chloe liked Olivia” (87). So Sackville-West did for me what I think she also did for Woolf—turned that knowing without knowing into knowledge.

Woolf helps us repress this knowledge by prevaricating about her sexuality. As Patricia Cramer says:

Woolf’s aim was to write as clearly as she could about love between women while avoiding detection. To do so, Woolf crafted works that could “pass” within the dominant culture and at the same time communicate subversive in-group messages to savvy readers. (123)

Breaking Woolf's code requires reading her letters, which provide a key to her erotic imagery. The letters are full of puns on having and coming, exploring budding flowers, and romping with licking dogs. Many critics have written about these encoded messages. It all becomes quite obvious—after one receives the wink or a poke in the ribs that gives permission to read Woolf as one as wished to all along. Feminist criticism has served as the nudge many readers needed in order to get the joke.
Woolf is not popularly known for her sense of humor or her ribaldry—again it is the letters that show us this—after which it is impossible to miss. As we break the codes, we have recreated Woolf in individual executions of the cultural process Brenda Silver describes as “the ‘versioning’ of Virginia Woolf” (xvi). Silver celebrates the fluidity of “Virginia Woolf Icon,” because, “situated on the boarders, Virginia Woolf continually threatens to undo them and the categories or norms they name and contain” (11). I do worry that this also allows evasiveness and that Woolf’s persona—created by her and after her—has assisted in repressing knowledge of her sexuality. It’s all well and good to see her rejection of categorization as an anticipation of Foucault’s more elaborately theorized position against positions, but in practical terms this has made things more difficult. It allows even the most balanced of biographies, Hermione Lee’s, to conclude that, despite participating in affectionate physical contact with women, Woolf did not define herself as lesbian (484). This is true enough, but Sackville-West did not call herself a lesbian either. Nevertheless, for Lee, Sackville-West is the lesbian, and Woolf is a woman who, beginning with her mother and sisters has close relationships with women. While I am more than sympathetic to Butler’s premise that sexuality is performative, we must be careful when prevarication threatens to throw us back into the sticky arms of Havelock Ellis where Woolf can once again become the “sexless Sappho” of Bell’s biography, temporarily corrupted by Sackville-West in the role of the congenital sexual invert. Lee writes: “If Virginia Woolf was lesbian and Sackville-West confirmed that identity, she accepted it only evasively and ambivalently” (487). Now, plenty of people are evasive and ambivalent about their sexuality—one might say that Sackville-West was. But because we are more comfortable labeling her lesbian, the door opens onto Woolf’s sexuality as well. And this, for me as a reader of Woolf, was the key. It was Sackville-West who led me to a vision of Woolf as someone who had a sexual identity to be ambivalent about, and from there, there was no return.

There has been no return for Woolf studies either. I am surprised at the early dates of the first essays on Woolf’s sexuality: Blanche Wiesen Cook’s “Women Alone Stir My Imagination: Lesbianism and the Cultural Tradition” was published in ’79, Catherine Stimpson’s “Zero Degree Deviancy: The Lesbian Novel in English” in ‘81, Louise DeSalvo’s “Lighting the Cave: The Relationship Between Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf” in ’82, and Bonnie Zimmerman’s “Is ‘Chloe liked Olivia’ a Lesbian Plot?” in ’83. While it took time for these essays and others to trickle down to the common reader, they were being published in a rich context of feminist historical and cultural analysis. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (1987), Jeffrey Weeks (1977), Lillian Faderman (1978), and Martha Vicinus (1989) showed us that there was more to the culture than the mannish lesbian, and this important work still continues.

Very few are still afraid of a Sapphic Woolf. We are queering Virginia. How’d we do it? When the early volumes of Woolf’s diaries and letters had been published, Blanche Wiesen Cook advised:

Because of the disparity between Virginia Woolf’s own words, the fact of her changing sensibilities over time, and the prevailing interpretation of the meaning of her words, feminists may want to read every newly available letter and journal entry to decide for themselves such questions as whether or not Woolf was an elitist aristocrat or a socialist, asexual or woman-loving. (726)

This is exactly what we have done.
I think we need to be careful not to create two tracks in Woolf studies: work primarily about Woolf’s sexuality and work that is not. I am concerned that our understandings of Woolf’s complex sexuality have not become integrated into our readings of her work in the way that, say Gertrude Stein’s or Proust’s or Sackville-West’s sexuality is simply a part of the baggage we carry as we read the texts. Perhaps we are still struggling to integrate our new knowledge—thanks to Louise DeSalvo—of Woolf as a survivor of sexual abuse, and perhaps the two knowledges are too inextricably intertwined to take in turn. For me it is still painful to think of Woolf as an incest victim. On the other hand, when I read Patricia Cramer’s description in the introduction to Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings, which gives us an unambivalently lesbian Woolf, I felt an enormous sense of relief. As much as I recognize and wish to preserve the instability of Woolf’s sexuality, I enjoy being released from the tension of uncertainty. I see the time coming when a Queer Virginia will be less surprising than a cat without a tail.

I do fear that we’re living in a great big closet—a walk in closet, sort of like a room, which we must leave from time to time to go into another sort of room—a classroom—where the work of queering Virginia continues. Our students have all sorts of assumptions about sexuality, many of them created or supported by films and other forms of popular culture. It is difficult to disrupt these assumptions; although, sometimes the media can be useful. One of my most successful experiments in disrupting assumptions about gender has been taping to my office door a picture of Russell Crowe knitting (ChicKnits). Everyone does a double take. But Crowe does not always call into question assumptions about masculinity and sexuality. To justify the omission of John Nash’s alleged bisexually in Ron Howard’s film “A Beautiful Mind,” The Washington Post quoted Crowe as saying “we didn’t want to imply that there was any possibility that schizophrenia and homosexuality are related.” Presumably, the worry was that the film would be seen as suggesting that homosexuality causes schizophrenia, not vice versa. Crowe is not quoted on why they left in the schizophrenia and removed the homosexuality. This puzzling interview points to many difficulties we have when trying to fashion a biography of a person we recognize as complex and in whose reputation we feel a vested interest. I think this is a problem for all biographies. It is certainly a problem with Virginia Woolf’s. As we struggle to integrate into our images of Woolf the repressed knowledge of the sexual abuse she suffered, it is important to avoid pathologizing lesbian desire. It is equally important not to avoid this by censoring sexuality.

Despite the chic of Queer Theory, there’s still plenty of anxiety about sexuality, especially lesbian sexuality, in our departments and our classrooms. The publication of Woolf’s diaries and letters and Vita Sackville-West’s letters to Woolf have given us a new perspective on Woolf. Prominent critics from Louise DeSalvo and Jane Marcus to Sherron Knopp and Elizabeth Meese have asked us to integrate Woolf’s sexual history into our readings of her work and our understandings of her life. In the last 30 years we have been transformed as readers of Woolf—perhaps painfully, resistantly, unconsciously, or joyfully. We cannot go back to waiting patiently in line for our change, ignoring Woolf’s hints and revelations. But what happens when we take this knowledge to our students? When I introduce Woolf in my sophomore survey of British literature, there is squirming at the first mention of feminism. By the time I get through her childhood sexual abuse to her relationship with Vita Sackville-West, all I can see of the students in back row is the tops of their baseball caps.
While I don’t want to put students off from Woolf before they have a chance to fall in love with her prose, I have no ambivalence about insisting that they confront the complexities of her biography any more than Wordsworth’s or Byron’s. Still, I recognize that it is more difficult for some of them to do so. The students I worry about most are the ones who identify with a single aspect of Woolf. Anxious about uncertainty, my students tend to pin Woolf down as a suicide or an incest victim and to read her work only in that light. As teachers and critics, we must struggle against this reductive impulse.

I hope that we can fully integrate sexuality into our readings of Woolf and her work and that this is not interrupted by our culture’s tendency, reflected and supported in most biographies, to affirm the existence of a unified identity. Even after Woolf herself called for biography to take on the challenges of modernist fiction (“The New Biography”), we still tend to imagine lives that are unified, explicable, and that progress in a linear manner toward a climax (Nagourney). Can we imagine Woolf as she herself challenged us to imagine her, in the manner of the unstable Orlando, whose biographer could capture only a few of her thousands of selves? Can some of those selves be “Sapphic” without eliminating all the others? When we queer Virginia, what to we change and what do we gain? If we gain discomfort because we can no longer avoid the difficult topic of sexuality, then we make this change in order to gain a more fully human Woolf, with all the pain and pleasure and loss and joy that goes along with lovely, messy life.

Woolf studies is becoming more and more imbued with Queer theory. I think this is because Woolf studies has always embraced young scholars and new theories and that this makes it a model for all fields and an example of feminist practice as well as practicing feminists. Sharing Woolf is our form of sharing power, and like the loaves and the fishes, she feeds multitudes without giving out. Like Orlando, we each have many Woolfs. It is not threatening that someone else’s pack of Woolfs includes a few different versions. We have been taught well by Woolf; we must teach Woolf well. As scholars and teachers we are passing Woolf on to a new generation of readers. We are giving them a different Woolf than the one that was given to us. How do we do it? By continuing to follow Woolf’s charge to us at the end of A Room of One’s Own. We have prepared for the arrival of Shakespeare’s sister, who can now “put on the body which she has so often laid down” (118). By “versioning” a sexual Woolf, we have recreated her as the woman she herself desired.
Notes

1 Others are understandably less forgiving of Bell than I am. Patricia Cramer writes:

   It is worth while to emphasize Woolf’s lifelong battle with external censorship because so many readers, influenced by Quentin Bell’s biography and by stereotypes about what constitutes the sexual, miss the articulations of lesbian desire that permeate the novels. External censorship — not personal inhibition— is the primary cause for Woolf’s circumspect treatment of lesbian themes in her writing. (120)

2 Louise DeSalvo, Suzanne Raitt, Sherron Knopp, and Jane Marcus have all worked to put their work in the context of their relationship, asking us to take Sackville-West’s writing seriously and to see the innovative content in her use of traditional forms.

3 In Barrett and Cramer alone see Lilienfeld on animal imagery in Woolf’s letters to Violet Dickinson (41-45) and Cramer on flowers (121-22).

4 In praising Woolf studies, I have in mind the way in which it compares favorably with other areas. This has been evident to me at conferences. The annual Virginia Woolf Conference is a site for encouraging and mentoring women, which I have not always seen elsewhere. I witnessed, for example, a paper delivered by a female graduate student receive an outraged response from a prominent critic who stood up from the audience to announce “that’s not the Beckett I know!” My experience of Woolf scholars is that they typically lack this possessive inclination to humiliate.
"Virginia Woolf and Toni Morrison: Presenting the Past"

Jane Lilienfeld

Scholars such as Susan Stanford Friedman, Susan Gubar, Tuzyline Jita Allan, Lisa Williams, among others, have established a theoretical framework which authorizes the juxtaposed readings of African American and Caucasian women writers. In some cases predating these works, previous presentations at the Virginia Woolf Conferences, for example, those by Eileen Barrett, Ann Harris, and Barbara Christian, have frequently read Toni Morrison's novels in context of works by Virginia Woolf, thereby troubling and elucidating Virginia Woolf's complex response to her racial and social class privilege. Situated within this scholarly conversation, my paper will interrogate the narrative methods by which these authors mediated "official" history by focusing on selected passages in Woolf's *Between the Acts* and Morrison's *Jazz*.

Whether one reads her as a Modernist or Postmodernist, Virginia Woolf's narrative strategies provided a fruitful example for Toni Morrison, whose M.A. thesis on the theme of alienation in the novels of Woolf and Faulkner is now well known. Although it would be inaccurate to suggest that Morrison "thought back" solely through Virginia Woolf as a foremother, certain asymmetrical parallels connect the works and constructed personae of Woolf and Morrison.

Both are adept political pamphleteers. Their work problematizes the binary opposition separating "art" and "politics," for Woolf and Morrison, critique cultural structures of injustice without jeopardizing the artfulness of their fiction (Morrison, qtd. in Dreyfus 75; Woolf, "Leaning"). Using dislocations in time and space, free indirect discourse, multiply positioned narrative voices, skeins of freighted images instead of authorial omniscience as commentary--among other narrative techniques--each writer creates non-representational work convincing in its psychological verisimilitude. As their readership and influence grew, Woolf and Morrison became multivalent cultural icons, the focus of both envy and admiration (Peterson 464-5; Silver).

Woolf's and Morrison's polyphonic narratives seek to give voice and visibility to the long-derided, to reframe buried personal and group memories, to voice oral culture in written form (Wall; A R O O 65-6), and to negotiate the blurred boundary separating received from dissident history (Shattuck 290). *Between The Acts* and *Jazz*, as do many of their novels, construct and challenge a critically aware narratee who is embedded within the text (Leonard, qtd. in Hardrack 164; Lilienfeld "Asymmetrical").

*Between The Acts* and *Jazz* interrogate the methods and materials of historians, representing the impact of earlier events on contemporary experience by problematizing the genre of the family saga. Ostensibly set in June, 1939, *Between The Acts* incorporates the descendants of the Anglo Saxons and their Norman conquerors, the nouveau-riche Imperialists of the subsequent centuries, references pre historic times, and looks forward to a series of future wars. *Jazz* traces backward to their enslaved parents and grandparents and forward through 1926 to the Harlem Renaissance, the family origins of Violet and Joe Trace, two African Americans born during Reconstruction.
One of the many contested arguments about the nature of representation in *Between the Acts* is that of Edward Barnaby and Merry Pawlowski, who suggest that Woolf's work of the 1930s predates Guy Debord's formulation of the theory of spectacle, demonstrating Woolf's representation and critique of state-sponsored mass media that attempt to naturalize fascism. The method by which the text represents the scene in which Isa reads about the rape suggests to me that they are right (BTA 20).

Isa's reading about the rape is intertextually inseparable from the pageant put on later that day by the villagers under Miss La Trobe's direction. Even more contested than the rape scene, the pageant stages British "literary and imperial history" [...] as "epochs of a domineering civilization" in England and its Empire (Johnston 258-60; see also Knoles). Noting the intricate historical metanarrative which depicts while problematizing, Barnaby interprets the pageant as a scene of critical reading: "the meta-audience reading [Between The Acts] is liberated from the spectacle by watching the [spectacle] take place" (Barnaby 316). Framed through interruption, the pageant has multiple proscenia. Thus the rape scene is distanced spatially, perhaps an objective correlative for "the alienation effect" (Barnaby 315) that many critics argue is deliberately produced in the viewers (and many readers) by the village pageant. Isa reads about the rape in the newspaper dropped by Bart Oliver, her father in law.

Prior to being brought into the study, this newspaper had served Bart as a weapon of war, which the grandfather, perhaps to re-enact his service to the Empire, wears to play with his grandson (Johnston 271). The three year old, however, interprets Bart not as a playmate, but as a beaked monster (BTA 11-12) and dissolves into tears. Disgusted, Bart retreats with his newspaper to the study, where he tells Isa her son is a coward (BTA 19).

Readers of *Three Guineas* bring to this scene their remembrance of that text's deconstruction of the daily newspaper (95) which is shown to be an unreliable reporter of events, subject to the same powerful moneyed Patriarchal fellows who "march in the procession" (Pawlowski).

As the text's careful delineation of her reading process suggests, Isa reads for escape and romance, but the reader reads a metanarrative. Woolf creates an "alienation effect," playing on the word "real" (Barnaby 314), for Woolf is citing the infamous case of a rape (and the newspaper accounts of it) that had taken place on 27 April 1938, but is here pushed forward one year so that it occurs during the day in June on which *Between The Acts* takes place (Beer 137-9).

As Stuart Clark has argued, many readers of this novel in 1939 would be aware of the complicated facts of the rape and recall that the judge chastised the rapists for victimizing female citizens, rather than the enemy abroad. Numerous readers of *Three Guineas* in Woolf's day and ours know that that is the point: brutality toward women emanates not just from the Fuhrer or Il Duce, but from the structure of British Patriarchy in the home and in all civil and military institutions.

Although the reader, enabled by "the alienation effect" to comprehend rather than participate in the spectacle, may read critically, some have argued that the characters do not. The pageant audience resents being alienated from empathy, and Isa's seeming distance from the rape victim precludes identification with her (Barnaby 314). The earlier typescript of the
novel notes that Isa reads with "a certain pleasure mingled with her disgust," (PH 54), indicating that the article served partially as voyeuristic titillation, much like the "shilling shockers" (BTA 16) that crowd the library shelves where she and Bart are reading. If Isa appears to some critics to be complicitous in her own oppression (Johnston 270-3; Christie 170), reframing the rape scene by concluding with Mrs. Swithin's raised hammer is read by others as the avenging instrument of the Goddess Figure, mother of life and death (Shattuck 286). Thus, although Woolf is usually assumed to view violence as solely a male prerogative, in fact, this passage problematizes that interpretation.

Between The Acts's brilliant metanarrative of critiqued spectacle proceeds by disclosing the existence of cultural suppression. In an asymmetrical parallel, Toni Morrison explained in 1987 that she wanted her work to voice that which had been forcibly excised from the historical record, the interior lives of slaves. For although "no slave society in the history of the world wrote more [...] about its own enslavement" [...] "in shaping the experience to make it palatable to those who were in a position to alleviate it, they were silent about many things, and they 'forgot' many other[s] [...]" (Morrison, "Site" 109-110).

The two passages of Jazz that I will discuss deconstruct what Wilbur Cash (qtd. in Sundquist 410) called "the South's 'rape complex'" by problematizing sexual violation, violence, and volition.

The first passage of Jazz to which I will turn my attention discloses the slave True Belle's free indirect discourse. The uneasy alliance between True Belle and her owner Miss Vera Louise Gray demonstrates that the perverse intimacy between a white southern slave-owning woman and her slave violated in part because an owner's dependence and emotional infantalization were grounded in and reinforced the slave's bondage:

Certainly nobody could help noticing how many times a week a Negro boy from out Vienna way was called on to ride along with Miss Vera, and what part of the woods she preferred to ride in. True Belle knew what all the slaves knew, and she knew more since she was the one whose sole job it was to tend to whatever Miss Vera Louise wanted or needed, including doing her laundry, some of which had to be soaked overnight in vinegar once a month. So if it did not need it, if the personal garments could be washed along with the rest, True Belle knew why, and Vera Louise knew she knew. There was never any need to speak of it [...]. (Morrison, Jazz 140).

Her enslavement forces the knowledge of Miss Vera's pregnancy on True Belle. That True Belle will be expected to keep her owner's secrets, restates the erasure of True Belle as a person in Miss Vera's eyes. Nevertheless, knowledge of Miss Vera's assignations is widespread on the plantation, enunciating the power of slaves' observations.

Jazz renders Miss Vera's enslaved lover visible and verbal, thus superimposing a human being onto the vicious stereotype of "the black brute" (Chesnutt 233) circulated by white supremacist propaganda (Gubar 56-61, 100-105). Myths about the rape of the Southern woman served as a pretext for the violation and savage lynching of generations of African American males from the 1880s through 1941 (Sundquist 396-7).
As Between The Acts does with British literary history, so Jazz references and problematizes African American literary history. The two cited passages from Jazz interrogate the sexual relations between owner and owned from the point of view of the male slave who serves as a sex object to his owner and, in the resulting child, "the genre of the tragic mulatto [. . .]" (Sundquist 399). In both instances, by using a male figure as the subject, Morrison defamiliarizes themes central to African American literature.

The son born of the union of Miss Vera Louise and her father's slave is Golden Gray, raised as a white by his mother. Thus Golden Gray's uncritical imbibing of the racist construction of the Black male becomes Golden Gray's unacceptable self image, once he learns in his early twenties that he is born of a slave father, a comeuppance that True Belle had joyously anticipated (Morrison, Jazz 113, 139) and he sets out to find and kill the man she has told him is his father.

The man who is possibly his father has several names and is the imagined creation of one of the focalized narrative sources of Jazz. Because the construction of this putative father forms a metanarrative, the reader cannot be certain of his identity or that he fathered Golden Gray. When, however, he responds to Golden Gray's anguished confrontation, his answer does many things (Morrison, Jazz 171-2). The response mocks the boy for his ignorance of the implications of chattel slavery, savagely parodies the stereotype of the black male's swaggering sexual prowess, and yet hints at this man's volitional enjoyment of sex presumably initiated and continued at the will of Miss Vera Louise, a taboo formulation, which, however, insists upon his subjectivity and complicates interracial sexual relations.

Virginia Woolf is not alone among 20th century authors who interrogate the newspaper as a cultural construct. Eric Sundquist brings to light an important newspaper editorial by Alexander Manly, (<http://www.mindspring.com/~Imno/riot.html>), which I read as an intertextual commentary on the rape scene in Between The Acts and the passages I analyzed from Jazz. Through its dignified and courageous honesty, Manly's editorial bears a striking resemblance to the father's reproach to Golden Gray. As an expert on the textualization of miscegenation, Toni Morrison would most likely know, not only Manly's editorial, but also The Marrow of Tradition, Charles W. Chesnutt's 1901 novel, in which the fictionalized Manly editorial is central (Heermance 192-217). Written in August, 1898 in response to Senator Rebecca L. Felton's praise of the unprosecuted epidemic of lynchings used to terrorize and subjugate the first generation of African Americans after slavery, Manly's editorial problematizes emotional and sexual ties between African Americans and whites.

Unlike the newspapers deconstructed by the daughter of the educated man in Three Guineas (95), Manly's Wilmington Daily Record, the only Black newspaper in North Carolina, was not in service of the white men in the procession (Sundquist 411). Manly "[protested the] denial of the possibility of a white man's or a white woman's sexual expression of love for a black person [suggesting that] the charge of rape that accompanied nearly every lynching of a southern black man, whatever the evidence, ironically reversed the visible historical fact [. . .] that a significant portion of the African American population were the descendants of acts of white rape of black women" (Sundquist 410-411).

The courage to voice unpalatable truths does not always lead to commendation, a fact clear in the male elite's rejection of Three Guineas, the precursor to Between The Acts. His
editorial almost got Manly lynched and was widely blamed for the subsequent white supremacist takeover of North Carolina elections and white-instigated Wilmington, North Carolina race rioting (Sundquist 416). Golden Gray's parents' relationship comments obliquely on the interconnections of sexual violation and political oppression, a central issue not only in Jazz, The Marrow of Tradition, Alexander Manly's editorial, but also in Virginia Woolf's Between The Acts.
Notes:

1. D. D. Mbalia, for example, vigorously contests the attempts by white critics such as myself to read Morrison's work from the perspective of a white literary tradition. Barbara Christian's acknowledgment of such influence, however, suggests that like all great writers, Morrison learned from numerous sources whose achievements she adapted to her own ends. As part of her argument, Christian has written movingly of the composition of Toni Morrison's M. A. thesis (written under the name Chloë Ardellia Wofford), asking what it must have been like to be a Black woman graduate student at Cornell University in 1955, one year after the landmark Supreme Court ruling that integrated North America's school (165).

2. Margaret Ezell and Alison Booth have excoriated Woolf for her claims in *A Room of One's Own* about the silencing of women, a charge interrogated by Melba Cuddy-Keane in her discussion of the concept of "anonymous."


4. A recently discovered novel by a former slave depicts the perverse intimacy between mistress and slave in much the way that *Jazz* does (Crafts 150). Slave resistance was ongoing and effective (Berlin, et al.).
Protective Values: Virginia Woolf, Gaston Bachelard, And the Aesthetics of Semi-Transparency

Joseph M. Kreutziger

Before there was Foucault’s, Deleuze and Guattari’s, Kristeva’s, or any of the multiform and varied analyses of spatial relations to power, politics, gender, and economics, we had this poignant assertion in Gaston Bachelard’s The Poetics of Space: “There is no dearth of abstract, ‘world-conscious’ philosophers who discover a universe by means of the dialectical game of the I and the non-I. In fact, they know the universe before they know the house, the far horizon before the resting-place” (4-5). Searching for the positive values of inhabited space, for an ontology of well-being, Bachelard insists upon a time before dialectics that settles into the spaces memorialized by childhood’s moments of greatest contentment. He reminds us of the protective value of the house, this “non-I that protects the I” (4-5). It recovers in intimate space a primary virtue, the very intimation of the idea of a space of one’s own. So Bachelard names the chief benefit of the house by the reveries it houses: “the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (4-6).

Throughout Bachelard’s work on literature there is an insistence on the daydream as an activity thoroughly more satisfying than the night dreams of which there is so little choice or selection. He refutes Freudian and aspects of Jungian psychoanalysis which would make of reverie a diluted aspect of dreaming, a mere wish-fulfillment. The act of reverie, if given memorial space—which concentrates consciousness into the meditative memory of its greatest pleasure—is in Bachelard a special knowledge of oneself; it mixes memory so thoroughly with the imagination that it constitutes a poetics actually enacted by the reading and the writing of the reverie. By coupling this oneiric activity with the house which shelters daydreaming, Bachelard reinvigorates what must seem so apparent to us that it is taken as a given, so given that we need, perhaps, his reminder: “[. . .] the places in which we have experienced daydreaming reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling-places are relived as daydreams that these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time” (6). No other philosophy comes to mind, even among the literature deepened by a century of psychoanalytic thought, that has given the daydream (as distinct from the dream) such an essential, dynamic value and kept it for literature.

And whom among readers of Woolf would deny her the protective value she invests in the Talland House of St Ives and her Cornwall childhood, its prolonged shelter in her fictive daydreams from Jacob’s Room to The Waves, its essential being in To the Lighthouse and in her final, protracted inhabitation of memory in “A Sketch of the Past”? It is in the meditation of her first memory in “A Sketch,” in the conflation of her mother and the nursery and the waves at St Ives, that we read her “purest ecstasy,” something she likens a few passages later to “lying in a grape and seeing through a film of semitransparent yellow” (MB, 65). Those who seek to analyze and diagnose the trauma of Woolf by her childhood should not overlook or underestimate the relief, the very ecstasy Woolf presents to us in her reveries over this early and self-selected past. I have come to believe we cannot read Woolf’s memories in “A Sketch of the Past” close enough in their intimacy, and we cannot fully read them without the protective value reverie affords them. Woolf’s immediate qualification of her
first memory—that she as a memoir writer should “fail” unless she “had begun by describing Virginia herself,” and that most memoirs do fail because they “leave out the person to whom things happened” (65)— informs the very process of becoming the person to whom things happen, the process writing induces in the Woolf we read here. It restores to Woolf the feeling, she writes, “which is even at this moment very strong in me” (65). Contrary to Woolf’s qualification of what would constitute or determine her failure as a memoir writer, Woolf is exceptionally present in her memoir by partaking of the process that is left out of most memoirs: the reveries in which and through which memories are remembered.

Of course Woolf tells us St Ives was “set off by many months in London” (65) and 22 Hyde Park Gate, her house of non-being unavailable to reverie, at least the daydreams of positive and protective value; it was the house that shattered daydreams and gave Woolf’s time before dialectics an intrusion of dialectics. If a poetics examines “felicitous space” as Bachelard’s does, the subject idealizes dangerously close to the condition of nostalgia and to creations which partake more of the created utopia than the grimmer experience. Bachelard is not naïve to criticism that would find in his ahistorical and phenomenological approach a whole world of seeming repressions and exclusions. His more concentrated study on the daydream, *The Poetics of Reverie*, addresses this time and space outside daydreams of repose, the real world, he writes, “where we are delivered over to the inhumanity” (13), what Theodor Adorno deems in his materialistic dialectics as our “negative knowledge of the actual world,” a difficult reconciliation always under duress. But in a reverie active in its inversions, consciousness is liberated from our “reality function” and bears witness to what Bachelard deems a “normal, useful irrationality function which keeps the human psyche on the fringe of all the brutality of a hostile and foreign non-self” (13). Such a position explains why Bachelard writes:

> From my viewpoint... the conscious metaphysics that starts from the moment when the being is ‘cast into the world’ is a secondary metaphysics. It passes over the preliminaries, when being is being well [...] To illustrate the metaphysics of consciousness we should have to wait for the experience during which being is cast out, that is to say, thrown out, outside the being of the house, a circumstance in which the hostility of men and of the universe accumulates. (*Poetics of Space*, 7)

And how it did accumulate in Woolf. Felicitous reverie works through Woolf not in spite of but because of her traumatic accumulations. Reverie in “Sketch of the Past” accumulates this resonance most because Woolf stands furthest upon the precipice of the present. That present gave us all its future as the past. Its deliverance to us, incomplete and in medias res in a sense more literal than often we’re prepared to allow, might throw up the speculative, conditional questions that arise in any text unauthorized and unrevised. But what we do have speaks for itself, even speaks to the way it will be written: “2nd May... I write the date, because I think that I have discovered a possible form for these notes. That is, to make them include the present—at least enough of the present to serve as a platform to stand upon” (MB 75). For Woolf the present, when ideally suited, should be brilliantly transparent, that platform also figured as water so clear one could see down to the depths.

But then why the Woolf who sees through all these semi-transparencies? Bachelard writes in *The Poetics of Reverie* that the “path of reverie” reverberates, that by following reverie, “a constantly downhill path— consciousness relaxes and wanders and consequently becomes douded” (5). Clouded, in essence, like the ubiquitous semi-transparency in Virginia Woolf’s
“Sketch”; you would think that so many semi-transparencies would add up to one whole. Instead there are as many semi-transparencies as there are memories. They are enveloped in the partial light through which her memory flickers and uncircumscribed by the past and future each revere ceaselessly delivers. For though Woolf’s reveries sketch the past, they are also becoming, attempting to have a future. And then there are the semi-transparencies of objects illuminated by her subjectivity, the indirect object to whom things happen and the subject whom you could call a self in search of lost copulas. Woolf renders a scene in revere the way a poet renders an image, until the scene in deed becomes an image. At the “level of the poetic image,” Bachelard writes, “the duality of subject and object is iridescent, shimmering, unceasingly active in its inversions” (Poetics of Space, xix). Semi-transparent, too, in just the names of things, persons, or places: Think of the one sentence Woolf uses when her brother Thoby eludes her description. She writes, “St Ives will fill him in” (MB 127). The name St Ives, sheltered in the revere of Talland House, seen through this semi-transparency, described in this manner with these words, so repetitively is it semitransparent that we almost wish she had landed on “diaphanous” or “gossamer” just once or twice. Woolf, however, needed the hyphen, found in it the compound rupture and reconciliation with a Victorian childhood and a future Modern aesthetic.

This is why we need to carry Woolf’s aesthetics of semi-transparency—its link to her Victorian past and evolving Modernist sensibilities—into her fiction with some assurance that its famous use as a manifesto of formal and realist concerns has more than an anxiety of influence many critics have assigned it. Take the often overlooked but fascinating essay of Virginia Woolf, her “Thomas Hardy’s Novels” commissioned by the Times Literary Supplement in early 1919 on the occasion of Hardy’s impending death, whenever that “evil hour,” her editor wrote, might transpire (Essays IV, 517). That hour lasts nearly ten years for Virginia Woolf and occasions some of her more amusing diary entries, registering panic over his greatly exaggerated demise before having finished the essay. She prays, for instance, that Hardy “... sits safe & sound by his fireside at this moment. May all bicycles, bronchitises, & influenzas keep far from him” (Diary II, 149). When Hardy’s hour did come in January of 1928, Woolf performed her next to last “furbishing up” of the essay (the final “refurbishing” not completed, though, until her revision of the essay in 1932 for its inclusion as “The Novels of Thomas Hardy” in The Second Common Reader). We bear witness to an essay that began with the final revisions of Night and Day and reached the presses during the drafting of Orlando and the initial undulations that would crest into The Waves. This is, in short, an essay Woolf paid particular care over an extended time to write to her liking.

Woolf’s crucial insight into his genius, that he was “at once poet and realist”, and that these contradictory talents did battle in his work unequally, leads her to write rather dramatically that Hardy was: “[...]doomed to see the faith and flesh of his forefathers turn to thin and spectral transparencies before his eyes” (509). To such a curse of realistic clarity, though, these ghosts of the past too visibly present and haunting, Woolf does afford Hardy the blessing of luminous but hazy “moments of vision,” moments when the poet in the novelist emerges. It leads to one of the most suggestive and prescient passages in all of Woolf’s critical writings:

Some writers [...]are born conscious of everything, others unconscious of many things. Some, like Henry James and Flaubert, are able not merely to make the best use of the spoil their gifts bring in, but beyond that they control their genius in the
act of creation, they remain aware and awake and are never taken by surprise. The unconscious writers, on the other hand, like Dickens and Scott, seem suddenly and without their own consent to be lifted up and swept onwards. The wave sinks and they cannot say what has happened or why. Among them [. . .] we must place Hardy [. . .]. With a sudden quickening of power which we cannot foretell, nor he, it seems, control, a single scene breaks off from the rest.” (509)

“A Sketch of the Past” reverberates here before it was written, when Woolf claims for herself “scene-making” as her “[. . .] natural way of marking the past. A scene always comes to the top;” she writes, “arranged; representative” (MB 142). But perhaps equally reverberating and reminiscent is the duality established between conscious and unconscious writers that recalls Woolf’s more crucial distinction between “being” and “non-being” in “A Sketch of the Past.” There Woolf apportions to the “real” novelist the ability to “somehow convey both sorts of being,” something, despite her conscious efforts in Night and Day and The Years, she confesses she has never been able to do (MB 70). For writers with Hardy’s poetic and lyrical bent, Woolf avers, the clarity of those “thin and spectral transparencies” is a disadvantage. Unlike a James or Flaubert, “always alert and awake” to the intent of their creations, Hardy’s novels at their best have about them, she continues, “[. . .] that little blur of unconsciouslyness, that halo of freshness and margin of the unexpressed which often produce the most profound sense of satisfaction” (Essays IV, 510). Woolf reads Hardy through his less satisfying stretches of daylight, his passages full of non-being, to arrive at those singular and separate moments of vision and being.

Like the more celebrated essay “Modern Fiction” that also bestows on Hardy an “unconditional gratitude,” we are teased into searching out where Woolf places her own aesthetic among the novelists she values and the terms of expression by which she values them (CR, 149). We are used to thinking about a generation of writers educated by Flaubert’s insistence against sentimentality, worked out through the invisible yet omniscient consciousness of the artist. To such a position Woolf opens up a space not merely for the unconscious and indeterminate in modern fiction, but for the unconscious and indeterminate writer in modern fiction. Into Hardy’s haloed light (and into Woolf’s own writing) we might read again her most famous assertion on reality in “Modern Fiction,” that “Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (150). Given Woolf’s immediately preceding image of the mind exposed to a “myriad impressions,” that it is rained upon from all sides by an incessant shower of innumerable atoms, the task of the novelist isn’t to exert an omniscience over consciousness but to make amenable and avail oneself instead to this “varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit” (150). Woolf’s figure of the semi-transparent envelope, the luminous halo, likewise opens up, leaves ajar, the space between the conscious and unconscious writers, moves dynamically between the engraved and the evanescent, the composed shapliness of a Jamesian form of writing and that living, quivering thing which captures the glow of life in Hardy.

And yet this circumvents the more intimate and essential primacy with which Woolf invests her aesthetics of semi-transparency. We’d have to begin again, perhaps with the first memory that gave her life as a bowl to fill and a base to stand upon, the one she writes as the most important of all her memories, the purest ecstasy she can conceive. In this first reverie of semi-transparency, Woolf houses us in her own self-conception, the waves and the
maternal presence something essentially reverberating in all of her writing. Such an archetypal presence of femininity, we might surmise, is what attracts Gaston Bachelard to Jung’s archetype of the anima in Bachelard’s exploration of the “feminine element” of reverie. Lost somewhat to our English ears, the French language, with all its preordained designations of the masculine and feminine, affords Bachelard the satisfaction of reading into the genders of le rêve (dream) and la rêverie (reverie), le songe (dream) and la songerie (daydream) “indications of a need to make everything feminine which is enveloping and soft above and beyond the too simply masculine designations of our states of mind” (Poetics of Reverie, 29). Though his study of feminine language might at first sound the notes of another male writer appropriating some feminine ideal for the conquering masculine intellect, The Poetics of Reverie and Space resonate strongly with Woolf’s basic assertions for the feminine sentence in A Room of One’s Own, or with Julia Kristeva’s symbiotics and Helene Cixous’s feminism for that matter. In this “language of the anima,” which Bachelard situates at its most hospitable in a language descending into reverie, there lies the greatest possibility of psychic depth and repose, a language recovering in its poetry an interior of words free of the censorship so often equated to masculine imperatives, that shadow of the egotistical “I” similarly insisting upon itself in Woolf’s comments upon the masculine sentence. As the psychoanalyst’s censor is most often a patriarchal super-ego sitting in judgment, Bachelard objects to the labels which create of a maternal, enveloping warmth a latent sexual desire: “By being satisfied to answer only ‘return to the womb’ to enigmas which are being multiplied as they are being expressed, the psychoanalyst does not help us live the life of language, a spoken life which is lived in nuance, by nuance. It is necessary to dream more, dream in the very life of language [. . .].” (46). What Bachelard proffers moves beyond the scope of psychoanalysis to an aesthetic analysis of psychology, inverting the realm of values for each. Instead of psychology shedding light on why we daydream and what those daydreams mean, “Reverie brings to light an aesthetics of psychology” (81). Distinct from the night dream which does battle with its censures and supports the foundations of psychoanalysis, the feminine reverie of Bachelard’s inquiries, most essentially located in a literature with aesthetic force, is returned to a place of primacy, not derivative of psychoanalytic discovery but in itself a generative experience and an enduring value. In such an intimate and feminine aesthetic Woolf feels most at home.

1 Quoted from the endnotes to “The Novels of Thomas Hardy,” The Essays of Virginia Woolf, IV, 517.
"All human relations have shifted," Virginia Woolf wrote in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," "[t]and when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics and literature" (71). This change of relations, which Woolf placed "about the year 1910" (71), was marked by what Stephen Kern has, more recently, called "a greater interpenetration and a greater separation" (191) of the individual and the public. About the year 1913, the German philosopher Edmund Husserl both questioned and celebrated the individual in the world in his "General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology" entitled Ideas. Arguing that the ground of philosophical inquiry had become obscured by Western man’s unquestioning acceptance of the objective sciences, Husserl introduced a philosophical mode of operation: the epoché or phenomenological reduction. By enacting the epoché, the phenomenologist could “bracket” – suspend – common preconceptions about the world, render a purity of consciousness accessible, and thus re-learn to see the world in its pre-scientific but lost idea (107-114).

This paper offers a comparison of Paul Cézanne’s painting The Large Bathers (1906, figure 1) and Virginia Woolf’s “play-poem” The Waves (Diary 3, 139). In high modernist visual art and literature, respectively, Cézanne and Woolf set the parameters of the study of relationality at the core of which lie the above mentioned dialectical tensions. When Paul Cézanne in a letter to his son wrote: “it is all a question of putting in as much interrelation as possible” (Cézanne, 323), he spoke of incorporating, in his art, not only the “interrelation” between himself and his object-world, but also the “interrelation” between objects. He explained this to Joachim Gasquet: “Those glasses and plates are talking to each other, endlessly exchanging secrets … They do not stop living … They spread imperceptibly around each other, through intimate reflections, as we do through glances and words” (Cahn, 71). Virginia Woolf spotted the liveliness and interrelation of Cézanne’s objects when she in April 1918 first laid eyes on one of his still lifes with apples. In a diary entry she wrote: "There are 6 apples in the Cézanne picture. What can 6 apples not be? I began to wonder. Theres their relationship to each other, & their colour, & their solidity" (Diary 1, 140). In her own work, Woolf too suggests that things and people are constituted in and through specific relations. The six voices in The Waves interrelate, transform, and at times disappear into each other, approximating what the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty terms “l’intermonde”: “the intermundane space … where our gazes cross and our perceptions overlap” (Merleau-Ponty, Visible, 48). In the following I will use Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception, at the core of which lies a refinement of the Husserlian epoché, as a tool to articulate more clearly the nature of Cézanne’s and Woolf’s aesthetic inquiries.

We are gathered here today to look across the generations of Woolf studies. I would like to take this opportunity to take a closer look at the root sense of the word generation. The root form gen- derives from the Greek genes - which is in turn related to the verb gignesthai (to be born) - and denotes the action of becoming, or bringing into being. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology seeks to uncover the genesis of perception – he calls it “the lived
perspective, that which we actually perceive” (Merleau-Ponty, “Doubt,” 14) - and to
describe how this experience bears on the formation of linguistic and conceptual meaning. I
would like to demonstrate that both Cézanne and Woolf sought to lay bare this tension
between perception and conception; both wanted to trace the genesis and the process of
creative production.

For Merleau-Ponty the roots of our habitual world are found in primordial ideas, not
of how phenomena appear to pure consciousness, as Husserl set out to show, but of how
they appear to the embodied subject. Only by enacting the reduction, by “bracketing” what
we, according to habit, believe to be real, can we return to a zero-point of perception, to
what the philosopher calls “re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world”
(Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, vii). Merleau-Ponty found in Cézanne’s painting an example
of the reduction. “Cézanne’s painting suspends...habits of thought,” he writes in the essay
“Cézanne’s Doubt,” “and reveals the base of inhuman nature upon which man has installed
himself” (Merleau-Ponty, “Doubt,” 16). When clarifying how Cézanne’s canvasses suspend
the familiar, uncovering our primitive ground of existence, the philosopher must have had in
mind The Large Bathers:

Nature itself is stripped of the attributes which make it ready for animistic
communions: there is no wind in the landscape, no movement in the Lac d’Annecy;
the frozen objects hesitate as at the beginning of the world. It is an unfamiliar world
... (Merleau-Ponty, “Doubt,” 16)

Now consider the following passage from the first holograph draft of The Waves:

... this is the beginning ... birds have sung; & the ... spiders webs have been lit by
starlight ... The blank ... of profound night has cleared little by little. On this white
space first the trees have shown, ponderous with mist. And then the sea, moving, has
shown truly distinct from the fields. (TW: HD, 6)

This early draft shows us Woolf’s attempt to write what she in “On Being Ill” calls a “new
language ... more primitive, more sensual, more obscene,” a language which stems from a
place which is as unfamiliar and frozen as Cézanne’s stripped landscape: “There is a virgin
forest in each; a snowfield where even the print of birds’ feet is unknown” (“Ill,” 45, 46).
The untrodden and cold landscapes of Woolf and Cézanne are landscapes of reduction,
laying bare the preliminary phase of creative production. A “new” and “more primitive”
language presupposes the reduction: a “stripped,” “white space,” a blank page or zero-point.
Each by means of a different medium, the painter and writer sought to re-create a language
of “the beginning,” using paint and words to communicate the pre-communicative which is,
nevertheless, the source of creativity.

As Cézanne was, in his own words, “germinating” (Merleau-Ponty, “Doubt,” 17)
with his object-world, he traced the growth of his own creation. In Still Life With Apples
(1893-94, figure 2), he gives form to a slanting table, vessels and fruit that do not seem
accurately elliptical. The surface is characteristically distorted: the famous apples seem too
solid to balance on the tilting plate; they almost roll out of the picture surface and yet we
cannot reach them. The tilting and unusually lively objects bring into focus the immediate
nature of perceptual experience before our knowledge of gravity and geometry begins to order
it. Challenging our usual way of looking, the painting enacts the reduction, returning us to
the "lived perspective" (Merleau-Ponty, "Doubt," 14) from which Cézanne painted: "I paint as I see as I feel," he said (Eisenman, 343).

Like his apples and vessels, Cézanne's people are stripped of the characteristics of the ordinary. The figures in the portraits Boy With Skull (1896-98), Portrait of Mme Cézanne in a Red Dress (1890-94, figure 3), Portrait of Mme Cézanne with Loosened Hair (1890-92), and Old Woman with a Rosary (c.1896) appear to stare into nothingness in a dream-like manner. The gazes of these strange abstractions of people are stiffened; their lips are tightened; their expressions are completely arrested and lack individuality. These figures, too, "hesitate as at the beginning of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, "Doubt," 16), a world which is still silent and timeless.

"(T)ime shall be utterly obliterated," Woolf wrote in a diary entry on The Waves. Like Cézanne, she was concerned with the process of creative production: "I want to watch & see how the idea at first occurs. I want to trace my own process" (Diary 3, 118, 113). Throughout Woolf's work, the pre-communicative dimension of experience is ever-present as the source of this first idea. "[T]here is a zone of silence in the middle of every art," she claims in "Walter Sickert"; "[t]he artists themselves live in it" ("Sickert," 236). The six voices - six fragments of one creative mind - that constitute The Waves certainly "live in it." Like Cézanne's lively fruit and inanimate people, the voices of Bernard, Rhoda, Louis, Neville, Susan and Jinny operate on the basis of the reduction. Woolf has realized her "new... more primitive" language through a series of pure present tense soliloquies ("I flutter. I ripple. I stream like a plant in the river" (TW, 83)) which bracket the habitual, leading us away from references to time and place and back to a pre-reflective dimension of pure perceptual experience. The book's six inter-locking voices, which register only the immediate and create an ongoing stream of fresh zero-points, celebrate the perpetual possibility of creative production.

Gertrude Stein once praised Cézanne for showing that "in composition ... [e]ach part is as important as the whole" (15). Phenomenology applies equal importance to the aspect and the whole. What the reduction demonstrates is not a rejection of the world as we know it but a fresh starting-point to re-explore the depth of our involvement with it. In other words, the aspect is highlighted but only to provide a clear, unspoiled view of the whole frame within which it exists. At every point this equal balance is insinuated within the frames of The Large Bathers and The Waves. Whereas the aim of the Impressionists had been to grasp the immediacy of the fleeting impression, Paul Cézanne wished "to make of Impressionism something solid, like the art in the museums" (Eisenman, 345), that is to say, to find a balance between the broken and the solid, the fleeting and the tangible. Likewise Woolf's writing demonstrates a fine balance between pairs of opposites. Just as Lily Briscoe in To the Lighthouse senses that the "feathery and evanescent" surface of her painting is "clamped together with bolts of iron" (TTL, 231), in The Waves Louis sees through the impressionistic "mist" edging his surface world of moments and reaches "some hardness at the centre" (TW, 11, 26). In Cézanne's The Large Bathers, the natural setting of sky, water and slanting trees create the painting's framework, and in Woolf's The Waves, the soliloquizing voices are framed and balanced by the rising and setting sun, the continually breaking waves, and the singing birds. These frameworks indicate the cyclical pattern of nature: perpetual difference within a horizon of similarity, accentuating at once the aspect and the whole, surface and depth, feathery evanescence and iron, impressionistic mist and solidity.
Cézanne’s concern with “putting in as much interrelation as possible” turns our attention not to things in themselves but to the spaces between them: the spaces between vessels and fruit, bodies and trees, clouds and sky. Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs Dalloway* demonstrate a similar concern, anticipating a theme that would come to completely “saturate” *The Waves* (Diary 1, 209). For Lily Briscoe, a painter and, like Cézanne, a practical phenomenologist, “[t]he question was of some relation between those masses,” (TTL, 200) and to Septimus, who is phenomenology embodied, the world is always exposed as phenomenon: “leaves were alive; trees were alive. … The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern; … Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds” (MD, 28).

This invisible “pattern” of our existence, the betweenness of things, is brought into focus in *The Large Bathers* and *The Waves*. Cézanne’s nude bathers are, even more so than his earlier people, abstract and anonymous figures. The brown hair and far from sensual but rather plant-like shapes of these slanting figures, each of whom seems enclosed within a space of her own, mirror the equally brown and slanting tree trunks that frame their space. The scene accentuates at once separation and interrelation between the natural and the human. Cézanne’s plant-like women remind us of that moment in *The Waves* when Louis intertwines with and becomes inseparable from a stalk: “I hold a stalk in my hand. I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world, through earth dry with brick … I am all fibre” (TW, 7). Woolf’s book, a succession of similar moments, shifts our attention away from the surface of our everyday existence and back to the depths of a “direct and primitive contact with the world” (Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, vii).

In his reading of *The Large Bathers*, T.J. Clark draws particular attention to what he calls the "double figure" (157) in the right side of the painting: the bodies of two women merge and seem to disappear into each other; it looks like the one’s shoulders become the other’s buttocks and vice versa. Like Bernard in *The Waves*, these strangely schizophrenic figures seem to wonder. “Who am I? … Am I all of them? Am I one and distinct? I do not know” (TW, 240-41). Apart from articulating the interrelation of body and object-world, Merleau-Ponty brings to light this mutuality of different bodies:

The enigma is that my body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the "other side" of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself. … Visible and mobile, my body is a thing among things; it is caught up in the fabric of the world and its cohesion is that of a thing. … the world is made of the same stuff as the body. (Merleau-Ponty, “Eye,” 162-163)

The reversibility of the seeing and the visible takes place within what Merleau-Ponty terms “the intermundane space (l’intermonde) where our gazes cross and our perceptions overlap” (Merleau-Ponty, Visible, 48). Within this crossover space, the subjective and the objective intertwine; it is here that vessels and fruit “exchang[e] secrets,” as Cézanne pointed out, and where nude bodies seem more plant-like than human.

The body is, according to Merleau-Ponty, a “[v]isible-seer” (Merleau-Ponty, Visible, 260): visible and seeing, tactile and touching, separate from and yet intertwined with the world. Merleau-Ponty’s term highlights a paradox of our reflecting on the world, of our trying to step out of this world, by imposing meaning upon it, despite the fact that we are
constituent parts of it. It is this paradox that lies at the core of Woolf’s abstract play-poem. Although each of her six speakers repeatedly tries to impose imaginative order upon a world of flux - “We... stride not into chaos,” says Bernard, “but into a world that our own force can subjugate” (TW, 120) - they are all, inevitably, “made of the same stuff”: “we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory” (TW, 11). Woolf’s speakers look inward only to discover that they cannot escape being pulled back into the upsurge of the visible world. Thus, they lead their lives in continual wave-like movements of reduction and expansion, of separation and interrelation:

The mind grows rings; the identity becomes robust; pain is absorbed in growth. Opening and shutting, shutting and opening, with increasing hum and sturdiness, the haste and fever of youth are drawn into service until the whole being seems to expand in and out like the mainspring of a clock. (TW, 215)

To sum up, Cézanne’s bathing bodies - the double figure in particular - and the perpetually “shutting and opening” body of Woolf’s six figures lay bare a paradox of existence which is central to the creative artist: that of the subject objectifying a world which is, simultaneously, the frame of continuity within which he/ she exists. The tensions between bodies and frameworks in The Large Bathers and The Waves bring about a balanced shifting between the reduced aspect and the whole, surface and depth, the fleeting and the tangible, attempting to “make of Impressionism something solid.”

Finally, as pointed out by critics, when looking carefully, the middle of Cézanne’s The Large Bathers reveals the face of a woman.6 Her eyes are hidden in the sky, the water’s edge forms her mouth, and the slanting trees constitute her hair. While mirroring the mirror-relation between bodies and trees, the sky too approaches the human, once again stressing the mutuality of body and world. Once this face is spotted it returns our gaze, drawing us into the painting and yet pushing us away, giving us the feeling of being “visible-seers.” In a similar manner, Woolf’s The Waves makes us aware of our self-reflexivity. Our being conscious of what Bernard repeatedly refers to as the “lady... between the two long windows, writing” (TW, 12), a figure of the writer as a hidden and yet active force inside the text, calls attention to “that which we actually perceive” (Merleau-Ponty, “Doubt,” 14), making us reflect on our own activity of reading. Thus, Merleau-Ponty’s “intermundane space... where our gazes cross and our perceptions overlap” is also the space at which our eyes are directed: the picture surface and the page of the book. Cézanne’s face in the sky and Woolf’s hidden lady “bracket” the expected and bring into focus the particular phenomena to which we are oriented. In other words, in our experience of looking or reading, we too experience the reduction. If, as Stein wrote about Cézanne’s mode of composition, “[e]ach part is as important as the whole,” then the viewer or reader must be an integral part of the work’s landscape. Woolf reminds us of this in “How Should One Read a Book”: “Do not dictate to your author, try to become him. Be his fellow-worker and accomplice” (“Book,” 60).

Writer/ Painter, reader/ viewer and text/ painting: each is an essential part of the work’s making and re-making across the generations. Hence Bernard in The Waves: “I am made and remade continually. Different people draw different words from me” (TW, 109). Just as Cézanne was “germinating” with his object-world, we, the viewers or readers, “germinate” with the painting and text, as it were: we are parts of their coming into being. By
making the transition from the aspect to the whole, from the “mist” edging the surface of these works to the “bolts of iron” beneath, we help “make of Impressionism something solid.”
Notes:

1. Cézanne painted three different versions of The Large Bathers, two of which are in the Barnes Collection, Pennsylvania, and the National Gallery, London, respectively. I am using the last 1906 version, which is now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

2. In a 1918 letter Woolf reflected on the same apples: “They are really very superb. The longer one looks the larger and heavier and greener and redder they become” (Letters 2, 230).

3. Various critics have called attention to similarities between Woolf’s writing and phenomenology. In Journey Towards the Centre of Being M.L. Wadikar notes a "curious resemblance"(xiii) between Husserl’s phenomenology and the works of Woolf and Dorothy Richardson. The "detailed examination of Husserl’s position" (3) that Wadikar sets out to give, however, is far from detailed, the reason being that he fails to clarify that Husserl’s procedures persist under the guiding theme of the epoché. More detailed is Suzette A. Henke’s brilliant Heideggerian approach "Virginia Woolf’s The Waves: A Phenomenological Reading." Useful connections between Merleau-Ponty and Woolf have been demonstrated by Mark Hussey who in The Singing of the Real World uses Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception (xv, 3), alongside the philosophies of Sartre and R.D. Laing, as a point of departure for examining the role of the body in Woolf’s work; and, most recently, by Carole Rodier who in L’Univers imaginaire de Virginia Woolf examines all of Woolf’s novels through the thinking of Merleau-Ponty, Bachelard, Gilbert Durand, and Jean-Pierre Richard.

4. In “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf philosophizes about the same invisible “pattern” “behind the cotton wool of daily life”: “. . . it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we – I mean all human beings – are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art” (MB, 72).

5. For a careful explanation of this “exchange” of space, see Brendan Prendeville, “Merleau-Ponty, Realism and Painting: Psychophysical Space and the Space of Exchange.”

6. In Interpreting Cézanne, Sidney Geist calls Cézanne’s hidden imagery such as the face in the sky “cryptomorphs” (1-2). For another useful discussion of Cézanne’s hidden images see Joyce Medina, Cézanne and Modernism: The Poetics of Painting.

7. The writing lady re-appears on pp. 102, 201, and 224.
Figures:

1. [Image of a painting with figures under arches]

2. [Image of a still life with vases and fruits]

3. [Image of a woman in red dress]
Piety and Revolt: Woolf and the Victorians

Steve Ellis

This paper is rather more about piety than revolt; I think it's important that the less familiar side of Woolf's ambivalence towards the Victorians is given a regular airing and hearing.

"Taking stock of the Victorians is undoubtedly the literary game of the moment", the Athenaeum's "Adventures in Books" column noted in August 1918, referring primarily to Strachey's Eminent Victorians, published a few months earlier, but also to a whole spate of histories, memoirs and evaluations of the Victorian period that appeared around this time, as if the construction of the "Victorian" is one of modernity's key enterprises (351). It is in beginning with this context that I should like to talk about Woolf's own "taking stock" of the Victorians, especially in the novel she was about to complete, Night and Day, which was finished in November 1918. One might say that of all Woolf's fiction this novel shows the most urgent need to come to terms with the Victorian heritage, in ways I shall explore; one might say that, until we consider that just such a claim might rather be made on behalf of To the Lighthouse, or The Years, or indeed other works by Woolf, and that the relation between modernity and the Victorian can be seen as one of the most constant concerns in her oeuvre.

Although Strachey and Woolf have sometimes been associated in their attitudes to the Victorian past, it seems clear that there is a large gulf between them. It is admittedly not unfair to call an essay like Woolf's "The Soul of an Archbishop"—on William Thomson, a nineteenth-century Archbishop of York (published Athenaeum, May 1919) "Stracheyesque", but an exchange of letters between the two from 1912, where Strachey refers to his "hatred" of the Victorians—"a set of mouthing bungling hypocrites"—and where Woolf replies "I don't suppose I altogether agree", indicates a divergence between them that is always there (Woolf and Strachey 43-45). I don't suppose you could call the overall tone of Eminent Victorians exactly one of "hatred"; rather, I suppose, one of clinical fascination, where Strachey talks at the outset of his study of letting down into the depths a "little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen ... to be examined with a careful curiosity" (19). Woolf's metaphor for dealing with the sheer vastness of the Victorian legacy is more likely to be, as she notes in "The New Biography" (1927), that of "rummaging around in it for some "invaluable trophy" (475). Amid the rampant "undistinguished fecundity" of the period and the vast pyramid of junk that characterises it in Orlando (221-22) there are rich pickings to be had; it is an age "rich in remarkable figures" ("The Art of Biography", 1939, 223) and its novelists constitute a "splendid opulence" ("Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown", 1923, 385)

While she was working on Night and Day Woolf published in October 1917 a review of Henry James's book of Victorian memoirs The Middle Years, where the sense of the period around 1870 as a treasury, or argosy, is indeed predominant. Nothing could be less Stracheyesque than either James's volume or Woolf's account of it. She is led to salute rapturously "the old world of London life which [James] brings out of the shades and sets tenderly and solidly before us as if his last gift were the most perfect and precious of ...
treasures” (“The Old Order” 168-69). James’s London as a setting in which “personality” and physical beauty were able to thrive is contrasted with a reduced modernity as Woolf rhapsodises over the “energy” with which James’s peers “pursued the beautiful, the noble, the poetic” and over “the extravagant steps which they would take to snare whatever grace or atmosphere they desired” which “lend[s] their lives in retrospect a glamour of adventure, aspiration, and triumph such as seems for good or for evil banished from our conscious and much more critical day” (171-72). Woolf’s panegyric, in which these memoirs are even more “wonderful” than James’s novels, and provide “the greatest delight that literature has had to offer for many a year” (168) is startling, and I don’t suppose I’m the only reader who has gone to these memoirs, my appetite whetted by Woolf’s recommendations, to find them distinctly disappointing. But when Woolf goes on about James’s book that “the mere sight is enough to make anyone who has ever held a pen in his hand consider his art afresh in the light of this extraordinary example of it” (168), we realise that Woolf’s reading is closely bound up with the agenda she is pursuing in her own contemporary novel, which itself focusses on, to quote from one last sentence of her review, “the mellow light which swims over the past, the beauty which suffuses even the commonest little figures of that time, the shadow in which the detail of so many things can be discerned which the glare of day flattens out, the depth, the richness, the calm, the humour of the whole pageant” (168). Indeed, it’s possible that the first reference to Night and Day in Woolf’s Diary, from 13 November 1917— “I want to get on with my novel”— coming as it does hard on the heels of the James review, indicates the stimulus that reading and writing about James has had on her (Diary 1, 76).

Woolf’s attraction towards, nostalgia for and celebration of “the Victorian”— mixed, to be sure, with a detestation of and need to escape from it—is a conspicuous feature of her work, especially if, as in the case of someone like me, you come to it from a prior interest in modernist poetry where, in the case of people like Eliot and Pound, the Victorian period is largely anathematised, dismissed, and where allegiances are created with other periods, particularly the Middle Ages. With Woolf modernism and its innovations have to negotiate a much more complex relationship with the Victorians. But the researcher in this area has to ask himself or herself what there is to be added to previous work that has already recognised the ambivalence of this relationship, work by scholars like Gillian Beer, Perry Meisel and Janis Paul, and though I’ve been talking pretty broadly thus far I now want to enter into a closer dialogue with one of these critics, reverting to my key text, Night and Day.

Janis Paul’s The Victorian Heritage of Virginia Woolf (1987) is the principal monograph in this area, though its subtitle— The External World in her Novels— indicates its limited scope. It’s a formalist treatment of the early and mid-career novels that shows how Woolf’s innovations in the treatment of interiority and consciousness are always related to such traditional novelistic elements as social context and topographical/temporal realism— “their point of departure and return [is] a Victorian sense of solidity and factuality which is vested in the English world of time, place, and society” (37). With an early novel like Night and Day Paul sees “Victorian” discourse as far more than a “point of departure”— as, indeed, still exercising a crippling stranglehold on Woolf’s attempted modernity and on the attempt of its protagonist, Katharine Hilbery, to escape the Victorian closure of marriage; she is seen as “a Modernist spirit trapped in a Victorian novel” (84). It is only with the mature novels that Woolf finds a satisfactory negotiation between “a Victorian sense of solidity and factuality” and the newness of her own vision.
Although I respect Paul’s book and think it offers some very shrewd assessments I feel it misjudges Night and Day in several ways, and perhaps particularly in its familiar understanding of this novel as essentially preliminary; I argue that in its treatment of past and present it explores ideas about historical memorising in great depth and detail as a foundation for similar concerns throughout Woolf’s writing of the 20s, in particular To the Lighthouse. First of all, I think that Katharine is more deeply implicated in the Victorian past than Paul admits, which replicates that sense of Woolf’s James-inspired nostalgia I noted above; it might be fairer indeed to call her “a Victorian spirit trapped in a Victorian novel”. Although Katharine’s mother’s infatuation with this past is treated wryly, if not satirically, at several points, and although the potential burden of that past, in the incubus-like form of the unfinishable biography, is made plain, Katharine herself largely shares that infatuation in contrast to an unsympathetic modernity:

Quiet as the room was, and undisturbed by the sounds of the present moment, Katharine could fancy that here was a deep pool of past time, and that she and her mother were bathed in the light of sixty years ago. What could the present give, she wondered, to compare with the rich crowd of gifts bestowed by the past? Here was a Thursday morning in process of manufacture; each second was minted fresh by the clock upon the mantelpiece. She strained her ears and could just hear, far off, the hoot of a motor-car and the rush of wheels coming nearer … (ND 91-92)

The richness of the past, and in particular the phrase “bathed in the light of sixty years ago”, evokes the review of James and its celebration of “the mellow light which swims over the past” (“The Old Order” 168), and Katharine herself is equated physically with Victorian beauties (“like majestic ships … with white sails” in her mother’s phrase, ND 94) when Ralph sees her at Kew: “‘Here she comes, like a ship in full sail’, he said to himself” (280). To regard Ralph as the “modern man” would similarly underplay the extent of his involvement in traditional sentiments.

For Paul, the Hilberys’ house in Night and Day signifies the “trap” Katharine’s modernist spirit is struggling to escape from, and the time she spends on the streets of London represents her freedom: “the closed-off, man-made, many-roomed Victorian house both physically centers and symbolizes English life as it is lived in the external world”; its “stuffy, overcrowded rooms” represent how “the Victorian house cages in the impulses for natural freedom” (88). But this certainly misrepresents the Hilberys’ house, into which Katharine returns at the very end of the novel, as she says “Good night” to Denham on the doorstep: “Katharine pushed the door half open and stood upon the threshold. The light lay in soft golden grains upon the deep obscurity of the hushed and sleeping household” (432-33). This final chapter also opens in the house: “The lamps were lit; their lustre reflected itself in the polished wood; good wine was passed round the dinner-table …” (427). The Hilberys’ house is in fact not “stuffy” at all, but precisely evoked with a Jamesian sense of precious and lustrous furnishings. But these two quotations also consolidate the subject I wish to finish on, a feature that pervades Night and Day and indeed all of Woolf’s work, and that is how the relationship between past and present, and how the functioning of historical memory, are couched in terms of images of light and lighting, and how such images also underlie a broader understanding of the mind’s operations: “the light lay in soft golden grains upon the deep obscurity of the hushed and sleeping household”.

A richly-lit obscurity is a key Woolfian trope, often signalling the mind’s operations on the past. When Katharine shows off her grandfather’s shrine in the opening chapter of Night and Day, she “touched different spots, lights sprang here and there, and revealed a square mass of red-and-gold books…” and so on; the portrait of Alardyce has its own “special illumination”, in which one can see that “the paint had so faded that very little but the beautiful large eyes were left, dark in the surrounding dimness” (8). The review of James’s memoirs is similarly full of phrasing by which James’s mind “lights” the past, bringing an object “out of the shades” here, “illuminating” a figure there, and casting over the whole a “mellow light” and shadow “in which the detail of so many things can be discerned which the glare of day flattens out” (168). Janis Paul as we saw talked about the “Victorian sense of solidity and factuality” which was Woolf’s literary heritage, but paradoxically Woolf’s apprehension of the Victorian past frequently dissolves that solidity into the entrancing half-light. Moreover in Night and Day the deepest moments of human intimacy and the sense of a partner’s significance are expressed in similar images of illumination: for Ralph an “encircling glow” emanates from Katharine and surrounds “so many of the objects of life, softening their sharp outline”: “there rose up behind the whole aspect of life that soft edge of fire which … crowded the scene with shadows so deep and dark …” and so on (420). The battle for Ralph and Katharine is not to distrust this illumination in the face of another more banal and everyday apprehension or “lighting” that alternates with it, as when “an extraordinary clearness of sight seemed to possess [Katharine] on beholding” Ralph— “so little, so single, so separate from all else he appeared, who had been the cause of these extreme agitations and aspirations” (385). As Katharine’s mother says, “We have to have faith in our vision” (412).

Here it seems to me that Night and Day is formulating some of the key aspects of To the Lighthouse, such as the validity of the mind’s illumining and illuminations, even when countered by the colder light of day which also insists on being seen. The “silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye” of James’s memory and the “stark and straight” tower of actuality represent both Woolf’s characteristic contrasting of the Victorian period with modernity but also the further admission that such nostalgia is a partial apprehension of a permanent duality in history, whatever the period (TTL 251). In a review of 1926 she notes that “however grim and gaunt the stock Victorian figures may have been, another life washed at their feet”, characterised by fellowship, merriment, grace and charm (“Reminiscences” 339), just as in her review of Ethel Smyth’s Streaks of Life she suggests that the post-Victorian life of “romance” may in fact be going on in the reduced present (“this very year 1921”), being one which Smyth may apprehend retrospectively in some future volume of memoirs (“Ethel Smyth” 300). Woolf is quite open about what she calls in the James essay the “glamour” of retrospect (171) and about the fact that her appreciation of James’s treasures is inseparable from appreciation of his connoisseurship. In this, she seems to me to be working in well-grooved traditions of the mind as a Coleridgean light illuminating inanimate materiality.

And in this, to return to the beginning of my paper, she markedly differs from the Strachey wishing to drag up Victorian specimens into “the light of day” for examination. In Orlando the advent of the twentieth century is precisely signalled by the arrival of a uniform lighting that destroys privacy and “those lingering shadows and odd corners that there used to be” (283). My own sense of future direction in my research, to finish, will involve things like relating the way Woolf “lights” the Victorian-modern relationship and transition to
actual social and civic developments from gas to electricity; the relation of Woolf's writing and lighting to 1890s crepuscularity and to the work of the Bloomsbury painters; and the exploration of the way, I sense, that in her later writing the “glow” of the Victorian may perhaps become dimmer, but never dies out. I finish with a quotation from the very end of A Sketch of the Past (1939-40) which highlights (forgive the pun) the Woolfian piety:

I remember the hesitations and adumbrations with which Henry James made the drawing room [at 22 Hyde Park Gate] seem rich and dusky. Greatness still seems to me a positive possession; booming; eccentric; set apart; something to which I am led up dutifully by my parents. It is a bodily presence; it has nothing to do with anything said. It exists in certain people. But it never exists now. I cannot remember ever to have felt greatness since I was a child. (158)
Note

1. The idea of the writer proceeding by creating a world of light and shadow is recurrent in Woolf’s discussion of the Victorians, as in her obituary of Lady Ritchie, which describes “her power of creating an atmosphere of tremulous shadows and opal tinted lights”, and suggests that “she will be the transparent medium through which we behold the dead. We shall see them lit up by her tender and radiant glow” (“Lady Ritchie” 15, 18).
Voices from Below: The Song of Anon in Virginia Woolf

Freda Hauser

"A sound interrupted him: a frail quivering sound, a voice bubbling up without
direction, vigour, beginning or end, running weakly and shrilly and with an absence of
human meaning . . . the voice of no age or sex . . . " (MD 80).

As one reads work after work of Virginia Woolf's, the figure who sings in words
without meaning--but not without significance--returns as if the refrain of a song, or as if
incarnations of the artist to whom time, space, class, and even gender are irrelevant: that
singer whom Woolf named Anon. For Woolf's last, unfinished manuscript, Reading at
Random, tells the history of literature's emergence from the distant past of oral tradition, in
which Anon, the storyteller, sang, "songs sung at the door" (emphasis in original). As Brenda
Silver remarks, this originary singer, "sometimes man, sometimes woman," is the ever-
present outsider whose position allows her/ him to comment upon established authority
(382). Anon's voice lingers in "the world beneath our consciousness; the anonymous world
to which we can never return" (Silver 385).

I would add that Anon also lingers in the crucial corners of Woolf's narratives. Her
appearance in this posthumously published manuscript has drawn me to take a fresh look at
certain characters in Woolf's work, characters ordinarily seen as minor and unimportant--or
troublesome. After all, whether sitting in the London street, scrubbing floors, or standing
outside the door, the crooning singer is the personification of paradox. Although aged, s/ he
is timeless; although poor, s/ he is powerful; although seemingly meaningless, s/ he shapes
the narrative through a wordless song that nevertheless conveys her/ his story.

In any age or novel, "outsider artists," as Woolf suggests, are "helped by their
position . . . [and so by] that freedom from unreal loyalties, that freedom from interested
motives which are at present assured them by the State" (TG 113). Rather than becoming
part of existing institutions, women may take advantage of their marginal status to radically
alter Church, State, and education. The language Anon speaks, as Nora Eisenberg has
pointed out, is not "conventional language," but "an 'old language'--that is not quite
language--to cure modern words and woes, patriarchal words and woes" (253). In her notes
for the essay, "Anon," Virginia Woolf wrote such tantalizing fragments as:

The snatch of song. If I were in my castle at Boverly.
The song making instinct. The map of London.

........................................................................
This is continuity . . . certain emotions always in being: felt by people always. (qtd. in
Silver 374)

Here, Woolf juxtaposes instinct and the castles and great cities of Nation with their
"continuity" and progress. In contrast, Anon's song is always already present, a reminder of
other practices of history and art, a counterpoint to national 'progress' narratives. Anon's
authorship comes from performance, not authority; rather than emerging from an expert
source, her/ his craft coaxes a plurality of meaning from its listeners. Woolf made clear, "The
importance of the audience. / No public, in our sense. / Anonymity" (emphasis in original;
374). Anon performs without the conscious audience of a ‘master’ entertainer, instead singing a song that has been sung, in one form or another, since human voice first joined that of bird. The anonymous singer both presents and represents, “the vision of reality as a timeless unity which lies beneath the appearance of change, separation and disorder that marks daily life,” as Schulkind writes in her introduction to Moments of Being (18).

To take one example, the old blind woman's appearance in Jacob's Room prompts a pause in action, if not in rhythm. Preceded by the movement of vehicles and characters through London streets, punctuated by leaps backward in time, the narrative then seems to pause by looking at and listening to the older, more enduring figure of the “old blind woman,” sitting against “the Union of London and Smith's Bank,” cradling a dog, and "singing out loud, not for coppers, no, from the depths of her gay wild heart" (67). Woolf's refrain, in this song, is twice sung: the dog appears and reappears, her heart pulses twice, and twice we hear the refrain, "not for coppers." The woman clasps the oldest of human allies to her body and sings from her soul, even while bracing herself against the stony edifice of the mercantile world. And, her wild song and wild heart evoke woods rather than city, reminding us of Anon: "The voice that broke the silence of the forest" (qtd. in Silver 382).

Yet, the words here are not simple, rather they create paradox, defining the limits of modern life by their shadowy oblivion to its rush and its rules. The woman sings in two kinds of darkness, lending her a Miltonic romanticism, but sits on a prosaic camp-stool. She is old and blind, possibly drunk or out of her mind, but her heart is gay. The Victorian discourse of reform threads through the middle of the passage: "the child who fetches her is the fruit of sin," who "should have" been in bed; the singer's gaiety mocks their judgment (67). Upon her exit, Jacob goes to the Opera House, to hear the high art of song in a passage of de-romanticized language, rustling critique, and distracting personal intrigues. The rhythm of the choppy and confusing opera scene clashes against the earlier musical paragraph--only one sentence long, cut into its rhythm by commas and dashes, as fluid as a song sung into the darkness against which the “Queen of England” and "Prime Minister“ of the appear as frail and mortal as cardboard cutouts.

The aesthetics of the old blind woman's art are thereby juxtaposed with the art of Empire; she performs as the "often ribald, obscene" fool who acts as king for a day (qtd in Silver 383). Lena Schroder notes the marginalized placement of this street singer; adding, "In the work of Mikhail Bakhtin such marginalised figures . . . are as life-giving and dynamic as they are profoundly subversive. . . . Defying the norms of convention, they establish a world where authority and hierarchy are upturned and mocked . . . " ("MD“ 325). The singer's age, her wildness, and her blindness set her as the "outsider" of Three Guineas. As Schroder observes, both Bakhtin and Woolf "promote a representation of human interchange that is neither reduced to, nor pronounced by, a dominant authoritative voice," but is instead dialogic, that is, composed of the myriad, sometimes conflicting, discourses of a language ("MD“ 330). The singer then, "is a dialogic self who can stretch to accommodate contradiction," a "carnival mock-queen decrowning the authority of empire" (Schroder "MD“ 341)--and the authority of the published artist, whether operatic soprano or established novelist.

If the carnival mock-queen in Jacob's Room sings us from the lingering images of commerce into darkness (the darkness foreshadowing Jacob's death) the singer in Mrs. Dalloway sings us from character to character, linking the axes of the text. Peter is "at the
crossing" when a voice bubbles up "without direction, vigour, beginning or end" (80). Although her song is "absent of all human meaning," the narrator interprets its significance quite clearly: the woman sings of love, of the connections between people. Although the singer's voice has "no age or sex," she is gendered woman; for in Woolf's pages, Anon is most often gendered as female through the oppressions of her time, which allow [or constrain] men to escape her "outsider" position. Among others, Jean Wyatt has named this character "earth mother," recognizing her antiquity and her importance (442-3). For, although the singer is "battered" by daily life, she has a timeless, even mythological quality after singing for so long: "Through all ages--when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise . . . " (MD 81), this incarnation of Anon links past and present, time and eternity. Like the old blind woman, lingering "long past sunset," this singer stands as an embodiment of memory, or rather of memories: the history of the ages. In Jacob's Room the fluidity of the gay wild song bridges the staccato modern times of mercantile London and the piccato of social life; here Anon's 'ancient song' contrasts with aeroplane drone or the explosion of the automobile's exhaust. Her humanity, ungendered and unshaped as it may be, extends far into the past, back to before the printing press that encouraged authorship (that machine which ironically has given us this novel). Moreover, Anon's song also links modern, isolated mortals by acting as the refrain between characters' stories within the narrative, since the "battered woman's" song is the one human vehicle threading together the "beautiful caves" that Woolf carved out behind her characters.

If the wild singer and the battered woman act as a conduit between times and characters, so does Mrs. McNab in To the Lighthouse by dragging the house "back into the present order," just as the author brings caves "to light in the present moment" (Dowling 157). As Jane Marcus points out, the holograph of To the Lighthouse called for Mrs. McNab to narrate the whole of "Time Passes," which would indeed have given her the voice "between" (Languages 7). Although this explicit connection was altered in the final version of the novel, its traces linger. This new incarnation of the carnival queen, lurching, leering, and rolling through the house, breaks the silence of the forest the house could otherwise become, acting as a singing center to the characters' comings and goings--and to the narrative structure.

But Anon is not always a solitary old woman, rather the collective quality of Anon's voice, the "we" that Woolf sought after--"'I' rejected: 'We' substituted" (Diary 5: 135), reincarnates as plural in her later works. Woolf wrote in her diary, "(but I am thinking all the time of what is to end [The Years]. I want a Chorus. a general statement. a song for four voices. . . . And how to make the transition from the colloquial to the lyrical, from the particular to the general?) (236). The carnivalesque voice of Anon regains its blurred identity in this chorus of the unnamed cockney children of The Years. The old blind woman sang well after sunset, the beggar woman through the ages, the cleaning woman past the death of Mrs. Ramsay. As it grows light again, the cockney children of the caretaker sing, and "Not a word was recognisable. The distorted sounds rose and sank as if they followed a tune. They stopped" (429). The children sing another verse, which Woolf's narrator records despite its incomprehensibility, commenting, "They sang the second verse more fiercely than the first. The rhythm seemed to rock and the unintelligible words ran themselves together almost into a shriek. Their voices were so harsh; the accent was so hideous" (430). These children, whose gender is unclear, sing a song whose meaning is so obscure that the narrator of this novel can not, as in the others, even tell us its origins or paraphrase its words. The words
"children" and "grown-ups" are sufficiently repeated until we feel a vast gap between these two groups. Yet the song functions as earlier songs in Woolf's canon, for "their incomprehensible song draws the party goers together," as the "grown-ups" cluster around the singers (Dowling 195).

Paradoxically it is the fragmented and unintelligible quality of the childrens' song that links the characters within the narrative. The song is open for interpretation, thus the listeners determine its significance. "Old Patrick" thinks it a school song strained through a Cockney accent that he does not expect to be able to understand. Martin views it as a service and tips the singers. Only Eleanor pauses: "What was it? As they stood there they had looked so dignified; yet they had made this hideous noise. The contrast . . . was astonishing; it was impossible to find one word for the whole. "Beautiful?" (431) Eleanor asks not what the song's words are, but what the performance means. The space between appearance and sound, and its significance rivets her attention and draws ours, as readers, to its paradox, which shapes all that around it. Again the performance of song defines and yet connects individuals. The singing, the confusion of meaning, the ambiguous gender, have the familiar ring of Anon's performance.

"[F]ind the end of a ball of string and wind out . . . " Woolf wrote in her notes, while simultaneously writing Reading at Random and Between the Acts. One pictures that end as slightly unraveled, made up of threads, of which two are Anon and Miss La Trobe. A chorus of readers echo my observations. To Eisenberg, Miss La Trobe is Anon (253), or "He it was who found words for them to sing" (Woolf qtd. in Silver 383). The peasants of Anon's time "The mummers acted his old play . . . the boys came singing his wassailing song . . . " (qtd. in Silver 384) are the villagers of the novel. Or perhaps the villagers too, as Schroder suggests, are Anon ("drag" 117), and Woolf's artist has, as Marcus writes, "evolved from anonymity through egotism and female identity and back to anonymity" ("Thinking" 26). Schroder calls this novel "Woolf's carnivalesque novel in the fullest Bakhtinian sense," and its languages dialogic ("drag" 118). After all, "Conventional language," as Eisenberg writes, "is not capable of rendering a unified existence" (257). Thus the villagers, winding their way through the literal scenery behind the play, thus the cows, lowing, thus the rain falling just when it is needed. Thus the gramophone, since, "Music, then, encourages a recognition of the unity of all things" (Eisenberg 258).

And therefore the singers in so many of Woolf's works.

Miss La Trobe, sitting alone over her beer, is described as an outcast; the word recalls the Outsider Society (211). Her gender is not femininized, for she is "abrupt" and "bossy" (BTA 63). At play's end, "Flowing and streaming . . . still for one moment she held them together--the dispersing company" (98). She despairs that her play has not been understood in terms of meaning or significance. But she triumphs: "And listened. Words of one syllable sank down into the mud . . . The mud became fertile. Words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud. Words without meaning--wonderful words" (212).

* * * * *

In Moments of Being, Woolf described how her own words came from "shocks" that disrupt the "cotton wool" of everyday life. Only the author's capacity to write allows her to
transform these shocks into revelation. Woolf's "constant idea" is that there is a pattern behind the cotton wool that has nothing to do with authority or individualism: "there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself" (72). And, so does Woolf herself become an incarnation, despite the printing press and her notoriety, of Anon. Gendered woman, she becomes compared with male writers of the Canon. Writing in words, she seeks to recapture the unconventional language of unified existence. We know her by her resistance. We know her by her paradox. We know her by her song.
Grrls and Ezine Fiction: Teaching *A Room of One's Own* in American Universities Today

Judith L. Johnston

Teaching *A Room of One's Own* at Stanford University in 1970, I remember students resisting Virginia Woolf's anger; but, teaching Woolf's essay in 2002, I found American university students enjoying Woolf's anger. These students face a culture radically changed since 1928, when Woolf composed her essay, and even since the 1970s, when my generation began teaching; nevertheless, Virginia Woolf's angry, witty, and brilliant analysis of power, gender, and class in *A Room of One's Own* continues to challenge and inspire students of today's generation.

Within the university itself, the changes are obvious to students, who are comfortable in co-ed universities, in which women outnumber men, women earn more baccalaureate degrees, and women dominate English literature classrooms. When we discuss the Oxbridge references in *A Room of One's Own*, I tell my American students that when I began teaching college in the early 1970s, men were the majority of undergraduate students, and there were many public and private universities that still excluded women undergraduates. What a change in thirty years! Today, teaching web-savvy students *A Room of One's Own* using an on-line discussion forum, with software from Blackboard Inc., provided by my institution, Rider University, a co-ed private university, I find students' responses to Woolf's ideas reflect their own cultural experience, including their familiarity with computers and with communicating on the World Wide Web.

Paralleling Virginia Woolf being told to keep off the grass and being barred from the library at O xbridge, women and girls once seemed to be shut out of web technology. This has changed. According to a 1998 study of web use by gender, females are 38.7% of all users of the World Wide Web, but in the category of new users females are 51.7%, and among users aged 11-20, females are 43.8% (Pitkow). In public libraries and in public schools, girls have had access to computers for writing and to the web for doing school projects. This is a generation of "Cybergrrls." Many girls participate in chat rooms and conduct conversations by e-mail, and gossip is part of women's electronic interactions with each other. Rhiannon Bury, in an essay entitled "From a Room to a Cyberspace of One's Own: Technology and Women-Only Heterotopia," discusses not Virginia Woolf's essay but a chat room in which women gossip about a TV actor and about their lives. Although she admits gaps in the patriarchy, such as this women's chat room, Bury predicts that "the public/private binary will not lose its power to organize and gender space, 'real' or 'virtual,' anytime soon" (82). I disagree. Chat rooms and web pages, even those self-identified as "girls only," are open to public scrutiny, they give participants experience in voicing assertively their ideas and their identities, and the self-confident agency girls learn is soon practiced in other sites. Beginning as adolescents, girls in American culture have made their own girls-only rooms on the World Wide Web, and my students, even if they have not built their own sites, have surfed in G rrl Power sites--that's G-R-R-L, with a growl and a wink, a playfulness that is self-confident.

Recently, feminists in education have observed both a proliferation of girls' and women's own spaces on the Web and a playful self-confidence in women's on-line identities.
In "No Boys Allowed: The World Wide Web as a Clubhouse for Girls," Pamela Takayashi and two students, Emily and Meghan Huot, co-authors, study adolescent girls' home pages, finding assertive voices and strong self-esteem, in the "legions of articulate, thoughtful, and strong girls...actively creating and maintaining progirl home pages" (95). In addition, adolescent girls have created artworks, poetry, and stories, which they have published on their own home web pages. In place of a room of their own, these computer savvy girls have created websites of their own. Acknowledging the negative images of girls on the World Wide Web, these co-authors reject the media emphasis on girls and women as victims of pornographers: "Girls are an active presence on the Web even though the environment can be hostile to them...allowing that oppression is a potential problem for girls on the Web emphasizes the strength of girls who forge a space for girls anyway" (96). Also reporting a confident female self-representation are Danielle N. DeVoss and Cynthia L. Selfe, who study the border-crossing, multiple cyborgian identities created in web pages by college-age women, in order "to focus on better understanding the complicated work and representations women compose on-line and the articulations of this work in our classrooms." DeVoss and Selfe assert that "The value of personal Web sites as teaching and learning forums, ...will be realized when their author-designers engage in meaningful dialogue with other reader-viewers about the issues and identities they represent on-line."

Students in my classes debate one another in a discussion forum on the course website, and they playfully try on various personas in their posted entries.

As my students move from course to course, they adopt various identities in response to their perception of the professors' expectations. I'm sure that male and female students in my classes are more outspokenly feminist than they are in some other classes. As Lillian M. Brisson has suggested, the narrative stance of Virginia Woolf's persona "is fluid, relational, fragmented--encompassing thousands of suppressed female voices" (198), and my students imitate Virginia Woolf's playfulness and assumption of multiple identities in *A Room of One's Own*.

Building on students' competence in communicating electronically, I have transferred to my course website the writing exercises I had been assigning for years. Now, rather than having students type out responses to discussion questions and hand in paper copies before we began discussing the text in class, I ask them to respond to discussion questions on the course website, encouraging them to read and reply to one another.

Using the course website in this way, students became more fluent and more confident in their literary analysis. Empowerment came both through these electronic writing exercises and also through reading *A Room of One's Own*, in which Vara Neverow finds that "Woolf's theory of composition focuses on turning anxiety into empowerment" (58). In the weekly discussion forum, students wrote without the usual anxiety about a teacher's judgment; rather, they wrote knowing that other students would read their entries. Judging from their anonymous course evaluations, they really liked this exchange of ideas with their peers.

There are many pedagogical benefits to using the discussion forum. Because the question was posted well in advance, many students read the question to guide their reading and to prepare for the class discussion. On-time completion of the responses to discussion questions was better using the course website than it had been when I collected paper copies. By reading student responses in advance, I could adjust classroom preparations to
meet the students' actual needs. Knowing what the students had not understood helped me teach more effectively in the classroom. For example, I discovered that my students, for whom using a computer was easier than using a pen to write, were unfamiliar with fountain pens. When I taught the image of angry doodling, the pen stabbing the paper in *A Room of One's Own*, I knew I had to draw a fountain pen and to explain the function of this obsolete writing instrument. By using the course website's announcement page and also by replying individually to their entries on the discussion forum, I was usually able to give students feedback quickly. Students asked me for more developmental criticism, not just a grade. Students interacted with one another outside of class, discussing through their writing on the course website both the content and their own analyses of the text. They felt a sense of empowerment from this interaction with one another.

The week we began to read together *A Room of One's Own*, I asked students to begin analysis by responding to this question: "By 1929, what historical changes does Woolf mention, marking forward progress from Anne Finch's time, when Finch wrote: 'Alas! a woman that attempts the pen'?" The first student responded four days before the deadline. She expressed an explicit awareness of class differences among women: "Aphra Behn is especially significant because she was a middle class woman who, out of necessity following her husband’s death, proved that money could be made from writing. As a result, other middle class women began to write in order to put money in their purses" (GPD--I will identify the students simply by their initials). Twenty-five students (the entire class) read this first student's response, and many of them agreed and also commented on Aphra Behn's class status, admiring her for having earned her living as a writer, because today's English majors hope to make a career as writers, even if they earn a living in business or in education. When we discussed *A Room of One's Own*, I found widespread student understanding of how socio-economic class affects a literary career, and I found student appreciation for Woolf's own awareness of class differences.

A male student--writing more than three days before the deadline--picked up the class issue, but he extended the argument, writing, "Woolf also destroys another notion that democratic citizens like to believe in. This is the notion that the poor can become great writers. She destroys this notion by giving a list of great male writers... and explains how most of them were university educated and also very wealthy. This is why she keeps repeating that women need a 500/yr income and a room of their own to write good poetry. For without both of these things they will be so distracted from their writing that they will never be able to separate their negative emotions from the truth" (DE). After acknowledging that writers benefit from a university education and financial independence, this student, in commenting on "negative emotions" begins to approach the question of a writer's self-confidence.

Two hours later, an African American female student responded to the idea of the writer's self-confidence: "Woolf feels that in this very statement Finch is attempting to encourage herself through writing in order to prepare herself for what she thinks will be a work that will go unpublished" (AC). This student emphasized the opposition to a woman writer: "Bronte and Austen manage to maintain integrity in their works despite the criticism and overall adversity they face" (AC). She identifies with Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austen, but she inserts her own social activism in her concluding statement: "So in going back to Finch's statement women should not attempt the pen but rather transform the power that
the holder of it possesses, which is what women by the 1929 were well on their way to doing" (AC). This is a self-confident female voice, well aware of adversity, who expects women to be agents transforming the unequal power structure.

Students are less outspoken about sexual identity than they are about gender and class. In teaching A Room of One's Own, I find that reading "Chloe liked Olivia" no longer makes students blush. Lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgendered sexualities are part of students' experience. A male student wrote, "Mary Carmichael is writing about a female-female relationship. Woolf notices hints of lesbianism between Carmichael's characters Chloe and Olivia - something that may never have been attempted before in literature. But even if the relationship is not romantic, even the friendship between these two women is revolutionary. Woolf points out that men have rarely bothered to discuss these kinds of relationships" (JB). Today, students are aware that there are "Lesbian and Gay" sections of bookstores, even though few of them can name any lesbian or gay writers. Addressing this gap in knowledge, I identify writers as gay or lesbian or heterosexual writers, I tell students about Woolf's playful novel, Orlando, and that, outside of Woolf's personal circle of friends, few readers in 1928 knew about Virginia's erotic affection for Vita, explaining that the public literary world was not tolerant of homosexuality. This surprises most students, though not that student who called Woolf's depiction of the friendship between Chloe and Olivia "revolutionary."

Woolf writes about Chloe and Olivia in the last chapter of A Room of One's Own, where she discusses the new generation of women writers in 1928. The imagined novel Woolf claims to pick up "at random" she identifies as Life's Adventure by Mary Carmichael, but it is based on the real model of Love's Creation, published in 1928, written by birth control advocate Marie Stopes. In A Room of One's Own Woolf makes the point that most women novelists had been childless and that envisioning a career as writer was impossible for most mothers. Students felt empowered to dispute Woolf's point.

As feminist historians, we can note that Woolf was aware of the tremendous liberation that birth control offered women in the 20th century. Once birth control became widely available and affordable, women could choose whether and when to bear children. Birth control gave women the ability to give themselves some time of their own. I believe that the name "Marie Stopes" reminded Virginia Woolf of generational differences between herself and younger women. In Woolf's letter to Molly MacCarthy, 19 January 1923, she writes, "I've been talking to the younger generation all the afternoon. They are like crude, hard, green apples; no halo, mildew, or blight. Seduced at 15, life has no holes and corners for them. I admire, but deplore. Such an old maid they make me feel. And how do you manage not- not- not- to have children? I ask. 'Oh, we read Mary Stopes of course' (Letters 3, 6). Mary Stopes, a medical doctor, had published in 1918 Wise Parenthood, which explained contraception. In 2002, almost 80 years after 1923, when Virginia Woolf was writing her letter to Molly MacCarthy, the majority of students in our college classes are sexually active, and that they know about contraception. Unlike the younger generation speaking with Virginia Woolf in 1923; however, contemporary young women do not see motherhood and a career as incompatible. Twenty per cent of the students in this class were mothers and continued full-time college course work, and they hotly disputed Virginia Woolf's assumption that women writers had to choose to be childless."
Instead, my students agreed with Woolf's assertion "that women, like men, have other interests . . . besides . . . domesticity" (AR00 2197). This generation is quite confident that women have achieved equal access as writers. Writing in response to my follow-up comment on her original entry, a student commented on women writers with optimism and self-assurance. She wrote: "Yes, I think women writers have achieved Woolf’s vision. Excellent examples of women who write without bitterness and anger would be Toni Morrison, Barbara Kingsolver, Jane Smiley and Louise Erdrich. There are more, of course. As a nascent writer and a woman I am very happy to inherit such a tradition" (RM). This student embodies the spirit of Judith Shakespeare.

One female student responded explicitly to Woolf’s peroration by writing, "So Woolf really ends her essay challenging women to write, to take into account the history of women writers and women in general, and become great. . . . Woolf predicts great things for the future of women authors--‘the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare’s sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down’ (AR00 2214). By laying the past out clearly, she opens the door to a brighter and wiser future for women" (SV). A second female student looked through the open door to envision great achievement by women writers: "What Woolf is saying is that if the women of this [her] time were independent of men, their works would have been much better. So by this theory, our women writers today have no excuse for their flaws. Our current situation gives them the opportunity to be great." (CM). A third female student proclaimed confidently: "Our educational opportunities are the same as men and we are allowed to go to any university that we want. . . . Things have surely changed in women's history since the time of Virginia Woolf’s essay" (AH). The contrast between the past and the present is absolutely sharp to most students today.

Woolf’s portrayal of earlier women writers lacking a tradition of their own inspired and of course predates the decades of work by feminist literary historians who have uncovered many early women writers, edited their works, and made them available for the classroom teacher. To my students, however, the female literary tradition is still absent. One female student wrote, "If women had not been suppressed by the patriarchy, it seems clear that women would have been great writers, equal if not surpassing, Shakespeare for example" (SV). Students are aware that some professors but not all include work by women writers in their courses, but today’s generation of students believes the progress of literary women is very recent.

Rather than retreating to the isolation of a room of one's own, today's technologically savvy college students learn collaboratively, whether they are peer-reviewing each other's draft essays, or writing in response Woolf's essay, or writing in response to another student's posted entry. Students are well prepared to accept Virginia Woolf's challenge to contradict her and to make additions to her argument. One African American senior, headed for a career in education, is confident, not in herself alone, but in all women today, and she writes as if she is continuing a conversation that Virginia Woolf began over 70 years ago. "Women hold so many powerful positions and they are independent, intelligent and strong. I know that if Woolf and the two other women mentioned were alive today, they would be so proud of how far we’ve come. There is still work to be done, but by and by, women will be seen for the strong, smart and wonderful creatures that they are!" (ST). Virginia would have been delighted.
As the job market drives an ever-larger number of people to seek college degrees, student populations become increasingly diverse. Students at the two-year campus I teach on in southwestern Ohio come from numerous cultural backgrounds, range in age from sixteen-year-old postsecondary students to fifty-something men and women preparing for another career, and exhibit many levels of preparedness for college work. As at most institutions, our first-year composition courses consist primarily of non-English majors taking them solely to meet a requirement. While many come to find the first course in our two-semester sequence, College Composition, somewhat relevant to their work in other courses, many enter the second, Composition and Literature, skeptical about its usefulness, even resentful at having to waste time and hard-earned money on the three credit hours. Because Woolf’s works meet one of the course’s goals—having students think critically about difficult texts—I almost invariably teach her. There are challenges in doing this, challenges I believe will only increase as the new century rolls on. I hope to suggest ways we can make Woolf relevant to future generations of students who most likely will not have read her works before, will lack literary context for them, and will feel that a gulf of time and culture lies between them and Woolf and her work.

The comments Loretta Stec’s students made about Three Guineas, published in the Spring 2002 Virginia Woolf Miscellany, were all too familiar to me: “Why isn’t she more clear about her points, whatever they are? Why is the arrangement of material so difficult? Why does she use all those footnotes?” (4). My response is to agree with Mary Doll’s declaration in To The Lighthouse and Back that, “given time to meditate on a piece of text, the average citizen can shed light on it” (8). The trick is getting students to devote that time not just to processing words, but indeed to meditating on the ideas words express and suggest. To attain this goal, students must see how literature is relevant to their lives. Modeling ways in which we make it relevant to our own lives is a useful start.

In an article on using literature to teach writing, Joseph Ng remarks that while some hundred years ago teacher and student were “worlds apart” because universities “stress[ed] high literary culture,” today “the gap is farther widened in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and socioeconomics” (419). To bridge the gap, he suggests that instructors work along with their students in creating their “public voice,” reading their selves, and “relating ourselves to the reading as models of how literature reflects and enriches our own lives” (420). He offers an activity perfect for approaching Woolf: he brainstorms and writes along with his students about minority and feminist issues in current society as preparation for comparing this material with that presented by earlier writers who addressed these issues. Ng is honest about his own “understanding of [. . . ] culture and history,” his “own negotiation with text[s],” and finds his classes are “more interesting because students forge and reforge their public identities and voices in this supportive environment where all members, including the instructor, are active participants in the meaning-making process” (420, 421, emphasis in the original). The preparatory activity has multiple benefits: it “brings forth student text, encourages multiple and increasingly complex readings, probes the rich personal, linguistic,
Reader-response theories of literature lie behind such meaning-making processes. In her classic text, Literature as Exploration, Louise Rosenblatt articulates what I take to be my mission: instructors should guide their students “toward a fuller participation in what the text offers” by encouraging students to “critically revalue [their] own assumptions and preoccupations” and by themselves “understand[ing] some of the possible forces molding the student’s response” and “anticipat[ing] some of the major needs and concerns of adolescents in our society” (74). I agree with Lois Tucker that a reader-response approach fosters “an active, not passive, encounter with the literature” and “validates [students] as critical readers who are capable of determining meaning in texts” (199). Tucker has students journal after completing a reading assignment, then asks them to share journals and reflect on how entries differ: “What were the differences based on (gender, occupation, age, ethnicity, geography, social status, values, family backgrounds, personal experiences, background knowledge, other)?” (201). As a secondary step, she directs students, “Consider the responses to the work written by professional critics. How do they compare with your own perspectives? For example, do they confirm, support, extend, complement, refute, or differ from your ideas?” (201). Tucker finds this takes students “outside the strict boundaries of reader-response theory into reception theory, in which students are able to expand their collaborations to include historical perspectives” (201).

An activity for any Woolf text was suggested to me by the work of Alan Devenish, who writes about using classics such as Antigone in the contemporary classroom. Devenish strives to have students “consider their knowledge (or lack of knowledge) as the beginning or continuation of learning” (412). To apply this to Woolf’s work, we would ask students to write what they know about Woolf, historical events during her lifetime, and British culture. “In this way,” Devenish observes about using such a focus on ancient Greece, “I learn what they know, but more important, they begin to think about their impressions, images, assumptions—what they bring to their reading even before they begin reading” (412-13). We can guide students, through discussion and brainstorming, in uncovering the cultural assumptions that inform Woolf’s texts; have them research these assumptions; ask them to analyze how they have changed or persisted in British society; and explore any assumptions shared by various cultures across time. Such preparation helps make the literature relevant because it moves students toward seeing how Woolf thought against the current, thereby inviting them to explore the ways they themselves might think and act against the current of contemporary society—or how they might not.

I introduce students to Woolf with “The Mark on the Wall” because I believe it is an accessible text that demonstrates the style and ideas that will help students unlock more difficult works. I recommend reading aloud to aid students in making sense of the text; as experienced readers of Woolf, we know how to emphasize this, trail along after that idea, abruptly shift back to the mark on the wall—basically, we map out the text by taking students through a performed reading. I find this an essential activity for weaker readers as well as reinforcement for sophisticated ones. I pause over the first sentence, discussing it as an example of the ambiguity readers must embrace to follow Woolf through her texts: “Perhaps it was the middle of January in the present year that I first looked up and saw the mark on the wall” (“Mark” 83, emphasis added). We move through the essay, exploring
analogies and metaphors as a way to relate to Woolf's ideas. I tell students not to worry if certain references are lost on them, urging them instead to track the structure and flow of the piece: Woolf always returns to that mark. A perfect section for helping students follow how Woolf "slips easily from one thing to another" (85) is where she thinks the mark projects from the wall, like a tumulus, which leads to barrows, bones, the antiquarian, his stroke, the museum. Such rumination is the point of the essay, which is why, I explain, even though Woolf writes "I must jump up and see for myself what that mark on the wall really is" (88), she stays put.

As a strategy for encouraging confidence in students' analysis of literature, we engage in pre-reading activities for "How Should One Read a Book?" Since it appears in The Second Common Reader, I ask students to think about the term "common reader," imagining what such a reader in Woolf's day would have been like, asking them to profile that "common reader" through guided research, and having them do a collaborative interviewing activity to develop profiles of today's common readers. This speculation, research, and field work allows students to position themselves as individual readers of Woolf, common or not. Another activity is asking how they have been told in the past to read a book—by relatives, teachers, librarians, anyone who may have instructed them in reading literature. Invariably there are figures who took the you-read-it-then-I'll-tell-you-what-it-means approach. Most feel relief as they turn to Woolf's essay and are told, "The only advice, indeed, that one person can give another about reading is to take no advice, to follow your own instincts, to use your own reason, to come to your own conclusions" (How Should?" 258). But this could frighten those who have little confidence in their critical reading abilities, so students work collaboratively in small groups to draw meaning from Woolf's texts; eventually everyone has something to contribute to the group's reading, and the unconfident ones quickly see how their questions and confusion are the beginning of coming to understand a text. Too, Woolf is useful in addressing any student who wants to rely completely on what "the experts" say, either because she doesn't trust her own readings or because she is too lazy to perform them. Good critics help us only if we approach them "laden with questions and suggestions won honestly in the course of our own reading. [. . .] We can only understand their ruling when it comes in conflict with our own and vanquishes it" (269). Even if students remain wary about their own critical abilities, Woolf helps them see that as readers, they are influential in the creation of future literary works: "But still we have our responsibilities as readers and even our importance. The standards we raise and the judgments we pass steal into the air and become part of the atmosphere which writers breath as they work. An influence is created which tells upon them even if it never finds its way into print" (269-70).

Before plunging into either Mrs. Dalloway or To The Lighthouse, I take a smaller step into Woolf's fiction by using "Lappin and Lapinova." In this brief story, a newlywed creates an imaginative world in which she as Queen Lapinova and her husband as King Lappin rule— they are rabbits, and her husband enjoys participating in making up stories about their adventures. But after two years he doesn't want to play anymore; Woolf ends with the line, "So that was the end of that marriage" ("Lappin" 268). The piece is stylistically easy to read, highly imaginative and visual, about a topic students of any age warm up to, whatever their views— relationships— and affords the opportunity to practice close textual analysis. For example, the end of the story makes clever movement from the thoughts and words of the wife to the movements and words of the husband, paralleling the killing of Queen Lapinova with the killing of the marriage. Students find themselves confident both in performing a
close reading of the accessible passage and in expressing their personal views of the marital relationship depicted.

When teaching a novel, because I am both a proponent of reader-response and a New Historian, I strive to have students consider as many aspects of the period in which a work was created as possible. I agree with Michael Meyer that “literature may transcend time to the extent that it addresses the concerns of readers over a span of decades or centuries, but it remains for the literary historian a part of the past in which it was composed, a past that can reveal more fully a work’s language, ideas, and purposes” (104). Woolf’s novels can serve a dual purpose for our students, then: connecting to their lives through social issues that are still relevant, and illuminating the society in which Woolf lived and worked—making it less remote or foreign as it becomes more known, more understood. For example, when teaching *To The Lighthouse*, I ask students to make an informal, ten-minute oral presentation on the topic of their choice from a list I provide. The topics are designed to help us further understand cultural contexts and require students to do research. A few such topics are post-impressionism; the artwork or artistic theories of Vanessa Bell and Roger Fry; the Bloomsbury Group; the British suffragist movement; Sir Leslie Stephen; and contemporary clothing, decorating, and architectural styles.

My students have a variety of reactions to reading a novel, any novel. These range among fear (“I’ve never read a novel before!”), dread (“I’m going to be bored”), and excitement (“I like to read”). In an attempt to reach all students and entice them into the book, before we begin *To The Lighthouse* I provide a handout with brief explanations of the three sections (for example, “ ‘Time Passes’ concerns just that: Prue marries, WWI occurs, 10 years have passed and Mrs. McNab comes to open the house”) and a list of characters, explaining who they are and their ages in each section, if determinable. This supports inexperienced readers and those with learning disabilities, and sometimes piques the interest of the unengaged. I advise students to read slowly, reminding them about Woolf’s stream-of-consciousness technique and how we too will be searching and deciding and formulating along with the characters. Since the novel arguably is held together by a connection of emotions more than events, first discussions ask students to describe the Ramsays’ marriage by looking at how they treat each other and what their thoughts about each other are; to offer their impressions of all the characters and note particular passages that contribute to their sense of the characters; and to use the dinner scene as a way to get into the different characters: What is each like? What do they think about? Where would they rather be? What do they want to get or what have they gotten out of life? How do they feel about each other? Why do we eat meals with people other than our family? Such questions invite their individual responses as readers, their reactions as human beings, yet also demand close reading and the practice of finding textual support for their views.

If the novel is *Mrs. Dalloway*, before we begin I tell them that Woolf wrote in her diary, “In this book I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life & death, sanity & insanity; I want to criticise the social system, & to show it at work, at its most intense” (*Diary* 2, 248). Handouts again offer character biographies and questions: How do you respond to Richard? How would you describe the Dalloways’ marriage? Septimus thinks he cannot feel; what do you think? How do you respond to the doctors’ treatments of Septimus? What do you see as Clarissa’s positive and negative qualities? Discussing their answers moves us from the personal to the cultural as we explore how each character is shaped by conforming to or
rebelling against society. Students again uncover and research social issues addressed in the novel.

One way to diffuse potential resistance to working with this difficult text is to ask each student to track and comment on just one thing in a section of the novel. In the first fifty pages this could be the motor car, references to India and Sally Seton; in the next fifty they could be Peter’s walk through London, the woman singing on the street; in the next fifty, particular characters; and in the last section, Clarissa as hostess, Sally as Lady Rosseter, the old woman next door. This activity invites students to become invested in their perspective on one of the elements Woolf chose to include and to make themselves an authority on it. I believe first-time readers are apt to see the tapestry of Mrs. Dalloway more fully with the help of fellow readers in this way.

Another technique for gaining engagement, adapted from Devenish, is to present a scenario from the novel and ask students what they would do in that situation. In this way, Devenish explains, students contextualize the problem by imagining themselves in the situation. He notes how students “may have neither the background nor the predisposition to engage willingly with texts written [long ago],” so “reflective, probative writing can help generate links between these apparent distances,” with the additional benefit that writing “brief, regular responses can open onto more sustained thinking, so that topics for essays and longer projects emerge more organically from ongoing reflection” (413).

When it comes time to write essays about Woolf’s works, students develop their own topics, but I offer suggestions if asked. These are, not surprisingly, reader-response based or culturally situated. I might suggest students read more about Bloomsbury and venture ideas on how it influenced Woolf’s depiction of society in her literature; or that they discuss parent-child dynamics in a novel; or that they draw similarities or differences between Woolf’s treatment of marriage, society, women’s roles and functions, or art, and treatment of the same topic by another author; or that they make connections between Woolf’s writing and the visual arts, music, or dance of the Modern period.

Working in these ways to engage first-year composition students with Woolf’s texts can be the basis for encouraging critical thinking and self-reflection in students who initially might feel quite disconnected from her texts.
Aesthete to Radical to...? What Have We Gained and What Have We Lost?

Ann Murphy

Let me say at the start that my title should in fact read “Aesthete to Radical to...? What have we gained- and what have we lost?” For as I look back to the critics who formed my own undergraduate experience as an English major in the 1960s, and then to the radical transformation of literary studies brought about by feminist scholarship, which energized my graduate work in the 1980s, there can be no question that the critical approaches to Woolf in the ‘50s and ‘60s- if they existed at all, given her comparative invisibility- were seriously flawed and deeply misogynist. Nor can there be any doubt that the explosion in feminist criticism over the past twenty-five years has been a profound gain, rendering Woolf visible in all her complexity, and rescuing her from a critical ghetto of delicate female style and sensibility. At the same time, like other academics of my generation, I have serious concerns about the nature and direction of contemporary literary theory and criticism, and questions that I hope to raise here and to discuss with other feminist scholars as we celebrate “Woolf Across the Generations.”

In her recent book, Disciplining Feminism, Ellen Messer-Davidow describes literary studies as characterized by

two basic paradigms during the 1950s and 1960s. One paradigm- let's call it interpretationism- was an open system that allowed sex stereotypes to seep into and steep disciplinary reading and writing. The other paradigm- formalism- was a closed system of textual analysis that excluded other discourses . . . (38).

As those of you who were there at the time probably remember, Woolf fared poorly in both of these paradigms. Interpretationism might best be illustrated by the enormously prestigious F. R. Leavis, whose The Great Tradition was one of the first books of criticism I remember reading as an undergraduate. Leavis opens with a claim which is breathtaking in its absolute certitude, mitigated only slightly by the suggestion of doubt which edges its conclusion: “The great English novelists,” Leavis announces, “are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad- to stop at the moment at that comparatively safe point in history” (1). The Introduction to The Great Tradition reviews his rationale for this choice and his reasons for not including Gaskell, Scott, the Brontës, Dickens, Thackeray or Trollope among the Victorians, or Wharton, Forster, Lawrence, Hardy, Durrell, Joyce, Miller or Barnes among more contemporary writers. Virginia Woolf’s name is mentioned nowhere in this introduction. Modernism, as depicted by Leavis’s interpretationist paradigm, refers to Conrad, Lawrence and Joyce. Not to Woolf.

Nor is Leavis’s very public distaste for- and erasure of- Woolf an anomaly. Dorothy Van Ghent’s 1953 study, The English Novel: Form and Function, another staple of my undergraduate classes in the 1960s, includes 18 essays, beginning with Cervantes and Bunyan and closing with Lawrence and Joyce. Again, Woolf is striking by her absence. For Van Ghent, the modernist project is defined by “autobiographical portraits of the artist as a young man” and by a “subjective, introspective impulse” resulting from a “cultural crisis, when traditional values no longer seem to match at any point with the actualities of experience” (263). Van Ghent includes Proust in her discussion of this project, but she
makes no mention of Virginia Woolf, a writer whose work, to us today, seems expressly to explore such disjunctions between values and experience.

However, a third interpretationist critic, Walter Allen, does include Woolf in his 1965 study, *The Modern Novel in Britain and the United States*. Allen’s book contains an index, unlike those of Van Ghen and Leavis, and Woolf’s name in this index includes the following suggestive references: “attacks Edwardian novelists . . . her narrow limits . . . her devices for unity . . . [and] adapts the stream of consciousness . . .” but mentions only one novel, *Between the Acts* (346). According to Allen—and I would suggest this view is characteristic of much critical interpretation of the ‘50s and ‘60s—Woolf’s significance lies in her style:

Transience is the very stuff of her material. What happens on the surface is relatively unimportant. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, a fashionable lady gives a party, a man who has been in love with her comes back from India, a young man suffering from war neurosis commits suicide. But this is enough to enable Virginia Woolf to show us life as in a state of constant creation, changing endlessly from moment to moment, like a fountain . . . Virginia Woolf is doing on a small scale what Proust did in *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (17).

But while Allen acknowledges connections between Woolf, Joyce and Proust, he concludes emphatically that she is

admittedly a novelist of very narrow limits. Her range of characters is small. They belong not only to a certain class, the upper middle-class intelligentsia, but also to a certain temperament. They tend to think and feel alike, to be the aesthetes of one set of sensations. . . . Nor [he concludes] are the moments of revelation and illumination always illuminative in any real sense. Sometimes they don’t amount to much more than a series of short, sharp feminine gasps of ecstasy” (18).

The narrowness and misogyny of this critical assessment scarcely require comment, although I am amused by the enormous distance between Allen’s dismissive view of “feminine gasps of ecstasy” and ‘80s affirmation of *jouissance* and the erotics of reading.

However, one erudite and astute critic of this period, Erich Auerbach, did include Virginia Woolf in his study of “The Representation of Reality in Western Literature,” *Mimesis*, which was written during the Second World War and published in the States in 1953. Auerbach’s exploration of *To the Lighthouse* seems to escape the constraining paradigms of literary study Messer-Davidow identifies, for he combines a scrupulous and insightful formalist reading with a cultural/historical interpretation of the significance of Woolf’s rendering of reality. At the same time, it remains true that Auerbach focuses almost entirely on Woolf’s style, quoting a long passage from the fifth section of part 1 of the novel, and then providing an extended and thoughtful analysis of each minute shift in consciousness, chronology, and tone. He devotes approximately 20 pages to this close reading, and only eight to an analysis of its larger cultural meanings and implications.

Like many critics of this generation, then, Auerbach locates Woolf’s significance primarily in her employment of such “distinctive characteristics of the realistic novel” as “multipersonal representation of consciousness, time strata, disintegration of the continuity of exterior events, [and] shifting of the narrative viewpoint (all of which are interrelated and difficult to separate)” (546). Unlike Leavis, however, Auerbach unquestioningly places Woolf in the company of other modernists such as Proust, Mann, and Joyce. He finds in their
formal and stylistic experiments both a recognition “of the limitations in space and time
imposed upon [the novel] by its instrument, language” (546) and a reflection of the
“tremendous tempo of [cultural] changes” (549) in the twentieth century. Finally, Auerbach
attributes to Woolf “insight and mastery” and asserts that “in the process [of her formal
experimentation] something new and elemental appeared: nothing less than the wealth of
reality and depth of life in every moment to which we surrender ourselves without
prejudice” (552).

The invisibility imposed by Leavis and Van Ghent, the gender- and class-based
condescension expressed by Allen, and the recognition of technique accorded by Auerbach,
constitute, I would suggest, crucial facets of critical perception of Virginia Woolf during the
1950s and ‘60s. Interpretationist readings faulted her for being trivial, upper class, and
“feminine,” while the ostensibly more “objective” paradigm of formalism was distorted by
deeply flawed and unacknowledged gender-based perceptions of what mattered in style. For as
Mary Ellmann would demonstrate in *Thinking About Women*, in 1968, “prose conventions
were sex stereotyped: men’s prose, typed as rational, omniscient, and assertive, was taken as
mentorious, and women’s prose, typed as illogical, formless, and passive, was not” (qtd. in
Messer-Davidow 40). Essentially—in all senses of the word—Woolf languished for much of
the ‘50s and ‘60s in that ghetto labelled “feminine sensitivity.”

Ellman’s was only one of the many crucial feminist voices of the 1960s and ‘70s
which transformed literary studies in general and Woolf studies in particular. Indeed, looking
back on it today I find it almost impossible to grasp, much less to convey, the enormous
scope of change effected by feminist critics of the 1970s such as Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Lee
Edwards, Mary Ellmann, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Carolyn Heilbrun, Ellen Moers,
Elaine Showalter and Patricia Spacks, among many, many others. These critics challenged
the nature of literary studies as they existed in the 1950s and ‘60s, as well as of the academy
and women’s place in it. For them, Woolf was a political radical who anticipated the
revolutionary ideas of Second Wave feminism and articulated that movement as no other
writer, with the exception of Simone DeBeauvoir, could do.

Not surprisingly, then, political and personal (the two were, of course, affirmed as
synonymous at this time) rather than stylistic concerns are evident in, for example, Gilbert
and Gubar’s 1979 study of “The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary
Imagination”: *The Madwoman in the Attic*. References to Woolf in their index include such
unaesthetic issues as “the angel in the house . . . female authorship . . . ‘Judith Shakespeare’. .
. . Austen . . . Milton . . . and . . . misogyny” (719), as well as such previously overlooked
texts as *Three Guineas*, *Orlando* and *A Room of One’s Own*. Even more revolutionary than the
particular aspects of Woolf they explore, however, is the striking change in the valence and
significance of the very word “female,” which no longer signifies trivial or unimportant.

As an essential and inevitable corollary to the collapse of older critical paradigms
brought about by feminism, the content of Woolf’s writing began to be accorded as much
importance as her style, while breaking down distinctions between personal and political
meanings allowed considerable range for new and creative feminist interpretation. Thus the
“relatively unimportant” surface Allen saw in *Mrs. Dalloway*—“a fashionable lady gives a
party, a man who has been in love with her comes back from India, a young man suffering
from war neurosis commits suicide” (17)—becomes, in Gilbert and Gubar, a densely nuanced
social, cultural, political and psychological mosaic of meaning, including a pattern of
connection between “female schizophrenia of authorship [in] . . . nineteenth-century writers [and] . . . such twentieth-century descendents as Virginia Woolf (who projects herself into both ladylike Mrs. Dalloway and crazed Septimus Warren Smith)” (78).

The disjunction between Allen’s “fashionable lady” and the “young man suffering from war neurosis” (17) becomes, in Lee Edwards's 1977 essay, “War and Roses,” one of the overarching purposes of the novel, emblematic both of society's—not Septimus—pathology and of patriarchy's injunction that men learn not to feel and women not to question. The “unimportant surface” Allen sees becomes, for Edwards, a profoundly political, indeed revolutionary, social commentary:

Wars and parties, shellshock and roses, authority and individuality, death and life, ‘manly’ and ‘feminine’ are counters, metaphors, or symbols, but also, Virginia Woolf suggests, the literal facts resulting from a society's choice of particular forms. . . . The politics of Mrs. Dalloway are such that life is possible only when roses, parties, and joy triumph over war, authority, and death (162).

Elaine Showalter's 1977 A Literature of Their Own also reflects a rejection of neat distinctions between formal and interpretive, personal and political, indeed biographical and textual. The index under Woolf's name includes references not to stream of consciousness or formal limitation but to “androgyny . . . anger . . . anorexia nervosa . . . breakdowns . . . frigidity . . . marriage . . . menopause . . . rest cure . . . women's suffrage. . . . [and] working women” (Showalter 378). Like Edwards, Gilbert and Gubar, Showalter emphasizes the biographical component of Woolf's writing, drawing connections between her own breakdowns and her description of Septimus' madness and, especially, of Sir William Bradshaw's arrogance. According to Showalter,

A great deal of her anger comes out in the portrait of Sir William Bradshaw, the Harley Street nerve doctor. Personal experience explains the inartistic lack of proportion most critics have noticed as a 'flaw' in this fiercely vibrant section of the novel. . . . She could hardly have expressed her feelings of victimization and rage more plainly. This passage is almost Kafkaesque in its sense of conspiracy and guilt (277).

For feminist critics of the 1970s, Woolf played a central, personal and increasingly contested role. No longer simply the embodiment of upper-class feminine sensibility, she became, depending on your interpretive perspective, victim or hero, lesbian or androgyne, pacifist or scholar or critic. Feminist critics who did focus on style, such as Rachel Blau DuPlessis, experimented with new ways of reading literature which were a universe apart from the measured and objective analyses of, say, Erich Auerbach. Her deliberately, indeed defiantly, non-academic essay, “For the Etruscans: Sexual Difference and Artistic Production—The Debate over a Female Aesthetic,” combines the personal and the professional and deconstructs logical and formal boundaries. In it, DePlessis speculates on the connections between a writer's style and her life:

Insider-outsider social status will also help to dissolve an either-or sense of dualism. For the woman finds she is two irreconcilable things: an outsider by her sexual position, by her relation to power; an insider (if middle class) (but how? on her own terms? attached to her husband?) by her social position. She is both. Her ontological, her psychic, her class position are double. This is, therefore, the motion of her brain. How then could she neglect to invent
to invent the theory for this form (135).

The revolution effected by feminist scholarship during the 1970s was obviously only the beginning of an extraordinary burgeoning of complex new ways of reading, understanding and writing about literature, culture, and gender. Many feminist critics of the 1970s saw Woolf speaking directly to their own lives. Some of their readings may, from our vantage point thirty years later, seem reductive or naive. Certainly some betray a complication of stance, attempting to reconcile older critical judgments of Woolf’s “flaws,” for example, with their own personal and political reading of her life and work. Just as certainly both these feminist critics and their repudiation of the previous generation of critics opened whole new ways of seeing Woolf that we are still exploring.

When I submitted the proposal for this paper, the conference organizer suggested that I “expand somewhat on the risks of contemporary scholarship’s approaches” and then speculated that I might be “afraid [I’d] be poisoned at the banquet and turn up in an Amanda Cross mystery.” It is not my purpose here to offer a history of Woolf or feminist scholarship, nor to trace the subsequent developments from political activism to French feminism to deconstruction to post-colonialism, much less to criticize contemporary Woolf scholars. Rather, I would like to pose some questions about where we are now, and what we might learn from this backward look.

Examining the range of papers offered at this and other Virginia Woolf conferences, I am struck by the way she has become an Ur-source for a seemingly infinite number of often-contradictory readings. At this conference alone sessions establish connections between Woolf and eco-feminism, celebrity culture, lesbian desire, historicism, critiques of colonialism, Victorians, pedagogy and Modernism— to name only a few. I am not for a moment questioning that Woolf merits this rich multiplicity of critical approaches. But my first question—and this is genuinely a question—is whether, in reading Woolf as so utterly Protean, so all-encompassing, we risk obscuring both what she does stand for and what she means for our own lives and for society.

Now I recognize that positing the notion of a central core of meaning in an author, and suggesting Woolf might “really” mean X or Y, completely violates contemporary critical ethics. So let me refine my question and ask: have we, perhaps, gone too far in finding multiple and contradictory meanings in texts, and in claiming that texts and writers can mean everything—and yet nothing? This simultaneous slippage in meaning and rejection of older literary and aesthetic notions of “truth” and “authenticity” and “meaning” strikes me as morally problematic, in its own way as troubling as older categorical claims about humanity and universality.

While I was thinking about this question and trying to write this conclusion I came across a fascinating essay in the on-line Chronicle, by Lisa Ruddick, speculating about what literature could and could not do to help people after September 11, and asking why “literary scholarship has been refining the art of stepping away from humane connection.” She suggests that

[theoretical models that have dominated English and the related disciplines in the last two decades are especially effective tools (along with the institutional factors that have]
always existed) for creating demoralization. In their depletion of the meaning of such words as 'authenticity' and 'humanity,' they eat away at a person's sense of having a vital emotional life apart from his or her professional identity (5).

Obviously I can't begin to answer my own question. But I wonder whether we shouldn't at least discuss the impersonality and impenetrability of literary terminology as well as the loss of moral immediacy in contemporary scholarship. Have we in fact substituted one formalist paradigm for another? Have we slipped into those "unreal loyalties" against which Virginia Woolf warned us in Three Guineas?

My second question derives from a conversation I had with a colleague about this conference. My colleague is a Joyce scholar who told me years ago that he can remember vividly the sense of awe and wonder he felt when he first read To the Lighthouse. We talk often about teaching Woolf, about the frustrations and pleasures of introducing her to students who--much like the critics of the 1950s--often find her elitist and inaccessible and, I hate to say this, overly "feminine." In the course of this particular conversation he asked, casually, how many men would be at the conference. I thought about it, shrugged, and said that based on my experience at previous Woolf conferences, I assumed that most of the people at the conference would be women.

Now I am most emphatically not suggesting that the presence of men has any bearing whatsoever on the value of a conference, but his question took me aback and made me wonder if, rather than opening Woolf studies to a wider, more inclusive vision, we haven't instead (or also?) succeeded in building a larger, more elaborate and complex ghetto--for Woolf and for ourselves. Maybe I am asking whether we have genuinely transformed literary studies and the academy, if Woolf is still regarded as the almost-exclusive province of female or feminist scholars. Perhaps I am asking whether this kind of fragmentation and academic identity politics best serves us--and our students and our society.

I don't know the answers to these and a host of other questions I have about the state of my profession, which seems increasingly to foster a disjunction in both language and values between itself and the world around us. Furthermore, I recognize as I write this that I am simultaneously wondering why we have lost our political passion in reading literature, and suggesting that we need to be more inclusive in our scholarship. Do these two concerns need to be in tension with one another?

In closing I would like to return to Ellen Messer-Davidow and her discussion of the disjunction between academic research and social activism which seems related to both of my questions:

Several feminists commented in a 1996 issue of Signs that academic-feminist knowledge was irrelevant to women working at feminist policy institutes and issue-advocacy organizations, in labor unions and economic justice groups, and on grassroots projects and national councils. How did we get to the point where bell hooks would observe that feminist scholarship 'makes no attempt to engage feminist politics' and Charlotte Bunch would exclaim, "I don't read journals like Signs anymore"? (128).

How, indeed?
Teaching Woolf in the Context of Sound Bites, Chat Rooms, and Writers as Celebrities

Ruth O. Saxton

In September 1963, I faced my first classes at Hyde Park High School, 63rd and Stoneybrook, in Chicago. Age 22, wearing high heels so the students would know I was their teacher, I entered my classroom adjacent to the gym after fending off the advances of the football coach by showing him my shiny new wedding ring. During orientation of new teachers, one of the two campus cops offered to drive me around the neighborhood and slipped in the detail that his was an open marriage. Their challenges to my new marriage shrunk before my biggest challenge: to teach 15 to 18 year old students, primarily male, to read.

As the newest teacher in the English Department, I was assigned the least desirable courses in the five-track system. Three of my classes were composed of students who had already failed three times to pass the fifth-grade reading test that would allow them to advance to the next level and perhaps eventually receive a high school diploma. I was told just to maintain discipline; nobody could teach these kids. By the time my turn came to select textbooks, I found the bookroom cleared of all but 1930s grammar texts and a set of standardized reading cards. I had never taken a course in teaching reading, assuming it was not necessary in my preparation for secondary teaching, and I entered that classroom with my literature major, my French minor, and three years experience of volunteer work in the Cabrini Housing Projects. Yet, at the end of that first year of teaching, all but three of my students successfully passed the reading test, and board of education members showed up to visit my classroom to query me about my teaching theory. It was quite simple: I knew how to read. I was being paid to teach my students to read. I figured it out.

Over the years, I have often remarked that my Hyde Park students taught me all I needed to know about how to teach. Perhaps one day I will write about what they taught me, but this morning I want to focus on two anecdotes and two lessons that have served me well for decades but which I lost sight of in the spring of 2000 when, after years of teaching my popular Virginia Woolf Seminar, I taught my first Woolf Seminar that failed, fell on its face, ruined my semester, and nearly convinced me never again to teach it.

The first lesson from Hyde Park High School involves my ignorance of foul language. Raised in a devoutly Christian home, I never swore though I recognized familiar swear words. My Hyde Park students took swearing to new and unfamiliar heights or depths, but most of the time I had no sense of the meaning of their foul language and consequently did not react to it. They did not whistle under their breath during my turn at study hall duty, nor did they harass me during hall monitoring stints when I had to do locker checks for drugs and weapons. They spared me from their practice of leaving gift-wrapped dead rats on the desk. Amazed at my lack of what they considered basic common sense, they took turns escorting me home. By November, I was on such good terms with my students that they decided I needed a dictionary of dirty language. I wish I had kept it, for in it they defined the terms I needed to understand as well as the words I should never say but needed to recognize. They wanted me to know when I needed to respond with anger if I was
to get the respect they had decided I deserved. They taught me a lesson. My words were no more important than theirs. They needed my words to pass the reading test; I needed theirs to recognize insult in the corridors. We both needed to understand the other’s language for our own personal safety in each other’s worlds.

The second lesson concerns reading and desire. I initially refused to use the dreadful grammar texts, and I soon found the standardized reading cards as boring as did my students. Who would make the effort to read such drivel? No wonder students refused to do their assignments. In addition to exchanging words with my students and using the headlines of local newspapers, billboards, and the television screen, I asked students to bring in material they wanted to learn how to read, promising to use it for class work. They brought me a motley collection of true love magazines, auto mechanics texts, cheap paperbacks with tawdry covers, and a few political tracts. True to my word, I let them read whatever they wanted… and eventually they wanted to read material I found interesting.

I wish when I faced my spring 2000 Woolf seminar I had recalled that respect for student worlds and student language, that curiosity about what they wanted to read and why, that need to start with the familiar, that awareness that when we are on new terrain and feel vulnerable or stupid, we may act defensively. But I did not. Instead I taught a book a week as I had always done, and I assumed my students considered reading Woolf worth their effort.

In the remainder of my talk, I will describe the seminar of two years ago and my more recent reflections now that I have again taught a Woolf seminar that was not a disaster. Perhaps the major reason the recent seminar was such a joy is that I recalled the taste of failure and was nearly as cautious as when I faced those Hyde Park students who feared reading, or perhaps the difference can be explained by the changes in texts and timing, or perhaps on paper became a community and the other did not, or perhaps in Woolf’s words from A Room of One’s Own, “one cannot hope to tell the truth” “when a subject is truly controversial” (4), as teaching always is. I have “no nugget of pure truth” (3) for you to record in your notebooks, and yet I hope you will find among all my words a small fish at the end of your line.

Since my beginning days at Hyde Park, students have complained that I assign too much reading, and later have thanked me for ignoring their complaints. So, when students routinely complained about my expectation that they would read a Woolf text each week (with two weeks for The Waves) in the Disaster Seminar, I fully expected them to fall in love with Woolf’s texts. At the initial class meeting, as always, I asked them what they already knew about Woolf and put their words on the board. I cautioned them against assigning labels or being swayed by critics—like us—into aligning Woolf with a favorite theory or cause or limiting her with any of the many partial labels. I read aloud from “Professions for Women,” with its emphasis on killing the angel in the house, questioning authority, writing whatever one thinks, and we reflected briefly on the difficulty of being oneself. I sent them off to read The Voyage Out and to write a short response paper. I was pleased and thought we were off to a good start.

They returned a week later—either loving or hating the novel and Woolf and the class. One student saw no reason for further study of an author who killed the protagonist and then killed herself. Discussion went downhill from there, and the tone of the semester was set— but I did not recognize the seriousness of the situation. As weeks went on,
discussion remained tense and then waned. A few hardy souls tried to raise questions that would force us back to Woolf’s text. I tried every subtle intervention I knew—you know the usual tactics—break the class into small discussion pods and then reassemble, group them by graduate students and undergraduates, mix up the groups according to apparent interests, allow them to pose the questions in advance and lead discussion themselves, bring my own questions, summarize views of critics on a particular text, bring in mini-lectures to provide context.

It seemed that everyone was becoming a clone of Susan in The Waves, proclaiming “I Love” or “I Hate.” I queried a colleague who assigned the problem to modernism and claimed recent students have no patience with the modernists, and I felt calmed. But, when I brought forward this explanation to the class as a possible key to our difficulties, they insisted I was mistaken. It was NOT modernism. It was Woolf. I brought in the film of “Mrs. Dalloway,” fed them pizza, scheduled individual appointments. Nothing worked. Everyone seemed deeply disappointed, nobody blamed each other or me, but most of them did blame Woolf. Reading her work did not fulfill their unarticulated expectations, and most of them decided she had been terribly overrated.

Near the end of the semester I sent a group e-mail message to all of them, acknowledging the problems of the course and inviting them to help make it bearable for the remaining weeks of the semester. Something altered slightly, as they began to write lengthy reflective responses to my e-mail, but nobody looked forward to class. Amy C., a second-year M.A. student who enjoyed Woolf, chose to focus her final paper in the course on the class dynamics and interviewed many of the students. In her paper “This is the Dance for People Who Don’t Know How to Dance: Approaches to Woolf for the New Millennium,” Amy argues that reading Woolf’s texts is best done “free of supplemental material” (2) and that teachers should make use of the web for discussions. She writes “the problem with knowing too much about a writer...is that one comes into the reading with an experience already taking shape” (3), and she takes issue with my initial class meeting that invited students to pool their partial knowledge.

Amy also mentions the unspoken codes that control classroom discussion and suggests teachers take advantage of web chat rooms to help students express their emotional responses to texts and to help them bridge the gap she perceives between the discourse of chat rooms and the expectations for classroom discussion. She notes that many students thought our seminar of eleven students was too large, and yet:

When one logs on to the WWW, ... the experience is purely autonomous: one body, one computer. The silence that accompanies an online experience contributes to the feeling of privacy and security. The desire for a smaller class is thus gratified immediately when one goes online. The irony, however, is that the solitary act of ‘logging on’ brings the participant into a global network of voices... . The point is not to impress or posit what ‘should be said’ but rather to express freely. (8)

In commenting on the student responses to my e-mail, Amy writes that the students “showed Dr. S that they could discuss Woolf freely and on their own time and under their own volition,” and suggests that “Dr. S. may have learned something from her students: the way to ‘talk’ Woolf is to open up the classroom” (9). Class evaluations revealed that students
Ingrid M., a reserved MFA poet in the class, entitled her final seminar paper “A Way of Reading and the Poetic Within The Waves.” Her thesis is that Woolf requires a special kind of reading, and she explains that if students are to appreciate Woolf’s texts, they must be taught how to read them.

Lately I have been playing closer attention to how I read. Because of an obvious discrepancy between the experiences my classmates were having when reading Woolf and my own, I was able to compare my own reading methods with those of my peers. While a few of the students were obviously engaged in the book, others were disappointed by the opacity of the language and by the lack of concrete events or linear plot. They were mentioning some difficulty with the “wash of words.” For some reason, they felt excluded when they tried to read Woolf and came to classroom discussions a little bent out of shape. (1)

Ingrid quotes from Jeanette Winterson’s chapter “A Veil of Words,” in Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery in which Winterson says about The Waves: “This is a hard read. I am not talking about sense here, or philosophy, or ideas, or content. I mean that the chosen order of the words and the movement they make is so unfamiliar to us, that the experience of reading The Waves can be like listening to a piece of classical music that seems at first to have neither narrative nor structure” (88). Ingrid cites her own daily habit of reading poetry as helpful to reading Woolf. She writes, “Because I do not avoid and in fact often seek out ‘difficult’ poetry, I am used to struggling with unusual word combinations and abstract relations. I am also familiar with the feeling of giving in to the text, humbling as it may be. I accept the fact that I am not always going to be able to make heads or tails of meaning or be able to fully grasp the logical progression of the piece. This acceptance does not prevent me from appreciating the texture and rhythm and feel of the language. Jumping into a new poetry can be like diving into a mountain lake. The water may be cold and uncomfortable at first, but after the body becomes accustomed, the swim will be delicious” (2). Ingrid reminds me that the reader must meet the writing half way and that such reading takes effort of a different type than our students anticipate.

When I began planning my recent seminar on Woolf, I took seriously Amy’s recommendation to bridge the gap between chat room conversation and classroom discussion and Ingrid’s reminder that I need to teach my students how to read Woolf’s texts. As you can tell from a cursory glance at the two syllabi, I reduced the required reading by three texts, omitting Jacob’s Room, Orlando, and The Years in the revised syllabus. I also doubled the number of class meetings, scheduling the seminar to meet twice weekly instead of in the more standard once weekly seminar slot. The result was breathing room, the opportunity to dip into a text, meet, talk, return to the text rather than reading it alone for a single discussion. Although the class sessions were shorter than in the past, students came early and also remained after class. Students brought genuine questions and admitted their confusion, knowing they could help each other and then return to the reading.

Although I created a group e-mail list for the seminar as follow-up on Amy’s suggestion, we did not use it as anticipated. These students were unfamiliar with chat room conversation and seemed startled at my expectation of their familiarity. We relied on e-mail
to exchange information, to try out paper ideas, to carry on brief conversations, but the bulk of conversation took place in the seminar meetings and around the edges of class. Students were usually deep into discussion even before the official starting time of the class, books open, looking closely at passages rather than gearing up to trash or defend the text. Perhaps part of the reason for their careful attention to texts is that I also took seriously Ingrid’s and Winterson’s recognition of the difficulty of reading in a new way. I introduced Winterson’s essays early in the semester, and I stressed the difficulty of the reading they were facing. We read aloud the opening of each text, not just my usual reading assignment for in initial voices in The Waves, and we circled back time and again between texts as students made their own connections between a current passage and one read earlier.

I think back to Hyde Park. My students initially told me I talked “funny,” that if they talked at home as we talk at school they would get “hit up side the head.” They claimed school had no relevance to their daily lives. I did not disagree. I paid attention to their language. I taught the language of my world as a foreign language but one they could learn. As they became increasingly proficient, the defenses lessened. My Mills students in that early seminar found Woolf’s language opaque, seemed to sense she had little relevance for their daily lives. Today, in reflecting on all these students, those in high school and those in the Woolf seminars, I see the common thread is that in each situation I knew how to read and I needed to teach my students how to read. Once they could read, the other problems of relevance and “funny” language disappeared.
List of Abbreviations of Woolf Titles


**Diary:**


**Letters:**


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Appendix: Sybil Oldfield

Virginia Woolf OBITUARIES in alphabetical order of title of publication:

a) Britain and British Commonwealth

A binger Chronicle April-May 1941, R.C.Trevelyan, “Virginia Woolf”
A delphi May 1941, Margaret Baker, “Virginia Woolf”
Birmingham Post April 4, 1941, anon.
(Quaritch’s) Books of the Month April-May, 1941, H.E. Bates
Cambridge Review Oct. 1941 Joan Bennett – esp. re Between the Acts
Canadian Forum, 22: 244-6, November 1942, “Virginia Woolf”
Daily Herald anon April 3, 1941 “V.W. is Missing” – “Three Guineas was an

indictment of men and their clothes.”

Daily Telegraph

April 4, 1941 “Capital of Bloomsbury” and cites anon. report from

Lewes, E. Sussex. [Frankfurter Zeitung, April 8 1941.] Horizon May and June 1941, T.S.Eliot,

Rose Macaulay,Vita Sackville-West, William

Plomer, Duncan Grant, Hugh Walpole. International Women’s News – May, 1941 - Vita’s

poem “In Memoriam V.W.”

republished from The Observer. John O’London’s Weekly April 1,11941 “A Bookman’s Diary.”

Listener April 10,1941, Stephen Spender “Virginia Woolf: A Tribute.” And July 24, 1941,

Edwin Muir review of Between the Acts, placing it in whole œuvre. Manchester Guardian

April 4, 1941 anon and 21.4. 1941.

[Mouvement Feminine (Geneva?) September 20, 1941 “Virginia Woolf”.] New Statesman April

4, 1941, David Garnett, “Virginia Woolf”, and June 14, 1941 Hugh Walpole, “Remembering

Virginia Woolf.”

News Chronicle April 3, 1941 front page “Virginia Woolf is Missing”; April 4, 1941 Philip

Jordan championing V.W. against Magnay M.P. and The Times “Eclipse of the Highbrow.”

New Writing June 1941, Rosamond Lehmann “For Virginia Woolf” and Penguin New Writing


1941.

Nineteenth Century and After Dec.1941, Benjamin Gilbert Brooks, “Virginia Woolf”

Observer June 6, 1941 Basil de Selincourt, “Virginia Woolf an Appreciation” and


Orion Autumn, 1945, Logan Pearsall Smith, “Tavistock Square”

Spectator April 4, 1941, Rose Macaulay, “Virginia Woolf”."
Sunday Times April 6, 1941, Desmond MacCattery “Virginia Woolf.”
Time and Tide April 12, 1941 anon. editorial, almost certainly by Lady Rhondda:
The Times. April 3, 1941, anon. obituary; “Mrs. Virginia Woolf, Novelist, Essayist and
Times Literary Supplement April 12, 1941, two anon. notices, i.e., Philip Tomlinson, editorial
“End of an Epoch” and Orlo Williams, “Epitaph on
Virginia Woolf: Interpreter of the age between; the wars – the vision and the pursuit” the
former answered in a letter from David Cecil, TLS, April 19, 1941

Vogue, September 1, 1946, Victoria Ocampo “Memories of Virginia Woolf.”

Secondary Reading
McNees, Eleanor, ed. Virginia Woolf, Critical Assessments, Vol.1: Recollections and Obituaries;
Critical Reviews; Bloomsbury; Writers on Writing. Vol.1V: Critical Responses to Between the
Woolf, Interviews and Recollections. London, Macmillan,


The British location for the largest collection of V.W. obituaries, other than Colindale
Newspaper Library and the British Library, is The Women’s Library, Old Castle St. London
E1 7NT. The cuttings were collected by Vera Douie, the librarian of the London Society for
Women’s Service whom V.W. consulted re women’s history for Three Guineas and to whose
library she donated books and money. - See Elizabeth Crawford, “A Rich Network of
Associations: Bloomsbury and Women’s Suffrage”, The Charleston Magazine, Spring/Summer
1999.

b) U.S.A.

I am grateful for the assistance of Dr. Emily Blair, Fellow, English Dept, University of
California at Davis, in helping me to compile this non-comprehensive list: Atlantic Monthly
170:82-90; Sep. 1942, E.M.Forster “The Art of Virginia Woolf” Christian Century Chicago,
April 7, 1941, “Tragic Death of Novelist” Commonweal 36: 567-8; October 2, 1942,
D.Burnham, “Invalid Lady of

Bloomsbury” Current Biography 1941. Nation 155:382; October 17, 1942, L. Kronenberger,
“Tribute” Newsweek 17:12; April 4, 1941, “Missing” New York Herald Tribune April 3, 1941

“Virginia Woolf” New York Tribune July 13, 1941, Isabel Paterson “The Vitality that was
Virginia Woolf” The St. Louis Post Dispatch, April 4, 1941. San Francisco Chronicle April 6, 1941, “This
world” section, p.9. Time Magazine April 14, 1941 and May 5, 1941.
Secondary Sources It would also be worth checking Felice Levy’s Obituaries on File, Facts on File, 1979 and Obituaries in America.
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