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ENGLISH GRADUATE SYMPOSIUM

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The *Shawangunk Review* is the journal of the English Graduate Program at the State University of New York, New Paltz. The *Review* publishes the proceedings of the annual English Graduate Symposium and literary articles by graduate students as well as poetry and book reviews by students and faculty. The views expressed in the *Shawangunk Review* are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of English at SUNY New Paltz. Please address correspondence to *Shawangunk Review*, Department of English, SUNY New Paltz, New Paltz, NY 12561.

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## From the Editors

Volume XXI of the *Shawangunk Review* features the proceedings of the 2009 English Graduate Symposium, *Virginia Woolf and Her Spheres*, directed by Stella Deen. On behalf of the Graduate Program and the entire English Department we would like to thank Professor Deen for arranging an excellent program and for editing the symposium section of the *Review*. Five students presented essays at the symposium, and the distinguished scholar Melba Cuddy-Keane, Professor of English and a Northrop Frye Scholar at the University of Toronto, was the respondent and keynote speaker.

Also included herein are poems from members of the New Paltz community, two outstanding essays selected from those written in last year's English graduate courses, and a book review by the Chair of the English Department, Thomas G. Olsen.

The director and topic for the 2011 symposium will soon be determined. The submission deadline for Volume XXII of the *Review* is December 15, 2010. We welcome poetry, book reviews, and critical essays concerning any area of literary studies. Please see submission guidelines on page 105.

Students writing theses (ENG 590) are encouraged to submit an abstract for publication in the *Review* and to apply for the Russell S. Cleverley Memorial Fellowship (for information see page 102).

We ask readers to provide information regarding achievements of our current and former graduate students for the "News and Notes" column. For example, we would like to know the details of conference participation, publications, grants, and honors, as well as news regarding progress of our MA graduates in PhD programs and reports about teaching and employment activities.

Many thanks to Jason Taylor for layout, typesetting, and production supervision.



## Revolving Again in the Spheres of Virginia Woolf

*Stella Deen*

It is a great pleasure to introduce the proceedings of the Twenty-First Annual English Graduate Symposium, *Virginia Woolf and Her Spheres*. I have been reading this major modernist and important feminist for thirty years, and still she impresses me, elicits laughter from me, and provides abundant food for thought. In each of her novels and major essays Woolf finds a nonce form for both ancient and urgent human questions. Can language represent the world untainted by human vision? How can gender be freed from assigned roles, those deeply grooved ruts, so that the artist can communicate the truth of her experience? What would a tradition of literature by women sound like, and how would it change readers' view of reality? ("Reality" was a key word for Woolf.) Could women, by their separate vision and separate positions in the world, prevent war? How might our selves flow on in our absence or death?

Behind Woolf's questions lay her belief in a collective human "web" beyond the individual self. Reading of the premature death of the novelist Stella Benson, Woolf wrote in her diary, "Here and Now won't be lit up by her: it's life lessened. My effusion . . . as if the thinking stuff were a web that were fertilized only by other people's (her that is) thinking it too: now lacks life" (*A Writer's Diary* 7 December 1933). Like many in the early twentieth century, Woolf could not believe in "the confident and somewhat glib assurances of the old standard truth" (Drew 34). But like others, she searched for something sacred in human emotion and human creation.

In addition to her novels and essays, Woolf left her mark as a prolific diarist, correspondent, and book reviewer. She published a small number of memoirs, and even tried her hand at biography. She seems to have considered her practice of diverse forms and genres an advantage for her "modest" ambition to net in words "this loose, drifting material of life" (20 April 1919). The diary itself was to be "so elastic that it will embrace anything solemn, slight or beautiful that comes into my mind" (20 April 20 1919). These entries could be mined in later years, when "things put in haphazard" took on a significance she had not seen at the time (20 April 1919).

A glance at the long list of Woolf's publications might give the impression that she wrote as easily and naturally as she ate breakfast each day. Although a wealth of paratextual material (one thinks of the three scrapbooks of newspaper clippings Woolf amassed before writing *Three Guineas*) must

undermine any initial judgment of ease or spontaneity, many readers find that the impression of naturalness remains, for Woolf allowed rhythm to guide the shape and length of her sentences. For example, rising and falling rhythms underlie Mrs. Dalloway's thoughts, now surfacing to apprehend the busy life of a June day in London, now descending into memories of her young adulthood.

In a graduate seminar on Woolf, such miscellaneous observations wove themselves into our conversations as we saturated ourselves in Woolf's literary characters, themes, forms, and techniques. These conversations led naturally to the broader scope of the symposium, *Virginia Woolf and Her Spheres*, in which we considered how Woolf's literature engaged with her world. While some casual readers associate Woolf's voice with interiority, crediting her with giving aesthetic form to currents in the individual psyche, both Malorie Seeley and Emily Wejchert demonstrate that even within such apparently inward-looking texts as *To the Lighthouse* and "The Mark on the Wall," Woolf pursued realities beyond the self. Seeley believes that through the mark on the wall, the narrator recovers a prelinguistic connection to the world, while Wejchert links Woolf's distinctive shifting among characters' consciousnesses in *To the Lighthouse* to the late nineteenth-century French symbolist project to find the "lasting conception of the soul of things."

Alongside her prolific production of words, Woolf revolved in several cultural, political, and social spheres, facets of her modernity that are often overlooked. The famed Bloomsbury group pursued "truth" through rich and diverse conversations about any and all things modern, especially art, philosophy, and love. Several of the symposium participants examine Woolf in dialogue with such "Bloomsberries." Barbara Smith, for example, examines how *The Waves* (1931) draws on the philosophy of Bertrand Russell to "discover something more permanent" than individual perception and experience. Long before *The Waves* took shape in Woolf's mind, she and other Bloomsbury figures sought methods to pursue their conviction that "reality" consisted of some pattern transcending individual, private experience. They hoped that once discovered, writes Kelly Spencer, such a pattern could illuminate "their own troubled and confusing era in human history." Nick Haines corroborates this view in his discussion of the Bloomsbury thinkers' belief that this extra-subjective reality was crucial to ethical and peaceful civilization.

Woolf also travelled in wider realms, circles that would bring her into contact with women and men outside her social class. While in her twenties, she taught classes to working people at Morley College. For many years Woolf and her husband, Leonard Woolf, participated in the Women's Cooperative Guild, which in 1910 could boast 32,000 members (this number would swell to 72,000 by 1933), giving it a powerful voice in peace activism and enabling it

to press for maternity and workers' benefits. Woolf the artist was indeed preoccupied with aesthetic and philosophical questions, while Woolf the feminist, pacifist, and social activist debated problems of class and gender inequities, especially inequities in access to education.

*Debate* is apposite to Woolf, who throughout her life both employed and advocated literary forms based on dialogue rather than the assertion of authority. In *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere*, Melba Cuddy-Keane, our symposium keynote speaker, argues that Woolf facilitated democratic access to literature and promoted active, discriminating reading practices by demonstrating in her own essays a dialogic relation between writer and reader:

Woolf's essays usually begin by posing some question or problem, which she then explores in relation to specific literary works, often pursuing different possible approaches in the course of a single essay. She might suggest an answer or offer an opinion, only to change or even reverse it, or she might view a work through different and even conflicting lenses. She presents her own views and judgments, but she simultaneously examines the processes through which her ideas were formed. By foregrounding her process of thinking, Woolf conveys a theoretical approach that is speculative and open-ended rather than definitive and conclusive. (133)

Virginia Woolf died in 1941, the victim of suicide, but her words continue to inform, delight, inspire, and trouble untold numbers of readers all over the world. I think, too, they meet her own exigent standards. What is the mark of great literature? Woolf was not fond of hierarchical rulers. Yet few serious writers have not asked themselves this question. Many in Woolf's day stressed that "time is the inexorable acid test" (Bates 85). The late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed advances in printing technology, a vast increase in literacy, and a veritable profusion of new outlets for verbal expression—all of which contributed to more writing and more publishing. Onlookers guessed that some of these printed words would decay as naturally as fallen leaves, while others would prove their merit by their selection for reprinting. Yet Woolf, wanting to empower common, contemporary readers, invoked not "time" but "reality," encouraging readers to judge books by their immediate and empirical experience of life. For when a writer has successfully communicated the reality that it is her business to "find" and "collect," Woolf wrote, "one sees more intensely afterwards; the world seems bared of its covering and given an intenser life" (*A Room of One's Own* 110).

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## II | Symposium Essays

### “Part Earth, Part Flower”: Woolf, Strachey, and the Bloomsbury Reevaluation of Reality

*Nick Haines*

On 27 September 1908 Lytton Strachey wrote Virginia Woolf during her stay at the Voltaire in Paris and paraphrased E. M. Forster's *Howards End*: “There are moments . . . when I seem to myself to see life steadily and see it whole, but they're only moments; as a rule I can make nothing out” (*Letters* 17). Thirty years later, while expounding the contrasts between “non-being” and moments of “being” in “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf describes a childhood memory: “‘That is the whole,’ I said. I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower” (*MOB* 71). Both Strachey and Woolf describe instances in which mundane routine is transcended momentarily for an insightful instant that, in turn, becomes a nugget of comprehension, replete with meaning, and ultimately representative of the “reality” at both the core and the pinnacle of human understanding. From this vantage, life becomes comprehensible in a way that bridges the gulf between individual consciousness and a general outline of existence. Woolf goes on in “A Sketch” to note that people live “in relation to certain background rods or conceptions” and that her own “background conception” is that “there is a pattern behind the cotton wool” of the unremarkable (*MOB* 73). The revelatory moments described in Strachey's letter and in Woolf's memoir suggest that both believed that what Woolf calls “reality” often evades us. Both of their works offer the panoramic presentation of thoroughly realized and stunningly complex examples of unique fusions of metaphysical and corporeal life, in which the mind is often more vastly drawn than the body. These conceptions—that seconds of heightened cognizance can cultivate profound insights into the nature of humanity, and that such instances in some way represent “reality”—not only inform Woolf's and Strachey's artistic methods, but also pertain to a wider sphere, influencing the shape of what can be gathered of the collective philosophical underpinnings of the Bloomsbury group.

Whether the Bloomsbury group, the early twentieth-century collective of intellectuals of which Woolf and Strachey were a part, has any philosophical underpinnings at all has been an active subject of debate; however, some continuities among the thinkers of Bloomsbury can perhaps be established,

even though, as Quentin Bell tells us, they are “almost impalpable, almost indefinable” (Bell 319). Christine Froula, in her exploration of the Bloomsbury ethos, establishes a connection between the philosophies of Kant—his idea of “disinterestedness” in particular—and the shaping ideas behind the members of Bloomsbury and their actions. Kant’s disinterestedness relates to the genesis and appreciation of works of art; Froula finds that he emphasizes both the artist’s and the appreciator of art’s freedom “from personal interest, use, or purpose” and “of particular local, national, and cultural contexts” (Froula 13). Throughout *Critique of Judgment* and elsewhere, Kant explores the relevance of such an outlook upon social and political matters as well, as do the members of Bloomsbury; Kant’s ideas surface as much in Maynard Keynes’s work in economics and diplomacy as they do in Woolf’s novels and in Strachey’s biographies.

In such a divisive era as the first half of the twentieth century, this disinterested outlook freed the members from the popular pitfalls of extreme nationalism and cultural loyalty, and allowed them to observe impartially the symptoms of these pitfalls, such as violent separatism and fervent cultural polarity. Quentin Bell provides a fairly comprehensible description of the cohering qualities of the group: “Despite tremendous differences of opinion, it talked. Indeed it did more, it talked on the whole reasonably, it talked as friends may talk together, with all the license and all the affection of friendship. It believed, in fact, in pacific and rational discussion” (Bell 320). This belief in “pacific and rational discussion” held not only as an agreement among the members of the group as they sat face to face, but as a model for civilization.

The idea of disinterestedness that Strachey and Woolf cultivate is a paradoxical one, at odds with the general notion of the concept. The chronological presentation of life, like the kind found in many biographies of Victorians, may have few signs of authorial interpretation in it, much less than one may find in Strachey’s work. However, Strachey critiques past biographies on two fronts, both supported by Bloomsbury thought: first, that chronologies reveal little of the actual person who once lived, and second, that when the biographical subject is examined, there is no critical element involved. Nationalistic or moral urges subtly temper such examinations, concealing the idiosyncrasies and shortcomings of the subjects themselves in favor of the grandeur of their lives and their contributions toward the benefit of society. In a conversation recorded in the *Writer’s Diary*, Woolf reports that Strachey said “History must be written all over again. It’s all morality—” (*WD* 34). In other words, past biographies do not delve into the consciousnesses of their subjects; instead, they present the camouflaged motivations of their authors. This recasting of disinterestedness, then, requires the acknowledgement that both the author and the biographical subject are *subjective* beings. The objective, disinterested,

logical, and rational come from outside—from the reader. This stew can create a “life” in a biographical sense as well as in a fictional sense. Strachey and Woolf are similar in that they both apply this communicative notion in their literary/historical endeavors, however they may diverge in the process.

If what we have in history books is not actual history but a thinly veiled moralist’s sermon, the biographer must approach subjects in a way that unveils superficial events and reveals the actual person that lived and breathed, for this will be more closely related to the actual conditions of the subject’s existence than a cold list of events.

Here he may have found some corroboration and perhaps inspiration in his correspondences with Woolf and their shared recognition that a “life” is rendered better by its significant moments than by its timeline, an idea Strachey employed in his most famous and influential work, *Eminent Victorians*, published in 1918. He states his intentions in that book’s preface: “[The biographer must] preserve . . . a becoming brevity—a brevity which excludes everything that is redundant and nothing that is significant” (*EV* vii). Strachey admits that he employed the technique to compensate for the huge mass of information compiled during the Victorian period, but it seems as if Strachey’s own experiences of momentary clarity, his “moments of being,” have become part of his rationality as a biographer. He acknowledges that a biographical subject’s life does not necessarily make a story but rather is marked by discontinuity, irrationality, and ambiguity, notions that surface often in his renderings of Manning and Gordon, Nightingale and Arnold. The portraits regularly fix their gaze upon the darker psychological motivations behind the figures’ memorialized and celebrated public works.

Strachey, again in his preface, states that the biographer of Victorians must “shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undivined. He will row out over that great ocean of material, and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be examined with a careful curiosity” (*EV* v). This particular description has certain imagistic affinities with Woolf’s work. Most strongly, it suggests the image of the lighthouse in *To The Lighthouse*, a searchlight that certainly sees its way into the “obscure recesses” of that book’s characters. It also conjures a scene in *The Waves* in which Bernard wishes that a “fin” would break the surface of the water, or that something would emerge from the depths “to be examined” and held whole. This image in particular unites the “moment of being” which Bernard hopes to obtain with Strachey’s revealing light. The idea that a “characteristic specimen,” a moment, can create before us a life more succinctly and truly than a list of facts suggests a redefinition of what has been understood to be “life”—a redefinition informed by the two writers’ personal revelations

and synthesized into a theory of art in which the unique vagaries of subjects are illuminated evenly, showing both noble and grisly acts. However, scene choices are not arbitrary within this mode; they are chosen by their relative level of being—their ability to reveal the person behind the act, the act itself merely an emblem of the complex individual performing it.

So rightly, Strachey's "searchlight" is not often flattering to those caught in its glare. The reader is informed immediately that Florence Nightingale, beloved reformer of English military hospitals, is "possessed" by a "Demon." Although that "Demon" turns out to be little more than an illimitable will to work, it claims the life of at least one man, Sydney Herbert, whom Nightingale would not let rest, even in his gravest days. The "obscure recesses" of Strachey's other subjects in *Eminent Victorians* are grimmer. He portrays Cardinal Manning as a master of opportunism and manipulation, driven into religious orders by the combination of a childhood fear of the Revelation and the fact that he needed to take orders to accept a "Merton Fellowship." General Gordon, the surreptitious drunk, closely parallels the Madhi, his enemy, in religious purpose, and is at one point recorded as allowing a "mystic feeling" to guide him in important diplomatic matters. His weaknesses in such matters are often laid bare and are quite relevant to the character built by Strachey's narrative. The fact that we are only given a bit of background followed by Gordon's standoff with Gladstone and his eventual demise serves as an adequate example of Strachey's "becoming brevity," and also implies that all that can really be known about Gordon can be encapsulated in the events that led to his death in Khartoum. In all cases, the psychological idiosyncrasies of the subjects are points of focus, derived either from their personal writings or their decisive actions.

Although *Eminent Victorians* looks at the four figures therein with a satiric eye, that eye is not one that wishes to defame or ridicule, but rather to observe things lucidly and critically, to refuse to accept the lives as they had been handed down and instead to reconstruct them from primary materials. Again, Strachey states the aim of the biographer in his preface: "[he must] maintain his own freedom of spirit. It is not his business to be complimentary; it is his business to lay bare the facts of the case, as he understands them" (*EV* vii). The "freedom of spirit" here does not suggest that the biographer unnecessarily defame his subjects, but rather that he must maintain freedom in the realm of human affairs so he can make observations without fear of consequence. He continues, further throwing off any urge to appease his subjects, saying that he must present his material "dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior intentions" (*EV* vii). As Leon Edel describes it, "Lytton Strachey had dared to do what other biographers feared: to interpret his materials courageously, to say what things meant" (Edel 229). While deliberately recast-

ing notions of truth, *Eminent Victorians* also strongly suggests that a civilized culture must examine its past critically, for only then can that history become an active agent of improvement. To prop the value of one's own society upon a fantasy of unerring heroes from the past, neglecting the thing that makes them most like us—that they were imperfect—is a futile act of insecurity at its best and an unpardonable affront to truth and to the further development of society at its worst.

A distinction made by Strachey that is implicit in Woolf's mock biography *Orlando* is that the biography is the product of art and should be treated as such. Charles Sanders suggests in his article "Lytton Strachey's Conception of Biography" that "the fact had been too often overlooked, only art could make real people who had once lived, who had had their place in time, awaken and come alive again for us to see" (Sanders 297). Strachey himself, again in his preface, states that his decision-making in writing *Eminent Victorians* was driven by the "simple motives of convenience and of art" (*EV* v). This acknowledgement separates Strachey's work from other biographies by its lack of a claim for all-inclusiveness and its insistence that biography is subject, like other art, to the close and careful interpretation of the observer. Underlying this statement is again the assumption that a life can be depicted by a series of instances. Perhaps more profoundly, this method strips biography of one of its deceptive assumptions: that by amassing the sequence of events of a person's life, one has provided an accurate description of that life. The character of Orlando, who lives for 300 years and changes gender, sometimes moment by moment, presents the same point: that factual reports in temporal arrangements are not adequate to portray truth, that the "moment of being" reveals a pattern of "reality" while an endless unspooling of days shows us only "cotton wool." In putting the three hundred years of Orlando's life into the three hundred pages that is *Orlando*, Woolf demonstrates the futility of attempting any complete record, and insists instead that the reader will *feel* Orlando's tremendously long lifespan through the events portrayed. A recasting of disinterestedness allows Orlando's actions to speak for themselves, through the subjective choices of the "biographer."

Biographers must place sufficient trust in their readership if they are to defend such a theory of art. In *Orlando*, published in 1928, Woolf makes this faith in the reader clear enough, stating, as biographer, that a "reader's part" is to create "from bare hints dropped here and there the whole boundary and circumference of a living person," and furthermore that "it is for readers such as these alone that we write" (*O* 55). Although Leon Edel states that *Orlando* is "a brilliant parody of Strachey's historical prose" (Edel 231), which it may well be, it is certain that both writers felt similarly about the intelligence of their readership and the important role the reader plays in creating what is worth-

while both in biography and in fiction. The making of a “life,” they seem to say, is the product of a writer and a reader simultaneously gazing at the same thing, free from persuasive judgments and unobscured by imposed authorial morality. And in this light the subject is believably human, for all faults are laid bare, and we are allowed then to critique our historical subjects, our representative figures of our celebrated and diverse history—the protagonists of both *Orlando* and *Eminent Victorians*—in a way that invites readers to derive their own conclusions and judge the common history with a critical outlook, eyes open to the hypocrisies of the past, so they can be transformed into the blueprints for the pressing project of establishing civilization.

Woolf’s choice of biography in *Orlando* was no accident, clearly linked to her close friend’s many expeditions in the genre. Nor was Strachey’s reliance on “art” in *Eminent Victorians* free from the influence of the web of Bloomsbury correspondents. This literary transaction between the two quietly implies the profound and perhaps paradoxical notion that fictional characters have a claim to reality similar to that of biographical subjects, and conversely that biographical subjects are, in many senses, fictional. Since fictional and non-fictional works maintain an equal claim to validity in this respect, it follows that civilization stands to benefit equally from each genre, if an accurate definition of genre can actually be obtained in reference to *Orlando* and *Eminent Victorians*. In this, we see one example of Bloomsbury artists’ insistence on the vital cultural importance of aesthetics, not only for its pedagogical function of advancing disinterestedness, or a freedom from insidious didacticism, but for its potential transformative effect upon the literate masses. As in *Orlando*, Woolf confronts the illusion of the writing of “lives” in “A Sketch Of The Past” while examining her own memories. She states, “people write what they call ‘lives’ of other people; that is, they collect a number of events, and leave the person to whom it happened unknown” (*MOB* 69). She adds that in “A Sketch” she would attempt to write the person, without details of where she lived, for how long, or what a typical day was like. Woolf seems to have borrowed Strachey’s “searchlight” to shine upon herself.

Yet Woolf travels a bit further than Strachey with the notion that the imagination—or the active exchange between reader and text—is perhaps as useful a tool as the facts in creating a life. Woolf suggests this in *Orlando* when the “biographer,” present in the narrative, is faced with a situation in which she must interpret the “damaged or destroyed . . . papers” from a fire that left in its wake only “charred fragments.” She writes: “often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even to make use of the imagination” (*O* 88). As a minor impediment in the biographer’s presentation of Orlando, it does not stifle her, but rather provides an opportunity to raise from the “charred fragments” a living subject. The biographer here takes on a double role, as both

reader and transmitter of source material. As reader, the biographer's use of the imagination to recreate history shows a willingness to surmise from the facts at hand a more complete picture of the subject or the situation to which it refers. The statement appears to rewrite the very rules of biography, which *Orlando* often playfully does, but within the framework of disinterested research one may make a case for such employment. The old goals of biography— to esteem, to honor, and to record— have given way for this new paradoxical notion of brevity and completeness above all things, just as Strachey had defined it. What a list of facts leaves out can be replaced by the active union between the writer's imagination and the reader's intuition, but only if disinterestedness on both sides is a condition of the exchange. This radical reevaluation of customary modes, grown from the portals of individual discovery, relates to social as well as aesthetic concerns and is a habit of Bloomsbury members, again implying that works of art convey the ability to intuit and to think critically to the many. Without prescribing a course of action or a mode of opinion, art activates the mind into intellectual debate of massive import.

In her diary Woolf states, "Art is being rid of all preaching: things in themselves: the sentence in itself beautiful" (*WD* 183), but one may be prone to wonder how, if this is the case, art could have a meaningful use in a civilization completely ravaged by the largest war the world had ever seen. Froula helps us here, stating, again by way of Kant, that art "exist[s] for the sake of a freedom that mediates sociability" (Froula 13). Bloomsbury's aesthetic and social agendas here are linked. Art is a medium in which a social ethics can be enacted, and so through communication, or sociability, the potential for civilization can be attempted. And if one can see "reality" from a disinterested viewpoint, a stance cultivated and supported by interaction with art, perhaps it is possible to confront conflict, as does Bernard from *The Waves*, who, in a moment of complete ego dissolution, states: "We are divided. . . . Yet I cannot find any obstacle separating us" (*Waves* 289). What Froula calls a "noncoercive dialogue" is similar to what Quentin Bell refers when he says that Bloomsbury believes in "pacific and rational discussion" and is profoundly related to the aesthetic approaches of both Woolf and Strachey, their shared insistence on disinterestedness, and their methods of reality-depiction in written form.

It may not be arguable that Keynes and Freud, Leonard Woolf and Clive Bell, Roger Fry, Vanessa Bell, Virginia Woolf or Lytton Strachey could claim even one collective truth, because Bloomsbury, if anything, was a group of individuals, all with individual beliefs. What has made them recognizable as a group has come through the combined factors of friendship, intellectual commerce, and collaborative production within the Hogarth Press and elsewhere. Through their "pacific and rational discussion," the various views of the members of the group have formed a "family resemblance" (Rosenbaum

ii). Bloomsbury attempted to be a microcosm for what they wished for humanity: a group with widely divergent opinions on a number of matters that nevertheless agreed on the common purpose of rational, peaceful, and honest dialogue. In her pacifist essay, *Three Guineas*, Woolf claimed that “the public and the private, the material and the spiritual . . . are inseparably connected” (TG 169). Indeed, the mode of debate and conversation acted out within the Bloomsbury thinkers is a vision of society’s potential. It is disinterested in its open acknowledgement of subjectivity and rational in its separation of subjectivity from the process of decision-making, and these qualities reaffirm Bloomsbury’s belief in the Kantian notion that the human subject is at the center of wider ethical and moral concerns. To this can be added the remarkable fact that the artists and social leaders of Bloomsbury considered their causes, while wildly various in application, to be unified. They saw their aesthetic movement as one of equal importance to their work in politics and in other fields, a view of intrinsic and imminent value in the reevaluation of the basic assumptions underlying both Europe and broader civilization. Furthermore, the ability to see life fully, to say “that is the whole” and to see not just a flower in a flower, but “part earth; part flower,” was of utmost value to Bloomsbury members because of the tremendous civilizing effect of such “moments.” The nuggets of “being” in art become portals to the disinterested evaluation and frank discussion of humanity, with no hope for gain or fear of defeat, and with a clear sense of the “pattern” that underlies the wool, and the recognition that the “part flower” is an adequate and palpable model for the “part earth.”

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## The Polysemic Mark: From the Wall to the Page

Malorie Seeley

Virginia Woolf's "The Mark on the Wall" (1922) occurs in one room in which the unnamed narrator sits, unmoving, throughout the genre-crossing, ten-page short story that, at times, reads like a personal essay. Despite the narrator's physically fixed location and one sparse line of dialogue, multitudinous thoughts are communicated through an internal voice, allowing a glimpse into her psychology; indeed, there is essentially no plot in "The Mark on the Wall," only the development of interior psychology, where the majority of the action occurs. Our narrator, staring at a mark on her wall, launches into an intense musing about everything from Shakespeare to Whitaker's Almanack to knowledge itself. Her conclusions are varied and, sometimes, indefinite, including the unanswered question, "what is knowledge?" (43), and the notion that "[a] world without professors or specialists" (43) is a world that is "very pleasant" (43) indeed. The narrator's disdain for orderliness and concrete facts becomes clearer and clearer as the story progresses: why does she not simply stand up from her chair and look at the mark on the wall to determine what, in fact, it really is? The ambiguity Woolf often favors in her works is apparent in "The Mark on the Wall" as well as in her essay *A Room of One's Own*, though each of these works was written with a different goal in mind. "The Mark on the Wall," when viewed through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis, features a narrator who desires a return to the Imaginary Order, or childhood, when language did not act as separator and interfere with her ultimate (and language-less) connection with the world; *A Room of One's Own* expresses a somewhat less intimate desire, though no less important, focusing on the cultural and political realm and conveying the desire to strengthen the female literary tradition.

Right from the beginning of "The Mark on the Wall," the mark is considered a "relief" that "interrupt[s]" (37) a childhood memory and replaces it with a strong unconscious desire to become a child, at least on a psychological level. On the surface, the narrator simply discusses a "fancy" involving flags and castle towers, but it is important to note that both the mark and the word "child" are placed together in the same sentence only six sentences from the beginning of the story: "rather to my relief the sight of the mark interrupted the fancy, for it is an old fancy, an automatic fancy, made as a child perhaps" (37). As the narrator fantasizes about some other childhood memory, she looks up at the mark, which begins the association of the mark with childhood (or the Imaginary Order). Lois Tyson explains in her book

*Critical Theory Today* that the Imaginary Order is “the world of images . . . not the world of the imagination, but a world of perception. It’s the world that the child experiences through images rather than through words” (27). As we see throughout the story, the narrator places much more emphasis on the image (i.e., the mark) than on the word (i.e., the definition of the mark).

The mark is never clearly defined throughout the story, until the end of course, but until that point (and arguably beyond that point), it serves numerous purposes in the story and assumes a couple of different meanings for the narrator herself. We see that she muses on it quite a bit and states that “[she] might get up, but if [she] got up and looked at it, ten to one [she] shouldn’t be able to say for certain” (38). This is a somewhat odd way of approaching determining the meaning of the mark, since most people would likely stand up and see what it was for themselves, but for the narrator the mark represents something abstract, and she clearly wants to keep it that way. Considering this, we may say that the mark is the narrator’s *objet petit a*, which, according to Lois Tyson, “refers to anything that puts [us] in touch with [our] repressed desire for [our] lost object” (28). The narrator’s lost object is her childhood and, inseparably, her connection with the world before the Symbolic Order eclipsed the Imaginary one. As Tyson explains, we exit a world of language-less connection into one of language and disconnection as we grow: “the Symbolic Order . . . change[s] our preverbal world of union into a world of people and things separate from ourselves” (28). Additionally, by making the conscious decision to avoid determining the true nature of the mark, or to ascribe a definite meaning to it through language, our narrator subverts phallogocentrism, or the idea that meaning is primarily constructed by, and in regards to, males. Since she does not examine the mark, she does not ascribe male-created language and meaning to it, rejecting the Symbolic Order. The narrator does not want to identify the mark with language because, to her, the mark represents the connection she had with the world before language, or the Symbolic Order, came into her life.

The narrator’s indifference toward concrete facts and definitions continues throughout the story, particularly concerning language. In fact, the narrator specifically mentions that she wants to “sink” away from the separation in the world, the separation that language brings, and instead wants to remain in her chair and submerge herself even further in her own thoughts: “I want to think quietly, calmly, spaciouly, never to be interrupted, never to have to rise from my chair, to slip easily from one thing to another, without any sense of hostility or obstacle. I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard *separate* facts” (39, my emphasis). It almost sounds like she is shrinking, if not in body, then in mind, as she does not want to move but, like an infant, is content to stay in her chair (or crib), away from

concrete facts and definitions, left alone with her own mind. We can interpret that the “sense of hostility or obstacle” she feels in “slip[ping] easily from one thing to another” is language and the Symbolic Order with which it is associated. Notably, this obstacle also includes men; that is, if we are to consider that meaning is primarily constructed by males, language becomes *their* domain, and women are therefore excluded from or, in our narrator’s case, feel a sense of difficulty or “hostility” with the phallogocentric universe in which their husbands reside.

Despite the fact that Woolf is approaching *A Room of One’s Own* from a different angle, we see a similar sentiment expressed; that is, women are excluded from the phallogocentric universe. For example, upon Woolf’s trip to the library, she realizes that there is a tremendous disparity between the amount of men’s writing about women and the amount of women’s writing about men. As Woolf looks back, she notices that men have treated women as the objects of their writing for hundreds of years, but this attention has not been reciprocated. Woolf also realizes “that nothing is known about women before the eighteenth century” (45). Other than a general idea of these women’s lives, conveyed to Woolf by a professor, women’s whispers from the past are inaudible, entirely excluded. Likewise, in her famous example of Shakespeare’s fictional sister, Judith ends her life in suicide, unheard by anyone. Woolf asks, “who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet’s heart when caught and tangled in a woman’s body?” (48), considering that nothing is conducive to a woman’s career as a poet. Woolf, in discussing such examples, has a visible agenda: she is calling attention to the critical state of women’s fiction in the 1920s (and earlier) and suggesting that in order to solidify the precarious foundation upon which the female literary tradition is built, and in order to continue to build upon it, we must write.

Woolf’s more personal agenda is clear in “The Mark on the Wall,” especially regarding the idea of abstract meaning as feminized, and we see that once the narrator questions knowledge entirely (i.e., phallogocentrism and the Symbolic Order), the imagery that follows is unquestionably feminine. There is, for example, quite a bit of womb imagery in this paragraph, such as water and “nests of white sea eggs.” Her use of such motifs as water is not coincidental, especially when considering her disdain for the Symbolic and desire for the Imaginary. Particularly, if we return to the previously mentioned idea that she wants to “sink,” we can hypothesize that this desire to sink may very well be a desire to sink back into the womb, as such diction evokes further water and womb imagery. Notably, she states, “How peaceful it is down here, rooted in the centre of the world” (44). The words “down here” are polysemous: she could mean as an actual fetus in her mother’s womb, as an infant or child in her crib, or as a woman who, especially in 1922, still occupied an

inferior status to the superior male. The “centre of the world,” to her, may very well be located in women, in an interesting reversal of the phallogocentric. This peaceful imagery is suddenly broken off with an abrupt damning of the Symbolic: “if it were not for Whitaker’s Almanack—if it were not for the Table of Precedency!” (44). That is, without such methods of meaning-making and hierarchy, both phallogocentrism and phallogocentrism could be completely turned on their heads.

The narrator’s work is certainly arduous as she attempts to assert her own meaning yet grapples with the idea that she is, in fact, part of the Symbolic Order and is therefore expected to utilize common language to communicate and verify meaning. For a moment, it almost seems as if she wants to assert herself and her knowledge in the male-dominated world of language and meaning: “[she] must jump up and see for herself what the mark on the wall really is” (44). But she then returns to the more feminine realm of nature in the following paragraph. Indeed, who *could* “lift a finger against Whitaker’s Table of Precedency?” (44), which is the epitome of the Symbolic Order she is resisting. Her tone in the last line of the paragraph is telling: “and if you can’t be comforted [by hierarchies], if you must shatter this hour of peace, think of the mark on the wall” (44). Her whole preceding statement to this closing line seems rather sarcastic, like something *she* has been told: “and the great thing is to know who follows whom. Whitaker knows, and let that, so Nature counsels, comfort you, instead of enraging you” (44). She explains that since she cannot be comforted by hierarchies, she can still muse on the mark because it has its own abstract meaning(s) to her. This mark and its meaning are hers and hers alone; it refutes such ideas as the Table of Precedency, and it is untouched by such patriarchal hierarchies and definitions. At the end of the page, the mark becomes “something definite, something real” (44) that immediately challenges the familiar hierarchies; though the mark is abstract to us and to everyone else, it is *her* reality. Since the mark represents the Imaginary Order in which hierarchy does not matter, our narrator has found in the mark a means to become one with the world again.

The end of the story marks the final battle between the Imaginary and Symbolic Orders, in which the narrator does successfully regress (notably, this may be the only way she feels she can *progress*), but only for a second, before she is abruptly interrupted by the imposition of language. In the last full paragraph, the narrator describes the growth and death processes of a tree, but also speaks metaphorically about her own life: when the tree dies, “life isn’t done with” (45); instead, a rebirthing process occurs: everywhere (i.e., “all over the world, in bedrooms, in ships, on the pavement . . . where men and women sit after tea, smoking cigarettes” [45-6]) someone waits “patient[ly]” and “watchful[ly]” for a tree, which eventually undergoes the process in which it

becomes a newspaper. The narrator mentions that “[she] like[s] to think of the tree itself” (45) or the idea of its natural state (i.e., the Imaginary Order). Once the tree dies, while certainly still useful to people, it has entered the Symbolic Order and therefore is less appealing to the narrator; in fact, it is because of “the immense cold pressure of the earth” (45) that the tree dies or is forced into the Symbolic Order, which our narrator actively resists. The tree, then, does represent her own life: it flourishes in its natural state but dies before it enters the Symbolic Order, all connections with its natural state abruptly cut-off. The narrator does acknowledge the usefulness of entering the Symbolic Order, but ultimately equates it with death.

In a clear reversal of the life and death processes of the tree, the narrator makes the logical step from Imaginary to Symbolic, but soon takes a step backward to the Imaginary. Suddenly, the narrator loses track of *everything*: “[she] can’t remember a thing. Everything’s moving, falling, slipping, vanishing,” and soon “[s]omeone is standing over [her] and saying: ‘I’m going out to buy a newspaper’” (46). The narrator has succeeded in “sink[ing] deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts” (39), as she expressed the desire to do earlier, and her husband (so we think) stands over her just as a father stands over his child’s crib and imposes the Symbolic Order, which the newspaper and the husband represents. Additionally, her husband claims that the mark is a snail, imposing language and concrete meaning to the abstract meaning the narrator has spent the entire story creating, while intentionally *avoiding* concrete meaning. Her attempt to revert back to the Imaginary Order of connection and equality is completely interrupted by the imposition of the Symbolic Order of disconnection and inequality. Despite her one line of feminine, submissive dialogue (“Yes?” [46]), our narrator does have the final line in the story, and she may not be as submissive as she appears; she states that the mark on the wall “*was* a snail” (46, my emphasis), but, as readers, are we to think that perhaps it is no longer a snail? Indeed, she may have entirely subverted phallogocentrism by the simple act of refusing concrete meaning and maintaining her belief that the mark is, instead, representative of an order associated with a time in which she experienced both connection and equality. The mark does act as a sort of catalyst for the narrator, but interestingly what the narrator longs for is an unmarked mind, one untouched by Whitaker’s Almanack, the newspaper, and language itself.

Similar to “The Mark on the Wall,” Woolf’s feminist manifesto *A Room of One’s Own* includes many examples of the refusal to come to any sort of a solid conclusion. Woolf makes no effort to hide this fact and admits, on the first page of the essay, that the main premise of the book, women and fiction, is a subject that “[she] should never be able to come to a conclusion” (3) about. If we are truth-seekers, we will not find capital “T” truths throughout

this essay, since Woolf openly refuses to “hand [us] after an hour’s discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of [our] notebooks and keep on the mantel-piece for ever” (4). The subject of women and fiction is reflected upon throughout the essay, and while Woolf does not come to much of a solid conclusion, except that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (4), she does offer a less concrete answer, which is more implied than directly stated: we must understand women’s fiction in multiple ways or we risk hierarchy. There is no “one way” to interpret or understand women’s fiction, especially considering Woolf’s concluding statement that the writer or the poet lives in us, as women, those of us who “are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed” (113). Like Whitaker’s Almanack in “The Mark on the Wall,” hierarchy in regards to women’s literature is pernicious because it implies that women’s fiction is lower, less than, and derivative, which is exactly what Woolf strives to overcome. The main issue with hierarchical systems of value, according to Woolf, is that they are transitory: one century may value the “coal-heaver” over the “nursemaid” or the “barrister” over the “charwoman,” but ultimately, Woolf states, “[n]ot only do the comparative values of charwomen and lawyers rise and fall from decade to decade, but we have no rods with which to measure them even as they are at the moment” (40). Woolf’s disdain for hierarchical systems includes the fact that they are ephemeral and random.

Woolf does suggest one memorable way to foster a female literary tradition. Her concept of androgyny in *A Room of One’s Own* combines elements of both the cultural and political, yet works to strengthen the female literary tradition. For example, one of the most famous passages is the one in which Woolf suggests that, as writers, we “must be woman-manly or man-womanly” (104). This emphasis on androgyny offers a solution to the restrictions placed upon women’s lives and women’s writing; that is, some new entity must come forth as a means to loosen such restrictions. Despite the cultural and political ethos of early twentieth-century England and the lack of privilege that women had at that time, the mental meshing of the man and woman provides a fertile environment for creation, since “[i]t is fatal . . . in any way to speak consciously as a woman. And fatal is no figure of speech; for anything written with that conscious bias is doomed to death” (104). Androgyny, connecting the male and female sides of the brain, subverts hierarchy, as does the notion that we must understand women’s fiction in multiple ways. The very act of connection nullifies the possibility of hierarchy. James Naremore writes in his essay “A World Without a Self: The Novels of Virginia Woolf”: “In all her work, she attempted to affirm the unity of our lives and to break down what she called in her *Diary* the ‘screen-making’ habit of the human personality” (134). In fact, she makes mention of the “common life” and equates it with “the

real life” (113) at the very end of *A Room*, implying that our lives, when disconnected, are somehow less real.

While “The Mark on the Wall” exposes an extremely intimate desire of its narrator, *A Room of One’s Own* offers a more social, political, and cultural perspective about the ways in which the foundation of women’s fiction needs attention, and how we, now, can strengthen this foundation, but we must have our own space. Interestingly, the room in which the narrator sits throughout “The Mark on the Wall” is not one of her own, but one that is easily penetrated by her husband and thus not conducive to the sort of creation discussed throughout *A Room*. In this way, Woolf’s essay sheds light on her short story, even though the latter was written before the former: the narrator’s desire to regress as a means to progress is the only way she can recover the connection she had with the world. The male-dominated realm of the Symbolic excludes her and will not serve her purposes, but the Imaginary Order, the world of perception, is her creative, fertile environment. Since, perhaps, she cannot write because she does not have a room of her own, she stays within her own mind and utterly rejects the Symbolic Order. In a time when women, as physical beings, were restricted economically, politically, and socially, and their moves were confined and dictated by physical reality and concrete methods of meaning-making, our narrator is content creating a more feminized abstract meaning, problematizing the familiar methods of concrete meaning-making, and that, indeed, is how she makes *her* mark. Seven years later, Woolf suggests that perhaps we should enter and claim the Symbolic rather than desiring the Imaginary. Woolf’s compelling rhetoric invites the reader into the essay in an irresistible request: “Thus when I ask you to write more books I am urging you to do what will be for your good and for the good of the world at large” (109). So with our small stipend and our own space, with freedom and courage, risking anonymity all the while, conjuring inaudible whispers of ghosts from the past, we will write and, through writing, will solidify the shaky foundation upon which the female literary tradition was built.

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## Summing Up: Sensibilia in *The Waves*

Barbara Smith

Virginia Woolf first published *The Waves*, which she referred to as a play poem, in 1931. Considered to be one of her most experimental and abstract stream of consciousness novels, Woolf creates an elegiac work without plot consisting of the interior monologues of six characters: Bernard, Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, and Louis. Whether issuing from individual consciousnesses or six aspects of one consciousness, the characters' soliloquies are framed by inter-chaptered and italicized interludes in which an anonymous narrator describes the progress of the sun in the sky over an uninhabited house, garden, and ocean scene. The light of the sun in the interludes might denote the beginning of perception and the articulation of the conscious experiences of the characters that follow. These perceptions constantly shift as Woolf depicts any moment as containing a plethora of possibilities. Woolf illustrates this idea through the differentiation of the characters by their ways of seeing. In the opening chapter of *The Waves*, Bernard sits close to Susan and imagines that they "melt into each other with phrases" as they share a moment, yet Susan is "tied down with single words" as she perceives Bernard to be slipping further and further away as he continues to speak (*The Waves* 16). Woolf utilizes this occasion not to create a sense of a shared perception between Bernard and Susan, but rather depicts them as having distinct points of view and ways of seeing.

As Woolf uses Bernard and Susan's conversation to illustrate, perception is neither single nor unified because within a single moment infinite possibilities exist for both experiencing that moment and assigning meaning to it through language. Faced with such lack of unity, how could individuals know one another or the world beyond themselves? Woolf's interest in discovering something more permanent within individual perception and experience was informed by the work of Bertrand Russell, a philosopher associated with the Bloomsbury Group. In *The Waves*, Woolf imagined her characters in a Russellian thought experiment of envisioning a world in their absence. The alternation between the soliloquies and the interludes in *The Waves* divides private and temporary perspectives but also links them; a sense of permanence is created by giving form to the ephemeral. By considering what exists beyond the self, Woolf finds the continuity of human existence in the discrete and private sensory experiences of the characters backed by the existence of the unperceived.

In the beginning of *The Waves*, Woolf clearly treats the bodies of her

characters as vessels for the reception of sense data, or what can be immediately sensed about a physical object perceived in the external world. The world of sense data is made possible by the separation of light and darkness in the initial interlude:

*The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it. Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky and the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually.*

*. . . The surface of the sea slowly became transparent and lay rippling and sparkling until the dark stripes were almost rubbed out. Slowly the arm that held the lamp raised it higher and then higher until a broad flame became visible; an arc of fire burnt on the rim of the horizon, and all round it the sea blazed gold. (*The Waves* 7-8).*

Contrasted by the unoccupied perspective present in the opening interlude, the first words of dialogue both establish the overall circular and repetitive rhythm of the novel and provide a depiction of the first shower of atoms onto the characters as children. “‘I see a ring,’ said Bernard, ‘hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light.’ ‘I see a slab of pale yellow,’ said Susan, ‘spreading away until it meets a purple stripe.’ . . . ‘I see a crimson tassel,’ said Jinny, ‘twisted with gold threads’” (*The Waves* 9). It is the light from the first interlude which makes sight, and thus perception, possible in the opening moments of *The Waves*. The rising of the sun over the landscape in the first interlude creates a divide between the characters, as the light provides them with the opportunity to begin to have their own private perceptions. Woolf’s use of a variety of points of view does not create one static reality, but rather presents a paradox of perspectives. By presenting a multiplicity of perspectives, Woolf illustrates how each character acts as his or her own center with his or her own point of view. The contrasts between what is sensed by the characters sets up both their individual realities and serves as an example of how matter can constantly be both sensed and unsensed: “‘Look,’ said Rhoda; ‘listen. Look how the light becomes richer, second by second, and bloom and ripeness lie everywhere.’ . . . ‘Yes,’ said Jinny, ‘our senses have widened.’ . . . ‘The roar of London,’ said Louis, ‘is round us.’ . . . ‘I see India,’ said Bernard” (*The Waves* 135). Repeatedly, what one character sees, another sees differently; there is a cyclical change of position.

These individual realities dominate the first sets of the characters’ soliloquies, as the characters who play and learn together are nonetheless sharply divided one from the other by their private perceptions. But Woolf also wants

to find an enduring reality behind the continually shifting individual perceptions. Before turning to the soliloquies in which she explores that enduring reality, let us consider how she developed these ideas about multiple points of view, and sensed and unsensed perspectives. Her membership in the Bloomsbury Group, a group of philosophers, artists, writers, and thinkers, many of whom were Cambridge-educated men, exposed Woolf to the philosophy of both G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell. While the philosophy of G. E. Moore initially dominated the conversation in Bloomsbury, she was most influenced by the work of Bertrand Russell and the new philosophical movement of realism, which incorporated scientific reasoning into philosophy. Russell utilized the insights of science, specifically physics, to develop an understanding of the external world as broken down into its smallest component: the atom. To Russell, objects appearing as solid, such as a table, are in reality made up of tiny imperceptible particles. Objects seen as atomized allow an infinite number of possible perspectives to occur because these objects are not viewed as unified wholes but rather as pluralistic. Within the atomized world, Russell saw waves and particles of light and sound as carriers of sensation. As we have seen, Woolf drew these ideas into *The Waves* by creating an atomized world in which the characters are subjected to a constant shower of atoms, both sensed and unsensed. Waves and particles of light and sound, the carriers of potential sense data, are the cause of perception for Russell and create an infinite number of perspectives from which Woolf can pull. With the characters in *The Waves*, Woolf clearly illustrates both the gathering of momentary sensations and the repetitious shifting of a mind continually altering its focus as atoms of sensation constantly rain down upon them.

In an atomized universe, one that generates multiple and possibly incompatible perspectives, how did Russell imagine that we use our senses to come to know things about the external world? Russell believed that what we sense about an object exists in conjunction with what he referred to as “sensibilia,” a term describing unsensed sensations that are registered by unperceived perspectives. In a simpler sense, the notion of sensibilia is itself a thought experiment concerning how an object appears when there is no one present to perceive it. Waves and particles constantly emanate from the objects we perceive; sometimes we sense them through hearing, seeing, or feeling, but the object’s waves and particles persist even in a viewer’s absence.

Consider an example that makes its way into Woolf’s novel *To the Lighthouse*. Must a table be observed in order to exist? Because matter existed before the mind, we know it does not depend on an observer to bring it into existence. Russell posited that “Whatever exists is perceptible, but not necessarily perceived by anyone” (Banfield 48). The unsensed sensations described as sensibilia account for the continued existence of an object, such as

a table, as seen from an unoccupied perspective. A person traveling amongst these objects can also perceive that there are other objects existing outside the person's current reality. These objects are beyond observation in that current moment, creating a quality of unreality within the moment of private and discrete experience.

The perception of both the perceived and the unperceived is the thought experiment that Woolf creatively imagines her characters engaged in throughout *The Waves*. The individual perceptions in the soliloquies contrast with the unseen reality of the sea, the garden, and the house present in the interludes. As the mature characters pursue a more authentic knowledge of what it means to be, they search, at least momentarily, for some union of the two. Bernard in particular imagines a world in his absence and most deeply considers the eyeless knowledge of something unperceivable, that which Bernard calls the "world seen without a self" (*The Waves* 287).

While in the soliloquies Woolf emphasizes the contrast between the subjective interior monologues of the characters, the interludes provide a glimpse into a vast and objective unreality: "*Everything became softly amorphous, as if the china of the plate flowed and the steel of the knife were liquid. Meanwhile the concussion of the waves breaking fell with muffled thuds, like logs falling, on the shore*" (*The Waves* 29). The reader is forced to travel between the two worlds of detachment and engagement, between the unperceived reality of the pastoral interludes as narrated by an Other without private sensations and thoughts and the sensed reality of the experienced world present in the dialogue of the characters. The interludes appear to be written from no perspective at all, yet the reader must interpret them both individually and in relation to the soliloquies of the characters. The unoccupied and unobserved world conveyed in the interludes creates a space for exploring a world beyond the self. Through the interludes, the reader is exposed to sensibilia, a world which may be sensed if only there was someone there to perceive it. It is the waves of light and sound first present in the interludes that bring into existence both sense and sensibilia.

In the last episode of *The Waves*, Bernard sums up all that has come before in an attempt to achieve a vision, though momentary, of what endures. The summing up questions the existence of the individual and issues of the collective experience. As Louis notes, "Our separate drops are dissolved." Woolf seems to suggest that the collective experience is more durable. This gives some permanence within the ephemeral, a method for answering the question posed by the novel, "What endures?" (*The Waves* 225). After the sun has set in the last interlude, it is Bernard who most clearly takes on a composite identity during the summing up after having what Woolf referred to as a moment of being. These moments of being are experiences that stand out

from the ordinary life by being fused symbolically with memory. As Bernard begins to sense a world seen without a self, he draws in the inhuman unreality from the interludes, which provides him with a momentary vision of a world unfiltered, a world without illusion. The darkness of a sun that has set dissolves Bernard's view of the outside and allows him to achieve a moment of clarity within the site of perception: the self. As the sun sets and the shower of sense data begins to wane, what was once clearly sensed fades into sensibilia as it moves further toward Bernard's very edge of awareness. He recounts in his summing up: "the fringe of my intelligence floating unattached caught those distant sensations which after a time the mind draws in and works upon" (*The Waves* 249). Through this drawing in of the sensations from the perspective's edge, Bernard acquires his moment of being and draws into his field of perception that which had gone previously unsensed.

When the sensibilia of the interludes crosses into the field of perception, Bernard "walk[s] alone in a new world, never trodden" and wonders how he can begin to describe a world seen without a self (*The Waves* 286-87). In the same way Bernard absorbs the inhuman world of the interludes, as he recounts the life stories of himself and his friends, the experiences and sensations of the other characters are collected on his body as he overcomes his once cherished, singular, identity. As Bernard's "eyes fill with Susan's tears," and he feels the "rush of wind . . . when [Rhoda] lept" from her window, Bernard absorbs what were to him unperceived perspectives and gains an unfiltered perception of sensibilia. His self is now reformed into a multi-faceted being in a state of pure feeling.

Bernard's loss of self allows him to gain a new perspective from the collision of multiple atomized selves and the sensed and unsensed worlds of the soliloquies and interludes. As the summing up begins to take on the condition of the last interlude, that of the setting sun, Bernard moves beyond the interludes towards a new dawn. Recognizing "the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again," he perceives this within himself, in the form of a wave (*The Waves* 297). Here, he recognizes the fluidity of the experiential and the constant transformation of the condition of being. When he takes on the sensibilia of the interludes, he senses that there is a multiplicity of things unperceived yet still existing outside of his direct perception of them. He deduces that the existence of these things does not depend on an observer to be brought into being. Within this realization there is continuity in experience of the universe. Matter persists in the viewer's absence and will continue to do so, just as the waves of audible and visible sensations will continue to radiate, and the waves of the ocean will perpetually crash on the shore. As Bernard's summing up reaches its end, he once again perceives the consistent beating of the waves on the shore, the ticking of the clock, and the

cycle of life in the form of a sound that will continue to be long after he is no longer there to perceive it. This is a glimpse of what endures. As his cycle of life withers, Bernard realizes that he is part of a continuum. His time is part of an absolute time. At this moment, the individual self is related to the whole; Bernard perceives continuity.

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“The Far More Difficult Business of Intimacy”:  
Virginia Woolf’s and Lytton Strachey’s Reinvention of  
Literary Genres

*Kelly Spencer*

The abiding sin of the Victorians, at least as seen by members of Bloomsbury, most notably by Strachey in *Eminent Victorians*, was their willingness to allow public values to intrude upon and determine the private values by which they lived.  
—Peter Stansky

This sentence in Peter Stansky’s book about the development of the Bloomsbury Group crystallizes what Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey felt was wrong with the two preceding generations of upper-class British society and the art they produced. It was clear to Woolf and Strachey that the restrained conventions of Victorian and Edwardian Britain were unsuitable for the lives being lived by their own post-Edwardian generation. As Woolf writes in her essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” “And when human relations change, there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature” (321). Woolf, Strachey, and their compatriots in Bloomsbury rejected the old literary conventions as inadequate and proposed new practices that they believed came nearer to depicting true human experience. In their art they abandoned the Victorian and Edwardian focus on the external world and on structures of public life for the internal life of the individual. Woolf took this interest and focused her groundbreaking fiction on her characters’ inner thoughts and, in her most experimental work, turned the reader’s attention to the unconscious, a relatively unexplored territory in literature. Strachey, in his own right, as a writer who revolutionized the genre of biography, explored the true nature of well-known Victorians, whose celebrated lives he chose to reexamine. Together, Woolf’s and Strachey’s published work embodied the change that the Bloomsbury Group envisioned.

Woolf’s essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” and Strachey’s preface to *Eminent Victorians* are manifestos of their authors’ artistic objectives, stating goals based on similar ideologies. The common thread here is the pursuit of hidden truth in their characters. Woolf writes, “Both in life and in literature it is necessary to have some means of bridging the gulf between the hostess and her unknown guest on the one hand, the writer and his unknown reader on the other” (330). Similarly, Strachey writes in his preface, “Human beings are too important to be treated as mere symptoms of the past. . . . They have a value which is independent of any temporal processes—which is eternal,

and must be felt for its own sake” (vi). In his recast biographies, he implicitly argues against Victorian biographers’ tendency to focus on highlights of their subjects’ public lives at the expense of examining the private thoughts and motivations that determine choice and action. To Strachey, prominent people’s lives comprised much more than the highlights listed in their encyclopedia entries. Their private beliefs and impulses were just as important as their best-known accomplishments in terms of explaining who they were and why we recognize their names.

Acknowledging how difficult it is for an aspiring biographer to gain an objective perspective on stories that have already been so well documented that “the perspicacity of a Gibbon would quail before it” (v), he goes on to say that the art of biography “seems to have fallen on evil times in England. . . . We do not reflect that it is perhaps as difficult to write a good life as to live one.” The wise biographer will “adopt a subtler strategy” and “will attack his subject in unexpected places . . . shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undivined.” Strachey acknowledges his debt to the authors of what he considers the “Standard Biographies” (unnecessarily, and sarcastically, he capitalizes the term): “works which certainly deserve the name. . . . For they have provided me not only with much indispensable information, but with something even more precious—an example.” He then goes on to criticize those previous “Standard Biographers” alliteratively: “Who does not know them, with their ill-digested masses of material, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design?” He defines what he considers the two central “duties” of the biographer: first, brevity, “which excludes everything that is redundant and nothing that is significant”; and second, a commitment “to maintain his own freedom of spirit.” As a modern biographer, Strachey exercises that freedom by “lay[ing] bare the facts of some cases, as I understand them, dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior intentions” (vii). The wise biographer, he says, “rows out over that great ocean of material” and lowers down into it “here and there, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be examined with a careful curiosity” (v). He says that his work will seek to “examine and elucidate certain fragments of the truth which took my fancy and lay to my hand” about his subjects’ lives. Strachey uses these “characteristic specimens” and “fragments of the truth” to collapse the myths that surround his subjects.

In many passages of *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey’s tone, which he restrains in his preface, is often so arch and sardonic—occasionally, even sarcastic—that many readers (including Woolf herself) have found it difficult to believe that the author is doing his best to elucidate the truth about his subjects. Examples abound; here, two will suffice. He assigns the cleric Cardinal

Manning, who nearly became pope, to “that class of eminent ecclesiastics . . . who have been distinguished less for saintliness and learning than for practical ability” (3). And of Manning’s mentor at the Vatican, he says: “He could apply flattery with so unsparing a hand that even Princes of the Church found it sufficient” (70).

Nonetheless, in the thoughtful portrait of Florence Nightingale, Strachey’s Bloomsburian principles break through. Here the reader realizes that he has two goals: to disparage Victorian public values, such as the nepotism that was endemic to the upper echelons of the military, and the social costs of sexism; and to try to understand more clearly what motivated Florence Nightingale to make the decisions she made. To quote Stansky again, why did eminent Victorians such as Florence Nightingale “allow public values to intrude upon and determine the private values by which they lived”? Was it possible to overcome these constraints? Apparently, for some people it was possible some of the time, and Strachey’s admiration for Victorians who played the game to their advantage is clear in his depiction of Nightingale. Strachey looks at the most familiar of the black and the white impressions of her life—the white being her dedication to her patients and her chosen vocation, the black being the enormous odds she was up against as a crusading nurse trying to save thousands of soldiers wounded in the Crimean War and, later in her life, trying to improve nurses’ training. Using his self-described technique of lowering “a little bucket . . . to bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimens” (v) to uncover Nightingale’s entirely human qualities, Strachey comes up with the gray in between these familiar highlights. He quotes from private letters Nightingale wrote to well-placed officials to demonstrate her willingness to play political cards in order to overcome the barriers thrown up by Byzantine bureaucracy in the British War Office when she tried to acquire the most basic medical supplies and equipment. In the following passage, notice Strachey’s ironic use of violent language to make his point about Nightingale’s resolve to improve soldiers’ health care:

[S]he would fill pages with recommendations and suggestions, with criticisms of the minutest details of organization. . . . And then her pen, in the virulence of its volubility, would rush on to the discussion of individuals. . . . Her sarcasm searched the ranks of the officials with the deadly and unsparing precision of a machine gun. Her nicknames were terrible. She respected no one. . . . “I do well to be angry,” was the burden of her cry. How many just men were there at Scutari? How many who cared at all for the sick, or who had done anything for their relief? (157-58)

In his rewriting of the events of her life, Strachey describes Nightingale as a

steely and brilliant political operator. He shows the British public that they were correct to revere Nightingale, but that the conventional impression of her as a gentle, quietly persuasive “lady with the lamp” (her popular nickname) was far from the whole and more impressive truth. Using an aristocratic Victorian woman’s words to make his point—and stretching a metaphor—Strachey quotes Nightingale’s mother: “‘We are ducks,’ she said, with tears in her eyes, ‘who have hatched a wild swan.’ But the poor lady was wrong; it was not a swan that they had hatched; it was an eagle” (135).

In their manifestos, Woolf and Strachey are very clear that they are trying to comprehend more about human motivation and values in order to grasp their own troubled and confusing era in human history. The difference between their approaches is the way they go about uncovering their characters. Whereas Strachey rewrites his characters’ lives, leading his reader pointedly to the truths that had been ignored by previous biographers, Woolf opens a door that hadn’t been opened before to let characters speak for themselves through their thoughts. Whereas Strachey leads and points out specifics with his quoting and re-quoting, Woolf uncovers, opens, and stands back.

In her essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” Woolf offers her assessment of the reason that the previous generation’s fiction had become outmoded and was irrelevant to her generation: “[T]he Edwardians were never interested in character itself; or in the book in itself. They were interested in something outside. Their books, then, were incomplete as books, and required that the reader should finish them, actively and practically, for himself” (327). The Edwardian novelists, she says, “have looked very powerfully, searchingly, and sympathetically out of the window; at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at her, never at life, never at human nature” (330). Like Strachey, she wasn’t merely interested in tearing down. As an artist and intellectual with progressive ideals, she wanted to build a new literature that was up to the task of describing life in the twentieth century. She put the onus on fiction writers to make this connection through the characters they create: “The writer must get in touch with his reader by putting before him something which he recognizes, which therefore stimulates his imagination, and makes him willing to cooperate in the far more difficult business of intimacy” (331).

To uncover the intimate thoughts—the motivations, doubts, and concerns—of her characters, Woolf uses the technique of interior monologue. A repeated theme in several of the most effective monologues in *Mrs. Dalloway* captures city life in a particularly evocative way: what it’s like to be around strangers all the time, how much time we spend thinking about them and wondering whether they think about us, how much we do and don’t share without ever speaking to each other. In the space of a page, the interior monologues of

Septimus, his wife, Rezia, and Peter Walsh, Clarissa's former beau—three characters who interact with the same stranger—tell us a lot about them. As they leave Regents Park, Septimus and Rezia pass an old woman who had been humming as Peter passed her (and gave her a coin; he was thinking about her too). The point of view moves from the old woman to Rezia, and Rezia's interior monologue tells us that she is thinking about the stranger: "Oh poor old wretch! Suppose it was a wet night? Suppose one's father, or somebody who had known one in better days had happened to pass, and saw one standing there in the gutter? And where did she sleep at night?" (81). The point of view then switches to Septimus: "So they crossed, Mr. and Mrs. Septimus Warren Smith, and was there, after all, anything to draw attention to them, anything to make a passerby suspect here is a young man who carries in him the greatest message in the world, and is, moreover, the happiest man in the world, and the most miserable?" (81). In this rapid shift of point of view within a single scene, Woolf reveals the connections as well as the gulfs between these characters, showing us that Rezia is able to think of others' cares and worries, whereas the troubled Septimus has difficulty thinking about anything other than his own emotional and mental struggles.

"How little one [knows] people" (149)—to quote a comment that Peter makes about Clarissa later in the novel—is a weighty topic in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and in Woolf's and Strachey's work in general. While learning more about others can help us understand more about ourselves, it's true, nevertheless, that nobody—not Lytton Strachey, not even Virginia Woolf—can fully describe, let alone know, anyone else, regardless of how intimate the relationship may be. Depending on how one chooses to view it, this examination of a common theme of human life can be thrilling, even stirring, or it can accentuate the solitude of existence.

As Woolf does in her novel, Strachey's commitment to expressing a full inner life for his characters sometimes means delving between their most and least positive, or attractive, aspects—the gray area, in other words, between the black and white. Toward the end of his *Nightingale* biography, Strachey, who as a modernist believed in the value of reason and intuition, points out how his Victorian subject's rigid attachment to facts ultimately hampered her:

Though the great achievement of her life lay in the immense impetus which she gave to the scientific treatment of sickness, a true comprehension of the scientific method itself was alien to her spirit. Like most great men of action—perhaps like all—she was simply an empiricist. She believed in what she saw, and she acted accordingly; beyond that she would not go. . . . Years after the discoveries of Pasteur and Lister, she laughed at what she called the "germ-fetish." There was no such thing as

“infection”; she had never seen it, therefore it did not exist. (193-94)

As Strachey did in his Nightingale portrait, Woolf chose to show her characters' flaws to make her point about human connection and isolation. As charming as she is, the privileged Clarissa sometimes behaves like the indulged woman she was brought up to be. Her interior monologues also reveal the ignorance that would have been typical of a woman in her position, who would have lived her life relatively far removed from the harsher realities of twentieth-century life; to put it mildly, Clarissa can be rather dim about current events. But because we hear her thoughts, we understand why Clarissa thinks what she thinks and says what she says, and ultimately, despite her less than attractive characteristics, we make a personal connection.

Critics did not always appreciate Woolf's method of using character flaws to connect with her readers. As Bonnie Kime Scott writes in her introduction to *Mrs. Dalloway*,

Woolf was concerned that her central character might be too slight and artificial to stand at the center of her novel. Indeed, Clarissa has had her detractors, starting with Lytton Strachey, who found Woolf alternately laughing at her female protagonist and covering her with aspects of herself. . . . It is easy to discover Mrs. Dalloway in unflattering moments, where she may patronize her servants, exhibit snobbery in making up her guest list or ignorance in pondering Richard's dealings with Armenians, or is it Albanians, when in fact the plight of the Armenians was desperate indeed. (lxiv)

Judgmental though Strachey may have been of her method of vacillating between admiration and disapproval of Clarissa's behavior, the criticism didn't particularly upset Woolf. She knew that he, as a fellow Bloomsburian, approved of her commitment to portraying the real Clarissa as patronizing, snobbish, and self-doubting, and, in all these facets, quite believable:

No, Lytton does not like Mrs. Dalloway, and what is odd, I like him all the better for saying so, and don't much mind. What he says is that there's a discordancy between the ornament (extremely beautiful) and what happens (rather ordinary—or unimportant). This is caused, he thinks, by some discrepancy in Clarissa herself: he thinks she is disagreeable and limited, but that I alternately laugh at her and cover her, very remarkably, with myself. So that I think as a whole, the book does not ring solid; yet, he says, it is a whole; and he says sometimes the writing is of extreme beauty. (*Diary* 77)

For her part, Woolf criticized *Eminent Victorians* for the effort that Strachey

makes to reveal previous biographers' faults; to quote her, "beautifully though it is concealed, [it] has robbed his words of some of the force that should have gone into it, and limited his scope" ("Mr. Bennett" 335). Woolf's point is well taken. Strachey's quest to show up his Victorian forebears does get the better of him at times. His cleverness can get in his way, and his sardonic wit can be distracting. When he makes fun of his subjects, he is neither objective nor dispassionate in representing his subjects, two of the goals he set out for modern biographers in the preface to *Eminent Victorians*.

Nevertheless, his and Woolf's respective quests, as Bloomsbury writers, to reveal the private lives behind the public faces of characters, real and fictional, are successful. In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf says, about the nature of fiction: "I believe that novels, that is to say, deal with character, and that it is to express character—not to preach doctrines, sing songs, or celebrate the glories of the British Empire, that the form of the novel, so clumsy, verbose, and undramatic, so rich, elastic, and alive, has been evolved" (324). This statement is remarkably similar to a statement Strachey makes in his preface to *Eminent Victorians*: "[M]y choice of subjects has been determined by no desire to construct a system or to prove a theory, but by simple motives of convenience and of art. It has been my purpose to illustrate rather than to explain" (vi). While neither professes to be interested in establishing rules or systems, in effect they did. Strachey personalized legends, and Woolf psychologized fiction. Each set the bar for writers in their genres and, in the process, defined modernist literature for future generations.

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The Drawing Room Window: Mrs. Ramsay's Haunt in *To the Lighthouse*

Emily Wejchert

In Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, the window, time, and the lighthouse are recurrent symbols. The novel is divided in three sections, "The Window," "Time Passes," and "The Lighthouse." Mrs. Ramsay, mother of eight and the central matriarch of the novel, is one of the main subjects, if not the main subject, of the first section. Mrs. Ramsay can be found recurrently occupying her haunt, the chair looking out through the drawing room window. I argue that windows, specifically the drawing room window, function as a narrative device by which Woolf may shift among characters' consciousnesses, especially when they focus on Mrs. Ramsay. The characterization of Mrs. Ramsay is therefore revealed in her own consciousness and the consciousnesses of other characters as they look at the window. During her life and after her death, the window is a testament to Mrs. Ramsay and the influence she wields over others.

Much critical attention has been paid to the symbolism of the lighthouse. Many critics have "develop[ed] readings that attempt to account for the work as a whole," tracing dominant patterns (Hussey 313). The window, too, deserves attention, as it is a *leitmotif*, or a guiding motif, which develops as a key structure of the novel. What might at first seem like an accidental feature of setting dynamically progresses into an essential motif representing the character of Mrs. Ramsay, during and after her lifetime.

The window may be understood as Mrs. Ramsay's haunt in two senses: during the first section—while she is still living—the window is her most frequented location, and after her death, specifically in the third section, it becomes a psychological "haunt." It becomes a *de facto* memorial of Mrs. Ramsay for Lily Briscoe, the young woman who vacations with the Ramsay family and strives toward a deep connection with Mrs. Ramsay. The characterization of Mrs. Ramsay develops alongside the symbolic progression of the window. In a novel with limited inter-subjective interactions, the window serves as a structural element that connects for the reader different characters' thoughts. In my argument, I focus on the moments in which characters' consciousnesses regarding Mrs. Ramsay are mediated, or consolidated, by the image of her in the window.

In the first section of the novel, Mrs. Ramsay gazes *out* through the drawing room window upon the sea and the family outside; through this same window, Lily Briscoe looks *in* on Mrs. Ramsay from outdoors. In this

section, Lily begins painting the figure of Mrs. Ramsay and her son James seated at the drawing room window, an image that she ultimately perceives in her painting to be a purple triangle. After Mrs. Ramsay's death, in the third section, Lily continues the same portrait she began some years earlier, reworking the image of Mrs. Ramsay, examining the memories of her and ultimately preserving her in elegiac portraiture. In my analysis, I will focus primarily on the perceptions of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily, especially Lily's perceptions of Mrs. Ramsay, to show the connection between character and symbol.

*To the Lighthouse* is a novel largely comprised of characters' private and interior thoughts. Martha Nussbaum notes, "Most of the novel is set inside the minds of its various characters. . . . The reader is thus . . . made aware . . . of the tremendous gap between what we are in and to ourselves, and the part of the self that enters the interpersonal world. Only the prose of the novel bridges the gap" (733). Though the entire novel can be classified as "prose," what I interpret from Nussbaum is that the "prose of the novel" relates the brief instances of action and symbolism rather than the periods of psychological interiority. The window is one of these "bridges" among characters' consciousnesses. Woolf uses the window as a point of commonality: the shift among the narrations of interiority often occurs as characters fix their attention and their vision on the window.

In Chapter I of "The Window," this shift occurs among three characters: Mrs. Ramsay, Lily, and Mr. Ramsay. The family gathers for a midday meal, and "directly the meal is over," the children leave and the narrative enters Mrs. Ramsay's consciousness—her private perception of "strife, divisions, difference of opinion, prejudices"—as she stands ruminating by the drawing room window (*TTL* 8-9). Later, Lily is painting "Mrs. Ramsay sitting in the window with James," working "the mass . . . the line . . . the colour" of her subject (17). To her, the painting is a private matter, "keep[ing] a feeler on her surroundings lest . . . she should find her picture looked at" (17). In another private moment during that day, Mr. Ramsay is pacing up and down the terrace, rapt in his own philosophical frustrations. He "looked once at his wife and son in the window, and . . . without distinguishing either his son or his wife, the sight of them . . . consecrated his effort" to further his philosophical inquiry (33). Here, the image of Mrs. Ramsay in the window as perceived by Lily and Mr. Ramsay enables the narrative shift between their private musings.

We have seen that the image of Mrs. Ramsay at the drawing room window has permeated the consciousnesses of both Lily and Mr. Ramsay while they are deep in thought or the creative process. In this way, the image of Mrs. Ramsay at the window is the apex of a triangle of consciousnesses. Lily and Mr. Ramsay both fix their attention upon this image of mother and son, and Woolf uses this shared focal point to shift between their two separate and

subjective consciousnesses. Lily privately works and reworks her impression of Mrs. Ramsay and James coalesced together in the window as she looks in upon them. Similarly, Mr. Ramsay glances at the indistinguishable mass that is his son and his wife. Both creators (painter and philosopher) are spurred deeper into their creative processes by the convergence of mother and son. Both perceive significance in the image of domestic security. Lily, young and unmarried, is drawn to the image, studying it and replicating it, an act of creativity that holds the temporal progression of the plot together, as we will see in the third section. Mr. Ramsay, glancing “as one raises one’s eyes from a page” (33), turns inward to his own thoughts and efforts, with the image of Mrs. Ramsay and James as “a confirmation of something on the printed page to which one returns, fortified, and satisfied” (33). The confirmation of domestic security enables his philosophical progress.

Thus far we have seen that Lily and Mr. Ramsay’s thoughts have been mediated by the image of Mrs. Ramsay in the window. Having analyzed two corners of the triangle—Mr. Ramsay and Lily—I will now consider Mrs. Ramsay, the apex. During an evening party, her domestic creation, Mrs. Ramsay takes a moment to reflect upon her dominion:

There is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had had once today, already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures. (105)

Amid family and guests, she pauses to look at the window and reflect upon the transcendence of life itself. Aspects from Arthur Symons’s work *The Symbolist Movement* are of particular interest to this analysis of Mrs. Ramsay’s experience here. In a letter to Roger Fry, Woolf mentions Symons’s influence, stating her unwillingness to fix her symbolism: “I can’t manage Symbolism except in this vague, generalized way” (*Letters* 2, 385). Symons’s treatise helps to elucidate the above passage from Mrs. Ramsay’s consciousness:

As we brush aside the accidents of daily life, in which men and women imagine that they are alone touching reality, we come closer to humanity, to everything in humanity that may have begun before the world and may outlast it. Here, then, in this revolt against exteriority . . . against a materialistic tradition; in this endeavour to disengage the ultimate essence, the soul, of whatever exists and can be realized by the consciousness . . . literature, bowed down by so many burdens, may at last attain liberty. (5)

Woolf includes the “accidents of daily life,” but she does so briefly, while paying close narrative attention to the essence, to that which “may have begun before the world and may outlast it.” Mrs. Ramsay’s recognition that “there is a stability in things” echoes Symonds’s argument against the material exteriority of life, pushing for a lasting conception of the soul of things. Mrs. Ramsay looks to the window while having this revelation of “stability” and “coherence.” Here, the window serves as a frame for the reader—a frame of Mrs. Ramsay’s mind, so to speak. Her musings, anticipating her death, are of crucial importance to the narrative. As she glances at the window, reflecting the image of her dinner party—her creation—Mrs. Ramsay’s thoughts become removed from the “accidents of daily life” and transcend her life itself. She sees her domestic creation, and as it is reflected, the “accidents of daily life” crystallize into its essence.

Mrs. Ramsay’s epiphany, her identification of “the thing is made that endures,” occurs near the end of the first section, “The Window.” Soon after this recognition of her life’s essence, Mrs. Ramsay “got up, and pulled the window down another inch or two” (115). Significantly, Mrs. Ramsay shuts a window for the first time in the novel. Anticipating her death, the window, the symbolic frame through which readers enter her consciousness, becomes sealed off. In Mrs. Ramsay’s last appearance, she sits with her husband, quietly occupying their domestic space. The privacy of her thoughts is emphasized as she gazes out: “And smiling she looked out of the window and said (thinking to herself, Nothing on earth can equal this happiness)” (124). During this moment Mrs. and Mr. Ramsay share a private moment—both intimate and individually private—through a connected gaze: “As she looked at him . . . though she had not said a word, he knew . . . that she loved him” (124). Woolf’s final representation of Mrs. Ramsay fixes her in a moment of mental privacy, gazing out the window, but also in a moment of mental inter-subjectivity through a mutual gaze.

Here we come to the symbolic progression of the window after Mrs. Ramsay’s death. Heretofore, the window is associated with Mrs. Ramsay’s own consciousness and the thoughts that other characters—namely, Lily Briscoe and Mr. Ramsay—have regarding Mrs. Ramsay. After she “died rather suddenly,” the family leaves “the house empty and the doors locked” (128). In “Time Passes,” a very brief section featuring fluid description of the external force of nature acting on the house, a great deal of narrative attention is given to the action surrounding windows. Housekeepers are “directed to open all windows” in the family’s absence, and for quite some time come regularly to clean the house that had “stood all these years without a soul in it” (135). At the end of their task “the windows were shut to, keys were turned all over the house, the front door was banged, it was finished” (141). After the house remains sealed

for some years, Lily Briscoe returns. Directly after her arrival, “through the open window the voice of the beauty of the world came murmuring” (142). During her life, Mrs. Ramsay urges, “all windows must be open” (27). Now, in Lily’s presence, the windows are open as Mrs. Ramsay has always preferred. Thus begins Lily’s visual and mental elegy for Mrs. Ramsay.

In the third section, “The Lighthouse,” Lily becomes the force which preserves Mrs. Ramsay’s character after her death. Her painting and her consciousness help keep the narrative attention on Mrs. Ramsay despite her departure. The rupture of the family, and indeed the narrative, in “Time Passes” now shifts the action of the novel. We have seen in the first section that Lily and Mr. Ramsay are spurred deeper into their artistic and philosophical endeavors by the image of Mrs. Ramsay in the window. Mrs. Ramsay’s own domestic creation, the dinner party, is reflected in the window, and she comes to recognize the essence of her life as matriarch. The window, as we will soon see, carries over as a motif in the third section.

Now, Lily stands some years later in the same spot in which she had been painting during “The Window,” and reminisces about Mrs. Ramsay’s character. She recalls her stabilizing force—her mantra “life stand still here”—and calls out her name in reverence (161). She directly observes the house “sleeping in the early sunlight with its windows green and blue with the reflected leaves” (161). Her memory is triggered by the image: “The faint thought she was thinking of Mrs. Ramsay seemed in consonance with this quiet house . . . this fine early morning air” (161). Furthermore, Lily declares, “even [her] shadow at the window with James was full of authority” (176). With her memory centered around the window, Mrs. Ramsay’s domestic authority still presides over Lily’s consciousness.

Long after Mrs. Ramsay’s death, Lily’s consciousness continues to associate the window with Mrs. Ramsay. What was Mrs. Ramsay’s haunt during her life is her haunt posthumously. The window remains a testament to her existence, both as a live character in the first section, “The Window,” and as a posthumous force in the final section, “The Lighthouse.” Lily’s artistic vision, her painting, represents the action of the novel. It functions, like the window, as a unifying force of the narrative. Through her unifying vision, Lily consolidates the essence of Mrs. Ramsay, representing the nebulous mass of her and her son: the purple triangle. By representing Mrs. Ramsay as a purple triangle situated in the window, she fixes her in her essence: her stabilizing domestic force manifested by her sitting in the window with her son. Lily “brush[es] away the accidents of daily life” and preserves the essence of Mrs. Ramsay that has outlasted her life (Symons 5).

Woolf ultimately strengthens the link between Mrs. Ramsay and the drawing room window after her death. Lily, still lost in memory, still work-

ing on her masterpiece, recalls one character skirting “past the drawing room window . . . trying to avoid Mrs. Ramsay” (195). Suddenly, “a noise drew [Lily’s] attention to the drawing room window—the squeak of a hinge. The light breeze was toying with the window” (195). In this case, Lily’s mental association of Mrs. Ramsay through the window is deliberately vague and subtle. While Lily paints:

Suddenly the window at which she was looking was whitened by some light stuff behind it. At last then somebody had come into the drawing-room, somebody was sitting in the chair. For Heaven’s sake, she prayed, let them sit still there. . . . Mercifully whoever it was stayed still inside; [for] one must hold the scene—so—in a vise and let nothing come in and spoil it. (201)

Woolf’s diction is deliberately vague, using the indefinite “somebody” and inquisitive “whoever,” and most vague of all, “stuff.” Lily’s nebulous subject lingers long enough for her to capture it and preserve it in painting. Then Lily observes: “some wave of white went over the window pane. The air must have stirred some flounce in the room” (202). Immediately, Lily recalls the image of Mrs. Ramsay at this same haunt: “Mrs. Ramsay—it was part of her perfect goodness—sat there quite simply, in the chair . . . knitted her reddish-brown stocking, cast her shadow on the step. There she sat” (202). The mood is indicative and declarative throughout the above passage, implying a fixedness of portraiture and its ability to preserve an individual posthumously. Triggered by the mental apparition, Lily conjures an image and a sentiment of her subject and finally fixes Mrs. Ramsay in an elegiac portrait.

*To The Lighthouse* as elegiac portraiture is explicitly stated in Woolf’s autobiographical writing. Biographer Hermione Lee states: “[Woolf] knew she wanted to call [*To The Lighthouse*] an ‘Elegy’ rather than a novel” (470). Through Lily’s painting—the meta-artifice—we can see how Woolf reworked this motive in her fictional narrative. Lily Briscoe is the narrative agent who preserves “[Mrs. Ramsay’s] beauty [and] the impression that she makes on all these people” (Lee 469). The concept of preservation through “the flight of time” is what Woolf calls “this impersonal thing” (Lee 470), but what I call an essential motif. With the drawing room window as a haunt during Mrs. Ramsay’s life, Lily is able to critically and artistically observe Mrs. Ramsay gazing out, and Mr. Ramsay can reassure himself mentally through the very same image. These are moments of inter-subjective mental privacy as well as individual mental privacy. After her death, the posthumous concept of Mrs. Ramsay, the lasting “impression” on others’ lives, is centered around the drawing-room window, thus remaining her haunt in the afterlife.

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## Winter Hymn

Kevin Larkin Angioli

Almost rhythmically,  
The creaking of the boughs  
In this terrifying February silence  
Of night spangled with apocryphal  
Stars of spiral-sung desolation  
Brings me back to my gravity-bound  
Station amongst the gaping challenge  
Of uncaring infinity.

Walking the barking, snapping  
Frozen boards of an upstate New York  
Porch, diamond-nailed to withstand  
The passing of a brutal century's  
Ghost travelers seeking respite  
From hard day's toil in the  
Austere mines in the woods  
Just beyond this ramshackle  
Outpost for city-workers,  
Reclaimed by ruinous nature's  
Defiant renaissance.

The yellow-grassed, rockhard soil  
Is tattered with a small amount  
Of whitefrozen, sky-sent water,  
But the creaking, patient creaking  
Boughs in silent, patient night  
Becomes

The creaking of the mast,  
The boards I traverse, only audience  
To the clocking of my own second-hand  
Bootssoles, the deck of an empty ship.

Am I left captain when I know not  
How to turn the wheel?  
Close these infinity-drunk eyes,  
And the water on the ground exponentializes,  
Liquid loquacious, into, unto

Ocean without end—  
Black depths fathomable only by human  
Measurement, unfathomable by human-  
Arrogant imagination.  
North, West, East, South stretch  
These waters of the mind.  
The same stars that watched them all:  
Brothers, fathers, sisters, mothers throughout  
All of this human history,  
Awaiting its apocalypse  
To know its meaning,  
To know its place,  
To at last judge the value of its story.

Because, after all, all we have  
And all we know and all we truly care about  
Is the story.

And the poet is trapped inside the poem;  
And the poet knows he is in a poem;  
And he cares not for the hearsay  
And heresy of canonized inkdrunk  
Poets theorizing centuries past  
And plastered in lapidary scrawl.

Crawling the deck,  
Basilisk-eyed still,  
Instilled with weight of knowledge,  
Distilled with the fermented grapes  
Of an ineluctable past,  
Standing aboard this creaking ship,

This ocean merely ocean,  
Whether here in particle flesh  
Or the circumference always  
Superfluxed of imagination.

An ocean where myth and magic,  
Muscle and memory flow  
With the North Star's twinkle  
And the inconstant moon's  
Vanity reflected in a validation  
And vindication that even

Alone, ever alone, we are  
Never alone,  
But rhythmically, compulsorily  
Pulled into a conversation  
With the whispers  
Of human history. List and wist,

Woe and weal,  
Through whatever keel,  
In heart's hymns kneel  
To the human god,  
"making ever glad the heart of man":  
Story.

## **The Fleeting**

Amanda Boyle

How does the wind  
Breeze like flame and frost?  
Days forgotten  
And moments lost.  
Coats creased  
Like forgotten letters  
Hidden in drawers  
Of moths and feathers.

## Broken Glances

Amanda Boyle

The raven's song was on the wind today:  
Heartache and mystery rarely so coupled.  
As his prophesy rang  
And the sounds echoed,  
We were drawn to the Siren's cliffs.

Only there did I find you—  
On the edge of the veil.  
How your eyes glanced back  
On me, eyes of Orpheus;  
And I, Eurydice,  
Banished not to the dead,  
But to the living.

Separated by thin chasms  
And voiceless echoes  
We unknowingly pray for Lethe,  
But live for the revelations of tomorrow.

## Survivor's Guilt

Joann K. Dejudibus

*Prepare yourself.*

Prepare your shoeless feet for  
paths scattered with stone, shells, bone-shatter, casings.

There will be flowers,  
stems bound like limbs,  
bunches of legs dangling above water;  
flowers pulled from fields,  
dug from torn ground, rootless.

There will be blood-black, blooms,  
mud-colored hair spilling like petals,  
dark shards arranged in sharp angles.

Those chosen could not prepare  
captives cast off like chaff  
or thrown atop pyres,  
stalks askew, barbed leaves lifting  
like ash-flecked palms in prayer.

*Prepare yourself:*

the rampart about your heart bursting with grief,  
as shrapnel seeps into tight red bud.

## North River

Joann K. Dejudicibus

Track-tied waters steer  
charred bone, teeth, and rail ships home:  
South River city.

## Lunar Eclipse

Dennis Doherty

Is it enough to know that it happens  
right now up the stairs, out the front door,  
climbing in the upper eastern oak branches,  
pulling their shadows along sparkling  
and play-printed ice echoes of girls and dog  
in a sexy tango of touch-my-sun?

Is it enough to know that others watch  
for me, do the work of witness, to tell  
what really came to pass, and how; the bulge  
of specific ocean and continent  
with animals and boats and streets with names  
asserting relationship across that  
distant and alien cold shouldered orb?

When I can sit here and taste the copper  
communion of old nights under the act?  
The event I tell could be any shade  
from any glade—no things but in ideas.  
I dreamt I flew arms wide in cinnamon  
winds of cold grace over jade forests  
and dizzy bridges from droll shores—so did.  
But Lola stands in her boots with the stars  
and the moon's new cloak. I should go, and hope.

## Organ Music

Dennis Doherty

On the news, miracles of wayward birth:  
fertilized girls sweat litters of tots;  
post-menopause moms hug drug borne firsts  
while trash cans and dumpsters receive the rot  
of accidental entry to glimpsed light;  
perhaps best, a flash, a whiff, then the clout.  
Our early son, birthed full of pain and fight,  
was planned and loved, was named and known without  
our knowing that the doctor trusted Jesus  
the myth (to me); to him, nature's sacred  
surgeon, organist of mad wills. He was  
loathe to treat the staph, the cramp. She ached, bled.  
"Awful mess," nurse chimed with excited eye.  
Born dead, I thought; found out they'd let him die.

## Can I title this “Prefab”?

Andrew C. Higgins

I was running and thought—  
it was late summer and I hadn't run in several days  
and I was hot and tired just a half mile in  
so I was thinking—or trying to think—  
to distract me from the fact that running sucks,  
that I could be sitting on a couch—  
not that I spend much time on a couch;  
mine's taken up with cats and children  
(do I need these lines?)  
anyway, I run because running makes me feel better,  
makes me more alert—but here I am,  
thinking—by which I mean something like  
“trying to follow a succession of thoughts”—  
as a way of not feeling my body  
because it *doesn't* feel good running  
at least not this morning  
and I pass the house.

It's not really a house yet:  
a site: crane, dirt, flattened grass,  
concrete and a prefab house  
not yet assembled, a swarm of  
men, tool belts, and hats.  
So yes, it's a house (Are you getting all this?)  
but it's also still becoming a house.  
And I think (think?). Okay:  
“I arrive at the conclusion that”  
our conclusions arrive this way  
like these prefab houses  
(yes, this is the simile part)  
carried on trailers to neighborhoods,  
one each for the first floor, back and front,  
and a third for the rest—dormers, a roof in pieces,  
windows and the small bits needed  
for assembly, cradled in bubble wrap,

all strapped *very* tight to prevent shifting.  
And one day there's the crane  
poised above (always "poised")  
the concrete foundation  
with lengths of rebar  
reaching up like  
(wait for it)  
teeth  
(I'm cheating now, aren't I?)  
and the very heavy parts descend  
while men,  
so fragile,  
guide everything into place.

## Dreaming About the Circus Again

Andrew C. Higgins

Sitting at your desk  
in the night, with the house  
quiet, while the cats pad  
along the floor and surf  
disperses on the sands,  
you make a list of names  
and think back on your past.  
Faces slide by, glimpses of people  
who jiggled the straight path of your life  
then faded into their own,  
and you wonder  
if you really should not  
have gone to school,  
or whether, perhaps,  
it might have been better  
to have joined the circus.  
Because you ride well,  
you might have become  
the man who did handstands  
on the gilded horse. Effortlessly  
your fingers would grasp  
the animal's back.  
As you rounded the big top  
at stunning speeds  
you would command  
your torso,  
lift your legs,  
unfolding yourself,  
the way a leviathan  
unfolds  
its tail before sounding.

But then it might be you would have fallen in love  
with Melinda, the ingénue of the high wire,  
or had a torrid affair with Alphonse,

her brother with sharp good looks.  
These things happen.  
The three of you might have run off to Surinam,  
where you drank your money and burrowed  
into dark rooms on the edge of the sand  
until finally it all broke. Then,  
amidst flayed tempers and weeping,  
you might curl your bedroll over your shoulder  
and set off north once more  
to reclaim something,  
maybe a chair in a saltbox house,  
or an iron seat  
on a mountain rising  
far above the sea.

## Nicknames

Chris Lawrence

That day, the clouds were low, the winds were high,  
Nothing to do but drink at the dropzone.  
Bad things happened when I found the Bourbon.  
“Noon is too early to start,” Candy said . . .  
We never listened to her anyway.

“Hey Jackalope, I’ve got a great idea,”  
I said, probably a little cockeyed.  
“You ever make a redneck Jacuzzi?”  
“What the hell is a redneck Jacuzzi?”  
He said, definitely pretty cockeyed.

We’ll put a tarp in the bed of my truck  
Then fill it up and have ourselves a swim.  
“That’s god-damn genius,” he said with a slur.  
“Call SCUBA Joe, I think he’s at the store.  
Tell him to get some bubble bath for us.”

“That’s god-damn genius,” I said with a slur.  
“We’ll heat it up with Dingo Phil’s blowtorch.”  
“Brilliant!” he shouted, unfolding the tarp.  
The water poured in, we poured ourselves drinks.  
When SCUBA returned, we poured in the soap.

The blowtorch didn’t work, so we got in  
And shivered a bit, our clothes bogging down.  
“To the hangar, wench!” we yelled to Candy.  
She didn’t mind ’cause she’s Jackalope’s girl.  
When we arrived, we were greeted with howls.

The sudsy water sloshed over the back  
And jumpers traded their beers for cameras.  
“The way to do this,” Ricky Bobby said,  
“Is run a hose from the exhaust for bubbles.”  
“Brilliant!” we shouted, “let’s get us a hose!”

“To the tool shed, Candy—pull away slow!”  
She didn’t hear us and hit the gas hard.

Out of body, I flew over the back  
In a mighty wall of bubbly water.  
Then sickening slap of flesh on asphalt.

They got to me fast, their eyes like golf balls,  
Picked me up slow, their hands slick from the soap—  
And sprayed on some Bactine for the road rash.  
Dixie gave me a beer and took a picture.  
Then after some thought, he said with a smile,  
“From this day on, we’ll call you Tsunami.”

## Something About Fire

Jes Mackenzie

I remember you.  
I showed you a candle flame  
And you told me it looked like God's finger.  
I said it could melt the sugar moon,  
And you said no, it was only white sponge paint  
On black paper.

The wax around the flame bowed in upon  
The wild tribal dance of man's early light—  
Dawn's early light?  
God's early light, his finger creating Adam.

You pushed the wax to melt it evenly  
And I breathed,  
Sending the flame jiving to another beat.

On nights like this, I want to be wrapped in hawk feather  
And I want you to be the snake charmer  
Of this infinite menagerie of possibility.

On nights like this, my mind wanders to that sugar moon  
And I wonder if the flame could reach it,  
Would it crystallize?

God's finger touched my temple and I  
Felt sacredly held like a baby.  
And that's what I am,  
Yet I've lived many times.

The wisp of my being  
Seeps softly from my mouth,  
Nose,  
Between the lashes of my closed lids  
Every night

Plays among the sponge paint,  
Confusing the spaces and then laughs  
As it presses its forehead against the Divine

And I return to be charmed another night  
Covered in hawk feathers  
Downy  
And down inside the fire.

## Out to Sea Again

Shonet L. Newton

Trying, trying not to be rattled by the rats  
And the rattling man with the barbed voice.  
The dust counts and collects  
like cobwebs and childhood  
unsettled and unhinged—  
out to sea again,  
out the door  
and out of your mind.  
The rope is untied, the ship unleashed:  
dark, crescent waves rise to molest those old wooden planks  
with beating blue kisses they dismantle  
each salted, rusty nail  
stripping splinters  
the ship is not sinking,  
slowly assimilating with the whipping, white-tipped waves.

Let the water wash the paint away.  
The mast bows in reverence—a beautiful surrender  
and it all comes back  
like a flood, tidal wave, typhoon, typhoid fever  
that ebbs you out with the tide  
brought back by memory  
a chilling ocean in your veins.

The air's not bad down here.  
There is no drowning:  
Learn to breathe a different breath,  
learn to leave your lungs behind,  
learn to seethe your love away.  
Take it in, take it away.

A cloudy night without wind.  
Your bearings have gone south for the winter.  
It was mutiny that drove them away.  
What is the force that cut the mooring?

Commands cascade from your ultramarine lips,  
Limber love has lost its lesson.

## **The Lady of St. James Alley**

Shonet L. Newton

She stands like a fresh-cut flower  
who waits for the right vase  
before her pale petals sour.

She sits in solitary malaise  
pining away the days' hours,  
her dreams fade from her face.

She rests in a lonely cower  
her shabby shears ready to sever  
the maidens from their bower.

## Geese

James Sherwood

### Geese

a comma and an open parenthesis  
join slowly in the sky  
resembling a drunken angle bracket  
drifting south.

## Swinging a putter

James Sherwood

on a freshly manicured lawn  
he tapped the balls to and fro.  
Retired, with his wife and an older son  
still living there.

The prostate cancer took him inside  
though I saw the wife in an old terry robe,  
slinking down the drive to get the news  
her eyes, slits in paper, indicting all.

When I saw him next, he seemed pale  
and ghostly. He told me that he was having  
a problem with the catheter they put in for his  
last surgery.

They told him to come back to get it  
removed, but he didn't because  
it would hurt.  
So he just left it in.

He was too sick to go out, and I  
didn't see him much after that.

One sunny afternoon, after the  
landscapers mowed the lawn, he  
went out on the side of the house  
stood long under a shady oak tree next to  
a bright yellow forsythia bush then  
shot himself in the head.  
The grass is growing long now  
hiding scattered golf balls and a rusting putter.

## Meditations: History and *Hymnagisme*

H. R. Stoneback

I

I WAS THERE

on the steep steps of Odessa  
in that runaway carriage, wheelchair

II

I WAS NOT THERE

when Goebbels gave Hitler those eighteen  
Mickey Mouse movies for Christmas

III

I HAVE NEVER SEEN

a Mickey Mouse movie. Read, heard,  
no fairy-tales. Myth—that's something else.

IV

I HAVE SEEN

the gods and God stand at the center  
of life since third grade. Touched visions.

V

NOT APPARITIONS

*désincarné* but things of the raw earth  
the rough roads the *farouche* flesh

VI

VISIONS *PALPABLE*

in the chthonic doorways  
song beyond symbol, hymns beyond metaphor

VII

WE REMEMBER ZION

would rather sit down and sleep  
under a tree with more shade than poplars

VIII

BY THE RIVERS

our captors demand we compose songs,  
mock us. Then we hang up our harps.

IX

OF BABYLON

this *mouvemong*, too, will pass  
before Amy Lowell lights her next cigar

## Dropping Slow

For J.A.S.

H. R. Stoneback

On the warm summer nights of all the years  
we played backgammon on the back screened porch  
I built, which she said was the best thing I'd  
ever made except for certain songs and poems.  
We were not rich, and never dull, but perhaps  
we played too much backgammon, played too late.

At some point, most of those long summer nights,  
with fresh gin-and-tonics, the game on hold,  
she'd read or say the poem inscribed on the tea-  
towel that hangs on the brick wall by the table.  
One night she said *Did we buy that in Sligo  
or at Thoor Ballylee? There's something not right.*

*There's something fake about his cabin and his lake.  
And I don't believe his bean-rows, his garden.  
If he did build a cabin, I'm sure it wasn't  
made like yours, like ours, at Wedowee.  
I doubt he ever really gardened and I  
wouldn't eat his beans of Innisfree.*

*Now isn't that clever? That rhyme (you'd call it)  
of Innisfree with Wedowee. I'm sure  
we've outbuilt and outgardened old Yeats  
but there is one thing that really makes his song.  
I always knew what was coming, I'd heard  
it many times, the way her voice brought it alive:*

*some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow*  
those notes carried through to the end of her song. Like  
all great singers (and few poets) she had natural mastery  
of time and timing, voice and rhythm, note-  
*duration*. She should have been there for Pound's  
experiments with sound. Talk about an ear  
for music. On this warm August night

she said: *Nobody ever said that before,  
not that way. It makes the rest of the poem  
come true and sing in the deep heart's core.*  
She was right, of course, and I always felt  
the same way when she sang *on that beautiful shore.*

When she sang, she made everything come true.  
When she sang, peace always came dropping slow.

## At the Ironing Board

Robert H. Waugh

She turns her back to the long frame  
because she needs to pay her full attention  
to the steam of the hot iron in her hand,  
the subtle seams and creases  
of this a sometime blouse (though we  
imagine it because it holds her attention,  
her full attention, this  
you know as she leans in).

The crisscross  
jittery legs of the ironing board  
tilt and slide  
brushing her sex (though we  
imagine that as she  
leans in and lifts her buttocks).

We  
address our study to her back,  
the crease of her deep spine that her wet hair  
divides, her matte black hair  
that acts out that blue-black hair at her pudenda,  
to her lean buttocks, to that slight  
well-nigh invisible line  
that creases at her kidneys, our guide in  
conducting our deepest study,  
the morbidezza of that shaky grey  
and brown (we are compounded all of death)  
in which the painter renders her long back,  
this swerve  
and the shards of her thin shoulders.

We are shut off  
from her eyes and mouth, she pays our frame no care,  
but now as though it were eternity  
something, a drift of sand across her back,  
something, a dry mist

in every muscle sifts across, this wet  
world pays us all.

(The boots that clasp  
her busy address, the hot iron in her hand).

## IV | Selected Essays

### An Exploration: Questions of Morality, Motives, and Gender in Travel

*Kelly Tempest*

It was evening, the dark early evening of winter in northern Europe. Miranda and I had taken shelter from the cold; we were tucked into a cozy corner of a brasserie near the Galleries Lafayette, sipping cocktails. I was both exhausted and exhilarated, having arrived in Paris just that day. Miranda was in her element. She looked the height of worldly sophistication, sporting brightly embroidered boots, which, she said proudly, she had found at a marketplace in Madrid, and a worn Moroccan leather handbag, which, she told me, she had found on her very first trip to Marrakech. The stories we had stored up over the past few months came gushing out at intervals; in between, we would look around us and marvel at the unreality of the scene. It was really Miranda; we were really in Paris. It was too good to be true. But it was.

Miranda had been my roommate and closest friend, and I had missed her terribly during the past semester when she was studying abroad in Morocco. I had missed her so much, in fact, that I had leapt at the opportunity to meet up with her for one day in Paris, though it had made my travel plans vastly more complicated. Miranda was the only person I had met in college who loved to travel as much as I did—“wandering souls,” she called the two of us—and I sensed that a day in Paris with her would be make an unforgettable entry in my catalogue of life experiences.

I was right. Paris was magical, mystical, and wonderful. Sitting in a brasserie, which we might have done just as easily back in Charlottesville, was infinitely more significant in Paris. We were an island of light, bright futures, luminous with hopes and possibilities, in the midst of the Parisian night.

In my experiences of travel, it is that kind of glowing, soaring happiness that I come back to the most. I have an instinct that travel changes people, thoughts, and ideas, but I have found it difficult to define that feeling in more concrete terms. In her memoir, *Tales of a Female Nomad*, Rita Golden Gelman also struggles to explain her need to travel. Gelman is a American writer who, at age 48 and at the end of a marriage, decided to sell all of her possessions and become a nomad, traveling all over the world and making connections with local people, mostly in developing countries. At the time that she published her memoir in 2001, she had been living this life for 16 years. After all of this experience traveling and living abroad, Gelman’s descriptions of her

desire to travel remain vague, in statements like “I’m embracing life” (97) and “My spirit gets nourished in faraway places” (281). These statements capture some of the positive feelings that I, and many others, have derived from travel. However, the more I have thought about why I travel, the less easy I have felt, and the less simple the act of traveling seems. I have begun to struggle to justify the expense, the abandoning of people at home in favor of strangers, and the spectatorship inherent in travel. But no matter what questions I raise, I still feel, at the core, that travel must be a positive, meaningful activity. I have intellectual misgivings, but they are markedly less powerful than my core emotional response to travel.

What, then, makes a love for travel? What draws people like Gelman and me, over and over again, to leave the people we care about to search for something else in new places? How does travel change people? What does travel mean? Is travel freedom and liberation? Or is it an elaborate form of self-deception? Or perhaps is it a distraction from the inadequacies of our real lives? Why am I—an average, middle-class, white, female, graduate student—a “wandering soul”?

To travel is to engage in an inherently complex activity, but often people consider travel uncritically. A person has vacation time and decides to go to a certain destination to “get away” from his or her “real” life. Even a person who undertakes a more introspective travel experience, attempting to learn about another culture and to undergo personal growth, often does not consider the full range of implications of his or her activities. Many people find travel to be deeply meaningful, while others use it as an avenue for breaking away from the pressures of their everyday lives. Whatever the goal, travel is an act loaded with history, defined by social structures, and carrying heavy moral implications. Travelers come into sustained contact with people from other cultures, with different languages, sets of knowledge, assumptions, and worldviews. This can lead travelers to question their assumptions about particular foreign cultures, about mankind in general, and about themselves.

Travel becomes even more complicated when the traveler is a woman. It takes women far from the home, defying traditional gender roles, and thereby giving women power and autonomy. At the same time, women face risks when they travel, dangers which would seem to reinforce their subordinate role in society. Travel, and all that comes along with the act of traveling, raises not only questions about travel itself, but about the role of women, the purpose of life, the nature of the universe, and the possibility of self-knowledge. Here, I will engage with some of the questions at the core of an understanding of travel for women, in an attempt to answer some of the questions about travel that circulate in my mind.

As with many domains of life, travel became an option for American

women only relatively recently. Until the 1820s, when steam-powered ships became a main mode of long distance transport, American women seldom traveled, and when they did, it was usually only to accompany male family members traveling for political or commercial reasons (Scriber 2). A woman was once expected to be the “angel in the house,” bounded and immobile, while travel was a man’s activity. A woman’s space was contained, while a man’s world was an open road, his for the taking. When a woman breaks through the spacial boundaries she has been given, she threatens the standing social order. Moreover, when a woman travels, she must, by necessity, gain “independence and self-reliance” (Robertson 217). As Scriber puts it: “Travel was transforming women from private into public actors on the world stage (13). By the 1860s, women were traveling in large numbers and often for their own reasons, independent of men (Scriber 2). This demographic change, however, did not come about without its challengers. Women’s rights activist Lydia Maria Child wrote in 1832 that travel was “one of the worst kinds of extravagance,” which was “rapidly increasing in this country” (qtd. in Scriber 12). While travel had become a women’s activity, it was an activity of questionable morality. Whatever might be gained through travel, there is also something neglected. To travel is to place one’s own individual interests above the interests of one’s home, family life, and larger ideological causes.

Though this tension existed, travel was also encouraged by nineteenth-century culture. Scriber states that “travel was a ritual, a ‘cultural performance’ to which importance, respectability, and meaning were attached” (16). Its form was far different from the kind of free-wheeling travel that women like Gelman participate in today. Popular guidebooks laid out routes for travel, “making choices clear and providing itineraries and routes to sacralized sites” (Scriber 16). The central role of the guidebook is highlighted in E. M. Forster’s *A Room with a View*. In chapter II, entitled “In Santa Croce with No Baedeker,” one woman tells Lucy, the central character, “I hope we shall soon emancipate you from Baedeker. He does but touch the surface of things. As to the true Italy—he does not even dream of it” (19). Accordingly, Lucy’s Baedeker is taken away, she loses her chaperone, and in this time of discomfort and insecurity, she comes into contact with people from outside her social circle. Because of this experience, her travel becomes deeply meaningful: “Her feelings were inflated spiritually as they had been an hour ago aesthetically, before she lost Baedeker” (30). The guidebook maps out appropriate travel, and deviations are both exciting and potentially dangerous.

Planned, guided, and well-mapped travel is still seen as a safe option, but many people seek a deeper, more spiritual experience, which can only be found when one deviates from social norms. A blogger on a student travel website named Christina Mehta gives an account of what she calls “a fantastic

experience,” which was possible only because she broke away from mapped, guided travel. She explains that she and some friends wanted to try the fish being sold at a local market in Chile and asked a fisherman what restaurants sold his fish. She goes on, saying, “To our surprise, the man immediately laid down his knife and told Brad to follow him. . . . After looking at one another for a split second as if questioning the wisdom of following a strange man inside a scary-looking building, we followed him inside.” The reason this experience was so “fantastic,” she explains, was that it brought them into close contact with the local culture. The fisherman went out of his way to help them, they ate local food, they “were entertained by folk guitarists,” and they “made friends with the owner.” Like Lucy in *A Room with a View*, Christina has one of her most meaningful experiences when she deviates from the guided course. And, like Lucy, she initially sees this deviation as putting her in an unstable and risky position.

While Christina found meaning in her experience and considers it to be “good” in terms of her learning about Chilean culture and her personal growth, her activities, like the activities of many travelers, are a form of spectatorship. Gelman, for instance, speaks as a spectator in Guatemala, when she comments, “The women in the fields look like paintings” (49). She is looking out upon the culture for her own enjoyment and education. Elizabeth Bishop raises the issue of the morality of this type of spectatorship in her poem “Questions of Travel”:

Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?  
Where should we be today?  
Is it right to watch strangers in a play  
in this strangest of theaters?  
What childishness is it that while there’s a breath of life  
in our bodies, we are determined to rush  
to see the sun the other way around? (93)

Bishop’s questions suggest that there is something which is not morally right in encountering foreign cultures through travel. In *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant states the problem more clearly. One formulation of his categorical imperative for behavior is “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means” (36). When travelers go into foreign cultures and use their contact with those cultures as a step toward achieving some other goal, even one as worthy as education, travelers are treating the human beings they encounter as means rather than as ends in themselves. According to Kant, this is a violation of universal moral law. Our society is influenced by theories of morality like this one, which accounts for

the idea that travel experiences like Christina's and Gelman's are of dubious morality.

Beyond the morally questionable nature of certain activities undertaken in travel, the morality of traveling at all is doubtful. This is the vein seen in Child's denunciation of travel as an extravagance and a detraction from a cause, and picked up again by Bishop in the lines, "Should we have stayed at home and thought of here? / Where should we be today?" Travel is perceived as having cultural value, but there is also a value lost. Many women who travel struggle with feelings of guilt, wondering if they have somehow neglected their duties and their relationships with people at home. Another blogger, Courtney Rogers, returns home after a year abroad and finds out that her many of her friends' lives have changed direction, and that her old group is no longer intact. She wonders, "Was I the one holding us all together?" Courtney feels that there exists a place at home where she should be, building relationships with her friends. This group seems to be something that she values and wants to see remain whole. She also feels that because she traveled, her place was left unfilled. Courtney ultimately decides that she values travel over filling this role at home and leaves to travel abroad for another year, but it is not without reservations that she undertakes these travel experiences. A traveler must decide whether she values the unknown knowledge and the relationships that she might gain during her travels over the knowledge and relationships that she knows that she will have at home.

Gelman describes another kind of relationship which she sacrificed when she decided to live a nomadic life. Her father, who had been a dedicated community leader, dies, and Gelman sees the hundreds of people who come together at his funeral. She at first feels "overwhelmed by a rush of loneliness. I fear that I have given up something significant." As she considers her situation further, however, she realizes, "I do have communities; I create them wherever I live. . . . There is more than one kind of community" (173). Travel, for Gelman, means giving up the traditional community, made up of people living together for long periods of time. She becomes reconciled to this fact by considering the groups of people she has come to know over the course of her travels as different kinds of communities to which she belongs. She perceives a gain along with the loss caused by travel and is satisfied to accept this trade-off.

This conflict between the home community and the alternative community formed through travel was illustrated for me at the end of that trip that began in Paris when I returned home for the summer. My brother, a senior in high school, had his best friend, Richie, over at our house. Danny and Richie were sitting side by side, in perfect, companionable silence. "They'll do that for hours," my mother told me, "hang out playing FIFA and watching SportsCenter, without even talking to each other. We laugh about it."

It struck me that here was what human life is supposed to be. People are meant to live in a place and get to really know the people there. They are not supposed to run around the planet, gathering friends that they will never see again. What am I doing with my life? Why? What am I looking for? It would be right for me to stop traveling, stay in one place, and build a life. But I cannot. I am restless. I wonder whether I am somehow deficient because I am never contented with my relationships at home. While I think that I am undergoing personal development when I travel, it has crossed my mind that I may be avoiding another kind of more rooted, deeper development, a kind which I sense must need to happen in a familiar place among people who have known me for a long time. It is easy to go to a new place where I am unknown and to become the person who I want to be. However, this is avoiding the person who I have been and who I still am, at some level.

Gelman takes up this issue in response to her friends' many queries as to whether she is "running away" from something. She insists, "I'm not running away. I'm running toward . . . toward adventure, toward discovery, toward diversity" (40). She believes that travel allows her to discover a truer version of herself, which had previously been suppressed by the roles she needed to fill at home. She says that she "is not wife, mother, daughter, writer, anthropology student, L.A. sophisticate. She is, of course, all of those things; but alone, without the attachments, she is a woman in limbo, whose identity has been buried in her roles. Away from those roles she is someone she doesn't know" (11). Travel, she thinks, will allow her to come to know that person who she is when she is not playing one of her roles.

A woman's decision to travel and to privilege her potential adventures abroad over her roles and relationships at home is made especially difficult because women are traditionally seen as relational, the center of the family, concerned with hospitality and bringing people together. In fact, Bassnett states in her essay "Travel Writing and Gender" that women's travel writing is characterized by "a tendency to write about relationships," while men have written "more public discourse" (227). When she does make the choice to travel, a woman asserts her autonomy in a powerful way. As Gelman realizes when she first goes to Mexico, "I do not need anyone's permission to do what I want to do. I am free to make my own decisions, follow my whims, and take whatever risks I choose" (9). Autonomy continues to be a theme throughout a woman's travel experience. When she travels, and especially if she travels alone, a woman must speak and make herself heard. Far from suffering under the oppression of males, there is no person near her who can claim any degree of power over her. All that is required is sufficient money to pay for food, lodging, and transportation. The traveler does exactly what she wishes all day long, makes her own decisions, and is free to move on to a new place when she tires

her surroundings. Her only obligations are those that she chooses to make.

However, even when there is no man around to whom a woman owes allegiance, her autonomy is threatened by men in a more general sense. Risk is an ever-present aspect of life, and many sociologists theorize about the gendered and spacialized nature of risk. In “Risky Bodies at Leisure: Young Women Negotiating Race and Space” Green and Singleton take up the issue of risk and women’s leisure activities through an analysis of “risk narratives” produced by two groups of women, one white and one South Asian, living in northeastern England. Particularly relevant for women’s travel is their discussion of the gendered nature of leisure spaces. Green and Singleton refer to a study conducted by Deem in 1986 that “highlighted the spatial inequality of leisure opportunities for women and men,” which is “linked to both women’s fear of violence but also to men’s control over women’s leisure movements and men’s ideas of where women should and should not go” (856). What is considered to be a “safe space” is different for different people, and is highly unequal. Green and Singleton found that for both white and South Asian women, public spaces were seen as unsafe, and the sources of risk identified included “male physical, sexual and racial violence and harassment” and “damage to personal reputation” (859). To mitigate risk, women engaged in behaviors such as sticking to well-traveled roads and pathways, avoiding being in public spaces after dark, and walking in groups (861). Based on these sociological factors, it can be concluded that while women who travel can theoretically be seen as autonomous, there are actually a large number of social factors constraining women’s options.

Miranda left Paris a day before I did. I spent a lovely day wandering about the city, snapping pictures of funny statues, taking advantage of the free Friday afternoon deal at the Louvre, and even making friends with an American mother and daughter. When the sun began to set, I safely barricaded myself into my room in the dingy one-star hotel where I was staying. Half-starved, because I had not thought to buy food before nightfall and was now afraid to leave my room, I passed a fearsome night. Loath to crawl between stained sheets, I curled into a ball at the foot of the bed, my jacket functioning as a pillow. My fitful slumber was punctuated by sounds of yelling French people and banging doors. The walls of the hotel seemed to be paper-thin. Promptly at four in the morning, I was up and ready to go, having foolishly scheduled an early discount flight to Stockholm. It was pitch black, and the street outside my hotel, which the day before had housed a lively fruit market, was devoid of all but some empty stalls, trampled cardboard boxes, and the sickly smell of rotting fruit. I moved quickly, heart racing, as I dragged along my obscenely loud and clumsy rolling suitcase.

On the Avenue de la Grande Armée, a man was walking toward me. My

level of panic began to crescendo as he drew closer, and I thought my heart would burst when he called out to me. I stared straight ahead and did not answer, figuring in my mind contingency plans, calculating whether I might be able to yell loud enough to bring help or swing my rolling suitcase as a weapon should it become necessary. He began to follow me, a couple yards back and to the left, speaking to me at intervals. We were alone on the street. I redirected my course toward a sign for the metro, and was unspeakably relieved when he did not follow me down the steps. At the platform, I finally had company: a few drooping groups of young people, dressed up from their night's revelry, and waiting for the metro to start running again. Funny, I thought, they are still in yesterday and I am starting today. And while today is not off to such a good start for me, yesterday does not seem to be ending too well for them. Maybe we will all start again on a better note when the metro decides that today begins for real. My fortunes did turn around; I made it to Stockholm unscathed, but more importantly, I learned a lesson in what a woman should never do.

Despite the limitations created by risk, travel does free women in one significant way. At home, women perceive risk based on the threat of gendered violence as well as the threat of harm to their reputations. In Michelle Thomas's study of women's sexual behavior on holiday, she finds that many women perceive travel abroad as a "liminoid" period, where they are freed from social constraints (572). Two women whom she interviews exemplify this attitude when they explain the pact that they made before traveling: "What happens in Tenerife stays in Tenerife" (576). Travel temporarily frees women from social restrictions. This tendency has been seen historically, in cases like that of Lady Hester Stanhope, who in 1810 left "the stifling atmosphere" of her life in England for the Middle East, where she engaged in "love affairs," "scandalous cross-dressing in Turkish male costume," and "shameless exhibitionism" (Bassnett 234). Later readers have tended to view Stanhope as "an example of a woman who bravely sought to establish her independence by choosing to move in different cultures" (234). Gelman writes of the freedom she feels when she travels: "Once I leave the U.S., I am not bound by the rules of my culture. And when I am a foreigner in another country, I am exempt from the local rules. This extraordinary situation means that there are no rules in my life. I am free to live by the standards and ideals and rules I create for myself" (40). This statement shows that Gelman, too, feels liberated from social restrictions, both those of her home culture and those of the culture she is visiting. As long as a woman is traveling, she can feel free to live outside of the rules of any society.

However true this might be, and however tempting it is to see women like Stanhope as the precursors to greater gender equality, the socially and

sexually liberated behavior of women travelers points back to the question of morality. Another formulation of Kant's categorical imperative states: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant 30). Many people would agree that acts promoting gender equality are worthy of becoming universal law, but the actual behavior that constitutes the acts that such people would uphold would be highly problematic if universalized. For instance, it is significant to note that the reason underlying Thomas's study is the spread of HIV/AIDS. Thomas states: "Sexual mixing amongst international travellers and between individuals from host and guest countries has particular epidemiological importance due to the different prevalence rates of HIV in different countries" (572). We may applaud women's liberated sexual behavior, but given the fact that such sexual mixing is increasing the spread of HIV across national borders, we cannot wish their actions universalized. Through a Kantian lens, then, this behavior is morally wrong.

This formulation of the categorical imperative casts another shadow on the morality of travel. While we might say that women's travel which does not increase the spread of a deadly epidemic is an act that we would want to see universalized, the fact stands that in our current society, the vast majority of women will never have the means to engage in this kind of voluntary leisure travel. Siegel makes this point when she asks readers to think about "the vast number of women's journeys that have never been written—journeys of flight, exile, expatriation, homelessness, journeys by women without means to document their travel; and journeys whose records have been ignored or lost" (2). We may make generalizations about women's travel, but these generalizations are based on the experiences of a privileged subset of women. It seems a contradiction to say that actions by these women are morally right and empowering to women, when the hypothetical criteria by which we judge their morality will never come close to being met due to economic inequality, and when the empowerment that results applies to only a small group of women. When Gelman spends a month in a Zapotec village in Mexico, she witnesses the husband in the family hosting her beating the wife. When she writes about her meeting with the woman the next day, she says, "I give her a hug, but I say nothing. This village, this marriage, this life are her destiny" (27). It seems extremely unfair that Gelman has the right to travel all over the world alone and has the right to be protected from domestic violence, while this woman does not. As travelers, people are able to come into contact with abuses and inequalities that we might not encounter at home. There is something problematic, to me, in the notion that some people are destined to suffer, while others are allowed to witness that suffering but are not meant to intervene.

Based on these explorations, what answers can be found to my ques-

tions about travel? Two weeks from the day that I sat in that brasserie in Paris, I found myself visiting a friend in Denmark. It was during the previous semester that I had first encountered Elizabeth Bishop's poetry and had begun to question the meaning to travel. Knowing that my friend was both a traveler and a thinker, I showed him "Questions of Travel" and asked him what he thought about the questions she raises. He was, however, uninterested in Bishop's qualms, telling me, "I just like to travel." I asked him what about travel he liked, and he told me that it was meeting new people, hearing their stories, and experiencing different cultures. He learned when he traveled and he could not see anything wrong about that.

At first, I was disappointed with his answer. I had hoped for a solution to the problem, a compelling reason that would allow me to lay aside all of my misgivings and travel with a clear conscience. But now that I think about his answer again, I think he has a point. There will always be problems and questions with any action that we, as humans, undertake. If we become too involved in the problematic aspects of travel, we risk losing the joy and wonder that draws us to travel in the first place. The problems of travel are complicated and likely irresolvable. My final answer to myself, then, is that I will continue to travel, while allowing myself to keep questioning and striving to think through the implications of my actions as a self-conscious, critical traveler. But I will not allow intellectual uncertainties to take over my entire experience. I will strive above all to find the joy in travel that I love, which is, after all, my answer to the question, "Why travel at all?"

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“It calls into it without entering”: Walter Benjamin  
and the Insoluble Problem of Form

*Thomas Whalen*

To address Walter Benjamin’s “Task of the Translator” from a Marxist vantage would seem both a historical and interpretive fallacy. Though by the time he was writing “Task” Benjamin surely had some semblance of experience with historical materialist theory (in “Critique of Violence,” also written in 1921, he discusses class struggle at length, mentioning Marx by name), this essay on translation shows a conspicuous absence of the Marxist hermeneutics and terminology that would figure prominently in his later writings. Moreover, the premise of pure language that is the crux of the essay’s thesis appears completely unsuited to a materialist position on culture amid capitalism. As noted by Paul de Man in his essay on “Task,” the piece seems “at first sight . . . highly regressive,” a “relapse” to a mode of philosophy that precedes the German idealists whose frameworks for understanding history Marx sought to update and improve by grounding them in the objective analysis of social conditions, rather than the speculative analysis of spiritual forces (76). Indeed the portrayal of the poet, as per de Man’s facetious superficial reading, as an “almost sacred figure . . . which echoes a sacred language” (77), seems to hint towards the deification of the artist and the cult of expressive salvation and thus uphold the same “outmoded concepts [of] creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery” that Benjamin would denounce as complicit in the Fascist project in “Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (218).

“Work of Art,” written 15 years after “Task,” is a text deeply rooted in Benjamin’s fascination with the Marxist concept of superstructure, and it represents arguably his most salient contribution to the materialist conception of history. Benjamin opens the essay by conceding that Marx’s critique of capitalism was developed when the mode was “in its infancy,” and that subsequent changes in the social superstructure have begun to reveal themselves “in all areas of culture” alongside the more rapidly evolving economic base (217-18). Charting the consequences of these transformations is Benjamin’s main undertaking in “Work of Art,” and so the theoretical basis for this essay, its concern for aesthetics in so far as they are on social conditions and technological processes, seems fundamentally opposed to the bracketed concern for language that characterizes “Task of the Translator.” Yet despite this apparent incongruity, “Task” and “Work of Art” are hinge texts for Benjamin’s philosophical project, sharing comparable elaborations on several primordial concerns that would reverberate throughout his entire body of work. Both

pieces directly address the manner in which cognitive impressions are irrevocably linked with mediums of expression and perception. “Task” deals with language, the fundamental material unit of human creation and communication; “Work of Art” considers the perceptive consequences of a radically new mode of art and art production. As a means of determining the perceptive-cognitive nature of these expressive mediums, each piece juxtaposes its material subject with a spiritual phenomenon: for “Task” this entity is pure language, the higher expressive realm linked to the “suprahistorical kinship between languages” (257), one to which translation alludes but never actually reaches; in “Work of Art” we have aura, the essential “unapproachability” that constitutes the cult value of a unique art object, whose actual “closeness . . . does not impair the distance which it retains in its appearance” (243). Just as the idea of aura is initially presented in “Work of Art” in terms of negation, as a casualty of mass reproduction (the “eliminated element”) that is perhaps only recognized and totally valued once it is absent (221), pure language appears in “Task of the Translator” less as a static concept than as a symbolic device through which Benjamin conveys both the inherent fallibility of language and its persistent allure as a means of communion and revelation. Through the conceit of pure language, “Task of the Translator” serves to illustrate, in both the content and expression of its theoretical premises, a paradox that haunts Benjamin’s philosophy and the whole of modern aesthetic theory: form, the concept made material, seems ultimately incapable of accommodating total meaning, yet it remains the sole medium of access to the realm of ideas. It is this tension between expressive capacities and conceptual intentions, seemingly fundamental to the human perceptive-cognitive experience, which Benjamin would find to be drastically perverted in the hands of advanced capitalist production.

The opening passages of “Task of the Translator” enact a clean break from the educational and didactic functions on which the practice of translation was founded. Benjamin’s insistence that the “consideration of the receiver” is not merely superfluous but in fact “detrimental” to a viable aesthetic theory serves to distinguish translation as a mode of art in and of itself, rather than a duty in the service communication and dissemination (253). One cannot help but detect in these initial passages an anticipation of Benjamin’s critique of the aesthetic commodity in “Work of Art,” particularly in his dismissal of the “ideal receiver” (253). In “Work of Art” the process of replication serves this ideal receiver, the “mass,” diminishing the aura of the visual art object, its “unique phenomenon of a distance,” by wrenching it from its unique spatial and temporal context and appeasing the impulse of the masses to “bring things ‘closer’” (223). The fate of the mass amid large scale reproduction, entranced by the imminent proximity of form while increasingly detached from

unique essence of the original work, is the inverse of the role of the translator in "Task." Translation facilitates a rare vision of the relationship between the form and meaning, and in seeking to uncover the "innermost relationship of languages" (255), it finds this relationship as accessible through form but never quite manifest as such. Conversely, the logistics of mechanical reproducibility, its process of commodification and dissemination through which "quantity has been transmuted into quality" (239), essentially renders the form of the art work as no longer merely contingent on but essentially equivalent with this essence. What you see in a film is, quite literally, what you get.

I would balk at addressing Benjamin's discussion of textual translation in visual terms if Benjamin did not do so himself at critical moments in "Task":

A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully. (260)

This visual analog is the culmination of Benjamin's discussion of "intention," the concept which he uses earlier in the piece to distinguish between "what is meant" and "the way of meaning it" and thereby to expound upon the pivotal concept of "kinship between languages." Benjamin posits that all possible modes of meaning ("words, sentences, associations") exist in order to "supplement one another in their intentions" towards what is meant, while meaning in individual languages is inherently unstable, "in a constant state of flux," by virtue of the fact that the modes of meaning in this language are "unsupplemented," incomplete, essentially meaningless as individual linguistic units (257). Pure meaning can only be apprehended as an *immaterial* composite of intentions *rendered material*, and so the translation, standing at the threshold of two distinct ways of meaning and therefore able to "let itself go" from the confines of a single language, "gives" figurative "voice" to the intention of the original as "harmony," the pure language's own mode of intention (260).

That Benjamin opts to progress from this incredibly dense theoretical discussion rooted in visual analogs to an encapsulation the whole of his critique of translation in yet another figurative analogy is as provocative as it is revelatory. Figurative language is prominent throughout "Task of the Translator," operating in the service of some of Benjamin's most crucial (and most convoluted) theoretical premises, while also seeming to confound the essay's central thesis that independent linguistic creations cannot approach truth on their own terms. It would seem as if the premises of Benjamin's theory that refuse to be summarized in theoretical language find momentary crystallization in poetic language and, as is the case of the analogy of light, this poetic language emerges not so much as a way of solving theoretical problems but as

a means of making them tactile. If we cannot comprehend Benjamin's claim that a translation should "refrain from wanting to communicate something," we may be more capable of understanding the translation as a translucence, an entity that contains nothing but the potential to broadcast a glow; if we struggle with the logistics of pure language as the "totality of [linguistic] intentions supplementing one another," we may be better served to regard it as a great light, ever present even as it is obscured by the dense material form of the alien language (260, 257). Just as the translation allows the original to "let itself go" from its restrictive form and thereby lend "voice" to its ineffable ultimate intention (260), Benjamin appears driven to cut himself loose from the confines of theoretical language in order to express the magical quality of sheer meaning that is imminent in all linguistic creations, a magical quality that becomes more and more attenuated as it is encumbered with the very expository language that attempts to bring it toward the light.

This problem is, indeed, "insoluble, determinable in no solution" (259), and that is to say it is beyond even theory, because the problem interrogates the essential mechanisms of theory itself. It would seem that for Benjamin human language is a failed system, and that the essential content of language is the residue of this inherent failure. The competent translator is, in effect, the ultimate poet, one who is acutely aware of language's systemic malfunctions, and who can confront with greater lucidity the potential for revelation that this malfunction carries. Perhaps this latent thesis is what makes "Task" both an alluring and disconcerting document for many poets and theorists: are we meant to understand that all of our language's "analogies and symbols" are relegated to interacting with intention in an "anticipative, intimating" fashion? (255). Does this render fundamentally tenuous the traditional translation binary of sense/letter? Is all language thus essentially figurative, a comparison of like and unlike which results in a momentary and unspeakable impression that transcends language itself? Is the beauty of language essentially manifest in its incongruities with and distance from the apparent world that it purports to interact with and evoke?

Such is the nature of "Task of the Translator" that one could use it to probe for such implications *ad infinitum*, but for our purposes the pivot on which to turn from figurative language and translation in "Task" to visual art in "Work of Art" is Benjamin's interest in distance and form as they relate to revelation and transcendent meaning. We are asked by Benjamin throughout "Task" to conceive of revelation in pure language as a "harmony," yet another synesthetic trope that displays both his spiritual sensibilities and his fascination with the modes of expression that cannot wholly contain them. It is useful to consider the logistics of harmony in a musical context: harmony requires multiple performers to play individual notes in unison so as to conjure

a totally new sound; this sound contains these individual notes, is a composite of their respective individual forms, but ultimately supersedes each of them in order to emerge as its own expressive entity. Viewed in negation with respect to the position of the receiver, a harmonic chord forces the listener to distance himself from the unique form of the individual notes in order to apprehend the total effect of the composite chord. Reapplying this principle to the linguistic sphere, it is evident that the linear structure of language prevents this kind of simultaneous experience to be accessed under the auspices of an individual language, but the translator is in the unique position to remove himself from the confines of form and thereby approach the harmony of intention.

Benjamin insists that the translator can only “reproduce . . . the unfathomable” if he is also a poet (253), so it stands to reason that the agent of this pure harmony in the linguistic sphere is figurative language: the poet imbues the ultimate intention with a myriad of forms so as to display this essence as incompatible with a single “way of meaning” and thereby distance himself and his intention from the fixed confines of form itself. In considering the notion of harmony from the position of the receiver of the musical sound and attempting to explicate from this conjecture a more expansive sense of Benjamin’s theory of linguistic creation so as to apply it to “Work of Art,” it would seem as if I am operating in defiance of the principle that Benjamin establishes in the opening passage of “Task of the Translator.” Indeed, for Benjamin the “appreciation” of aesthetic qualities is a process for which concession to the audience “never proves fruitful” (253), and the theoretical compatibility of “Task of the Translator” and “Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” is best understood along these very lines, precisely because the mass-produced art object inaugurates a new era of perceptive-cognitive tendencies by transgressing this very principle.

The emergence of quantity as an aesthetic value, herald to a drastic shift in perceptive-cognitive relationships through which the “total function of art if reversed” (224), is for Benjamin a signal of a new, absurd depth to mankind’s “self-alienation” (242). Ultimately, the ability of mass-produced visual art to allow mankind to seek gratification in representations of war, to “experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order,” proves that the relationship between symbolic systems and their alleged referents has been finally severed (242). The tension between symbol and meaning, the source of the frustrated redemptive energy in creation that propels “Task of the Translator,” has been absorbed by the economic apparatus so as to evaporate substantive meaning altogether, deemphasizing the signified by amplifying the sign. After all, by the logic of the economic apparatus, that which cannot be reproduced need not exist, particularly not if the medium of reproduction presents enough sensation to direct attention away from the absence of

revelation. By this logic the mass faces, under the auspices of technological progress and a revolution in entertainment, an intensification of the basic human problem of negotiating form and meaning and an exaggerated version of the very state of perceptive convolution that the translator is encouraged to transcend.

Attention to the budding medium of film is paramount to the theoretical premises in “Work of Art,” with this medium and that of photography representing for Benjamin “the most serviceable exemplifications” of the “new function” of art that result from mass reproduction’s displacement of the “cult value” of a work of art (the value hinging on the object’s “existence, not [its] being on view,” its status as an “instrument of magic”) with an intense, “absolute emphasis” on its “exhibition value” (224-25). For Benjamin, this shift results in profound alterations to the fundamental perceptive-cognitive capacities of the spectator, who is forced to confront the relationship between form and meaning as one that is the direct reversal of that which Benjamin privileged in the task of translation. By virtue of its status as the preeminent “work of art designed for reproducibility” (224), the film’s essential content, its very intention, is identical to its form; it is a work of art made expressly to be remade, its other intention incidental. Where the translator pulls away from the formal contours of language so as to enlighten his sense of their relationship to a larger body of incommunicable intention, the filmgoer zooms in for a close up, his vantage “assign[ed] . . . on a line parallel to the lens” so as to apprehend a spectacle heavily mediated by a technology that cannot reveal itself. In film we have a medium that posits form as meaning yet will not disclose its true form, instead focusing attention on “immediate . . . equipment-free reality” that “has become an orchid in the land of technology” (233). This immediacy and proximity becomes an aesthetic value in and of itself; the subject of a film is secondary to its status as a film, while its precise determination of vantage forbids an awareness of its real formal trappings. The translation demands an acute awareness of the mechanisms of meaning, those words, phrases and associations that are the “equipment” of man’s mental being, so that he may approach a fuller apprehension of the ultimate intention that animates these devices. In film that which is “ultimate” is some sort of visual phantasm, a form of magic that does not reveal its own means but further effaces them.

Throughout “Work of Art” the budding motion picture medium is characterized as an invasive craft, a premise conveyed most powerfully through the use of analogy. In comparing the role of the cameraman with that of the painter, Benjamin evokes the distinction between a surgeon and a magician:

The magician heals a sick person by the laying on of hands; the surgeon cuts into the patient’s body. The magician maintains the natural distance

between the patient and himself. . . . The surgeon does exactly the reverse . . . [and] at the decisive moment abstains from facing the patient man to man; rather, it is through the operation that he penetrations into him. (233)

What is remarkable about the magician/surgeon analogy is that the painter is aligned with the magician, he who practices a craft that is admittedly false, one based on illusion. It is clear that this evocation of willful falsehood is not meant to be pejorative. It is healthy for the painter to confess to the disparity between his means (his paint, his canvas) and his end (meaning). When the cameraman penetrates his focus on the object of his craft, he obliterates this disparity; what was once in the figurative sense the focus of the painter's eye becomes quite literally the focus of the cameraman's lens. The cameraman's means infiltrate what they are meant to illuminate, just as the surgeon treats not the man himself but the organs which concern his scalpel. A similar distinction is in play when Benjamin positions the poet and translator in what he calls "the language forest"; the poet is "in the center" of this forest, but the translator finds himself at "an inaccessible remove," "outside" of the forest, "call[ing] into it *without entering*" (258, my emphasis). To extract meaning from the original so as to convey this meaning in the language of the translation, the translator must acknowledge the form *as artifice*, as that which gives the unfathomable intention its shape but which is nonetheless wholly distinct from this intention. If translation is for Benjamin the ultimate medium of figurative transcendence, then the filmic gaze is its diametric opposite, the anti-figure which posits form as meaning rather than as means through which pure meaning can be apprehended. If translation is a transparency through which pure language can shine all the more powerfully, through which the unfathomable total intention is momentarily apprehended only to be refracted ever onward, then the moving picture is a dense and impenetrable translucence that blocks true light while, quite deceptively, never ceasing to glow on its own.

The ultimate purpose of this essay is to treat two seemingly static and separate points in Benjamin's philosophical project as fluid and supplemental, embodying fragments of a much larger critique, just as Benjamin's alien language systems operate in relation to his hypothetical pure language. By doing so one can see the concepts of these essays in broader terms; in other words, one can distance one's self from their more finite premises so as to better reckon with how their larger premises operate and what these larger premises entail. If we are to understand as per "Task" that all units of figurative language operate as supplemental entities, active and meaningful only insofar as they interact with other such units, this can lead to an understand-

ing of how in Benjamin's critique of mass-produced visual media phenomena such as film operate as false integers, as entire expressive units requiring no supplementation but only further dissemination. For Benjamin the film presents itself quite deceptively as a total experience, pointing not towards other, supplemental means of expression but back on itself. Film does this while disguising its real means so as to approximate the gaze which is separate from it but which it moves to absorb. We do not step away from the television in order to see through it, as the translator does with his alien language; instead we are compelled closer, compelled to watch not through but with, with the only end being the compulsion to watch further.

Studies in contemporary television culture have observed this trend of meta-semiotics as a defining characteristic of the medium. Though it never refers to Benjamin directly, David Foster Wallace's essay on television, titled "E Unibus Plurum," is in many ways an extension of Benjamin's supplemental critiques in "Task" and "Work of Art." Wallace links the rise of Metafiction in the United States during the 1960s with the growing normalization of extensive television viewing during that period, claiming, much as Benjamin does with film, that the television medium is inherently self-reflexive, its essential "content" often indistinguishable from its means of creation and dissemination. Wallace's richest analysis is supplemented with an illuminating figurative comparison: "A dog, if you point at something, will look only at your finger" (33). The rampant popularity of what is called "reality television," where the mundane minutiae of everyday life are transformed into wildly popular televised entertainment by mere virtue of its being displayed *on television*, seems to confirm this thesis. Stations run programs dedicated solely to sampling from and running commentary on the week's televised media events, usually presenting no thematic rationale for inclusion of certain incidents other than the fact that they occurred *on television*. One such program is VH1's *Best Week Ever*, whose title is at once willfully absurd and wholly appropriate: in televised media value is not contingent on merit or anything resembling substantive meaning, but is simply bestowed upon that which is apparent to its own gaze. A good deal of television content accrues "meaning" in this manner, by mere virtue of its being accessible to the mass of potential viewers ("Can you believe that they did that *on television!*?"). Quantity has indeed been transmuted into quality.

The problem of television is perhaps even more insoluble than that of Benjamin's translator, because what stymies the contemporary analysis of television is this way in which the medium's perceptive-cognitive mechanisms are so self-reflexive and, as such, so thoroughly insulated. Cultural theorists can discuss and critique television, as they have done at length for the better part of the past 50 years, but they seem to hold out little hope for actually af-

fecting television or stalling its ever-growing influence. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that never in modern history has the means of cultural critique appeared so incapable of legitimately and constructively addressing the one phenomenon which so urgently requires criticism and enriched understanding. More discouraging is the fact that one simply cannot imagine a sophisticated critique of television occurring on television itself; the nature of the medium, with its emphasis on concision and entertainment value, simply cannot accommodate such a critique. That television will find its transcendent translator seems just as unlikely: the televised forest may simply be too dense to sustain an echo sounded from beyond its own limits.

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## V | Book Review

John Freeman. *The Tyranny of E-Mail: The Four-Thousand-Year Journey to Your Inbox*. New York: Scribner, 2009.

*Thomas G. Olsen*

Bill Gates gets four million of them every year. Something like 100 billion of them dart across office cubicles, countries, and continents each day. The modern office worker might get a dozen or two of them every hour. In just about a generation, e-mail has fundamentally changed the ways we do business and the ways we communicate informally among friends and family, creating a whole new world of opportunities and challenges. And if John Freeman is right, it might also be changing the very ways we think.

Partly an historical survey of various rapid communication methods over the centuries, partly an exposé of the current state of human communication in the (wired) developed world and in much of the developing world, and partly a set of recommendations to reverse this status quo, *The Tyranny of E-mail* is also a kind of elegy for a Golden Age of simpler and more tangible, personal, and thoughtful written communication. Freeman's dedication hints at the aims and biases that define his argument: the book is offered to his grandmother, "who wrote the most wonderful letters," and to his mother, "who taught me how to reply." Complementing this implicit celebration of epistolary style and etiquette is a message of political and ethical urgency, strategically placed in the book's first epigraph: "No man can be turned into a permanent machine. . . . Immediately the dead weight of authority is lifted from his head, he begins to function normally" (Mahatma Gandhi).

The dead weight of authority in this case is neither an oppressive political regime nor some vile human overlord, but the millions of monitors and screens, keyboards and motherboards, modems and T1 lines that constitute our digital work and play spaces. At the core of Freeman's argument is a principle that people are not and cannot be machines. Like most who in one way or another rage against this or any other machine, he cautions that we cannot abstract and denature ourselves and still remain human:

Technology amplifies human instincts and desires, but it must obey the laws of nature if it is to sustain human life, not destroy it. And so we must remember we are part of nature, too. We may be dependent upon machines, but we operate like them at our own peril. A diving suit can

sustain a swift ascent from 3,000 meters below sea level; the human body inside it cannot. A man who works past the point of exhaustion in a mine will collapse; a machine can keep on digging. (194)

Freeman's argument is not simply a jeremiad against technology, however—nor is it just a nostalgic paean to age that had no over-stuffed inboxes groaning under the weight of cc's, bcc's, and unanswered messages. Despite the book's breezy, popular prose style, his theorization of the e-mail revolution in the last twenty or so years is intelligently presented and should make good sense to readers trained up in the traditions of literary and cultural criticism. In one instance he invokes Benedict Anderson to argue that the Internet has given us the most closed and exclusive "imagined community" in human history, certainly more extensive and more insidious than the imagined communities of nation states (187). In another he calls upon Frederic Jameson to caution us that Facebook and similar social networking sites leave us with a feeling of constant busyness matched by equally strong feelings of fundamental, unshakable emptiness (166). And in two places he invokes Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous image of a "transparent eyeball" as a way to conceptualize the ways that communication technology promises omniscience and spiritual fullness, but ultimately just reifies the subject-object dichotomy by making our own eyeballs, now glued to the computer screen for the better part of our waking lives, the sole means of interacting with our world and fellow human beings (96-97, 154).

Who knows what Emerson, with his reclusive and philosophical tendencies, would have made of the digital age, but it is worth emphasizing that Freeman is no Luddite. Quite the opposite: he is a sharp, realistic student of the history of technology and often celebrates achievements and innovations that sped or improved communication. Most of chapters 1 through 3 are devoted to a rapid survey, more often laudatory than critical, of the various means by which human communication has improved over the centuries, from the first postal systems (a pillar of empire for the ancient Persians, Greeks, and Romans) through to the ARPANET, the commercial Internet's predecessor, developed at UCLA in the 1960s. Stopping places along this noble line of innovations include the invention of print—a technological leap that rivals the Internet as a spur to the dissemination of both information and democracy—newspapers, state-sponsored postal systems such as Britain's redoubtable Royal Mail, the Pony Express, the telegraph, the typewriter, and even the humble postcard—a low-cost, low-stakes medium that went "viral" in popularity soon after its invention in the nineteenth century. It created a craze in Europe: from 0 to at least 98 million cards sent per year, within the space of just two years.

But what separates all these innovations from those of the present day

is speed. Freeman contends throughout the second half of *The Tyranny of E-mail* that omnipresent digital information, portable communication devices with which to read it anywhere, and the sheer volume of what we send and receive have surpassed our ability to absorb and live with what the digital realm has to offer. We cannot keep up. He insists that in order to preserve ourselves, almost all of us need to perform some real cost-benefit analyses not unlike those that ought to govern all questions of human progress: What is sustainable? Equitable? Just? Healthful? Can an office worker reasonably be expected to devote forty per cent of his or her work day to staying on top of e-mail? What happens to the workload that existed before e-mail became not only part of but the principal means of business communication? (His answer: work and/or e-mail inevitably encroaches into our evenings, weekends, and vacations, robbing us of opportunities for sleep, family time, fellowship, leisure activities, and basic enjoyment of life.)

Closer now to the concerns of an English Department: Freeman argues convincingly that the academy is, generally speaking, not a sphere that depends on real-time information or that moves at the speed of, say, stock trading, medical science, or international politics. So why raise the stakes and create urgency where there is none? Instead, he counsels us to be more thoughtful and deliberate in fitting the mode of communication to the circumstances and requirements of the message. A short e-mail sent to a dozen people on a matter requiring serious consideration and discussion can—and in my experience, usually does—lead to endless chains of redundant replies and cc messages. In short, the wrong mode of communication can create an asynchronous digital morass, clogging a dozen in-boxes and wasting valuable time, while a short face-to-face meeting might have saved time and produced a far better result. Similarly, Freeman recommends a simple phone call as a better way to convey nuances or details that e-mail or text messages often fail to capture. He also suggests that a lot of e-mails, including the estimated 85-95 per cent of all messages that are out-and-out spam, should never be sent in the first place (120).

The book's final chapter offers a kind of ten-step program for pushing back against this rising tide, for changing both the workplace and our habits in ways that might allow us, the human agents of a vast machine, to remain true to our humanity and, in the words of Gandhi, "to function normally" in our personal and professional interactions. Among these are a number of commonsensical strategies for limiting time spent writing and reading e-mail, for dealing more thoughtfully with messages that we must send and receive, and for setting up our workspaces and work days in such a way as to subordinate the computer and the in-box to the other facets of one's work that ought to take precedence.

Although *The Tyranny of E-mail* is not specifically directed at academics or English majors, Freeman makes a case that all lovers of language, writing, literature, and communication really ought to attend to, for our language and our basic modes of interaction *are* changing before our very eyes. But perhaps not inevitably. At its core, his book offers a rationale analogous to that of the “slow food” movement, which in recent years has exposed the false idols of modern high-volume, high-speed, consumerist food production and consumption. Where “slow foodies” ask tough questions about sustainability, environmental impact, and a host of unintended consequences for our ways of being, our environment, and our landscapes in light of all that we produce and eat, followers of Freeman’s gospel of slow communication will ask some parallel questions: Are our modes of communicating with each other fundamentally changing—and changing us? If so, for the better? Can we somehow manage our information in a way that sets us free and improves our quality of life? Or are we doomed to be the human victims of the technological successes of our own so-called innovations? I highly recommend this book as a tonic to serious reflection on what we talk about when we talk about communication: read it and tell me (don’t e-mail me) what you thought of it.

## VI News and Notes

In this column we feature news from current and recent graduate students: honors, achievements, publications, conference papers, progress in PhD programs, and other news.

1. Professional activities and achievements of current MA and MAT students and December 2009 graduates:

Amanda Boyle (MA and TA) presented a paper, “‘Tell Me More, Sir, About the Old Race’: Indian Signs in ‘The Great Meadow,’” at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference at St. Catharine College, KY, 24-26 April 2010.

Alicia Brienza (MA) presented a paper, “Coming of Age: The Interconnection of People, Places, and Experience,” at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference at St. Catharine College, KY, 24-26 April 2010.

Jessica Mackenzie Conti (MAT) presented a paper, “It is Known how Lovely Ellen Chesser is: Grace amid Evil in *The Time of Man*,” at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference at St. Catharine College, KY, 24-26 April 2010.

Thomas Doran (MA and TA) presented a paper, “The Consistency of Assent: Abolition History’s Origins and Renewals,” at the Conference on College Composition and Communication Annual Convention in Louisville, KY, 17-20 March 2010. He also published a poem, “Elegy for Sarah Bernhardt (born Marie Henriette Bernardt) French Actress (1844-1923),” in the Spring/Summer 2010 issue of FENCE (13.1).

Meaghan Doss (MAT) presented a paper, “Reading ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ through a Postmodern Lens,” at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Encountering the Text Conference, Southern Connecticut State University, 18 April 2009.

Alison Fugit (MA and TA) presented a paper, “The Philosophy of Poetic Realism in Roberts: the Force that Unites the Sense of Self with the

Sense of Place in *The Time of Man*,” at the 81<sup>st</sup> Annual South Atlantic Modern Language Association Convention in Atlanta, Georgia, 5-7 November 2009.

Mary Ellen Iatropolous (MA) published a book chapter, “Huxley, Orwell and *Angel*: (Re)Negotiating the Dystopian Dilemma,” in *The Literary Angel*, ed. AmiJo Comeford and Tamy Burnett, McFarland, 2010. She also presented three papers: “Literacy Through Filmmaking” at the Professional Development Seminar for Arlington Public School District educators, Children’s Media Project, in Poughkeepsie, New York, 10 October 2009; “‘Look Where Free Will Has Gotten You’: *Brave New World* and *Angel*’s Body Jasmine,” at the Southwest/Texas Popular/American Culture Association Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, 12 February 2010; and “Changing Landscape, Changing Literacies: Integrating Visual and Media Literacy into ESL Curriculum,” at the Teachers Teaching the Movies Conference at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, 9 April 2010.

Michelle S. Kramisen (MA and GA) presented a paper, “The Divided Self of Ellen Chesser: Her Struggle to Survive as an Obedient Farm-Worker and a Woman Consumed with Hatred,” at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference at St. Catharine College, KY, 24-26 April 2010.

Jaclyn Lyons (MA and GA) presented a paper, “‘The New Kind of Warrior’: Reimagining Identity in Sherman Alexie’s *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*,” at Carried Across: Translations, Temporalities, and Trajectories at the University of Rhode Island, 24 April 2010.

Michael Renganeschi (MA and TA) presented a paper, “‘Our Place to Keep’: A Sense of Home in *The Time of Man*,” at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference at St. Catharine College, KY, 24-26 April 2010.

Meghan Rogers (MA) presented a paper, “‘The Heartfelt Honey of Life’: Ellen Chesser’s Spiritual Pilgrimage through Internal and External Environments in *The Time of Man*,” at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference at St. Catharine College, KY, 24-26 April 2010.

Mert Sanivar (MA) presented a paper, “Turning ‘Others’ on Bourbon Street: King Creole (1958),” at the Annual Meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association in New Orleans, LA, 1-4 April 2010.

Thomas Whalen (MA) presented a paper, “Ineffable Design: Comics, Epic,

and Meta-Textual History,” at the Annual Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association Conference, St. Louis, 31 March-3 April, 2010.

2. Graduates of our MA program in PhD programs:

Lawrence Beemer (2002) at Ohio University  
Michael Beilfuss (2005) at Texas A&M University  
Danielle Bienvenue Bray (2004) at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette  
William Boyle (2006) at the University of Mississippi  
Nicole Camastra (2005) at the University of Georgia  
D. A. Carpenter (2005) at Texas A&M University  
Kevin Cavanaugh (2002), at the University of Albany (Curriculum/  
Instruction Program)  
Steven Florczyk (2002) at the University of Georgia  
Timothy Gilmore (2004) at the University of California, Santa Barbara  
Tina Iraca (2001) at the University of Connecticut  
Jennifer Lee (2007) at the University of Rhode Island  
Brad McDuffie (2005) at Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Nicole Myers (2007) at the University of Rhode Island  
Matthew Nickel (2006) at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette  
Sharon Peelor (1997) at the University of Oklahoma (Education Studies)  
Donna Bonsignore Scully (2001) at St. Sohn’s University  
James Stamant (2005) at Texas A&M University  
Amy Washburn (2005) at the University of Maryland (Women’s Studies)

3. Graduates of our MA program with full-time academic positions:

Eileen Abrahams (2002), Assistant Professor of English, Schenectady  
County Community College  
Cristy Woehling Beemer (2002), Assistant Professor of English, Univer-  
sity of New Hampshire  
Kevin Cavanaugh (2002), Assistant Professor of English and Humanities,  
SUNY Dutchess County Community College  
Lynne Crockett (1996), Associate Professor of English, Sullivan County  
Community College  
Deborah DiPiero (2001), Assistant Professor of English and Director of  
Writing, St. Andrews Presbyterian College (Laurinburg, NC)  
Dennis Doherty (1991), Instructor of English and Director of Creative  
Writing, SUNY New Paltz  
Laurence Erussard (1992), Associate Professor of English, Hobart and  
William Smith Colleges

Mary Fakler (1994), Instructor of English, SUNY New Paltz  
 Penny Freel (1995), Instructor of English, SUNY New Paltz  
 Thomas Impola (1989), Assistant Professor, SUNY Ulster County Community College  
 Jennifer Kaufman (2003), Instructor of English, SUNY Ulster County Community College  
 Brad McDuffie (2005), Instructor of English, Nyack College  
 Michele Morano (1991), Associate Professor of English, DePaul University  
 Fiona Paton (1991), Associate Professor of English, SUNY New Paltz  
 Rachel Rigolino (1992), Instructor of English and Director of the Composition SWW Program, SUNY New Paltz  
 Martha Robinson (1991), Associate Professor of English, SUNY Ulster County Community College  
 Arnold A. Schmidt (1990), Professor of English, California State University, Stanislaus  
 Nicole Boucher Spottke (1996), Assistant Professor of English at Valencia Community College (Orlando, FL)  
 Kimberley Vanderlaan (1995), Assistant Professor of English, Louisiana Tech University  
 Amy Leigh Washburn (2005), Assistant Professor of English, Union County College (Elizabeth, NJ)  
 Meri Weiss (2006), Assistant Professor of English, College of New Rochelle, John Cardinal O'Connor Campus

4. News from graduates of our MA program:

Kevin Cavanaugh (2002) was granted tenure and promoted to Assistant Professor of English and Humanities at SUNY Dutchess County Community College.

David DeMar (2008) was accepted to the Queens College Masters in Library Science.

James Perry (2008) was granted tenure and promoted to Assistant Professor of Computer Science at SUNY Ulster County Community College.

Nicole Boucher Spottke (1996) received her PhD from the University of South Florida and was granted tenure at Valencia Community College.

5. The Editors would remind students of the Russell S. Cleverley Memorial Fellowship, established by Luella and Donald Cleverley in memory

of their son Russell S. Cleverley, who earned his MA in English from SUNY New Paltz in December 1995. The Cleverley Fellowship is open to students matriculated in the MA English program with a 3.5 GPA who register for ENG 590, Thesis in English, in the award semester. The amount of the fellowship is \$500. Please submit a letter of application with transcript, the thesis proposal signed by the thesis director, and two letters of recommendation (one from the thesis director) to Daniel Kempton, English Graduate Director. Applications for the next award (fall 2010) are due May 15, 2010.



## VII Guidelines for Submissions

As the journal of the English Graduate Program, the *Shawangunk Review* publishes the proceedings of the annual English Graduate Symposium. In addition, the Editors welcome submissions from English graduate students in any area of literary studies: essays (criticism; theory; historical, cultural, biographical studies), book reviews, scholarly notes, and poetry. English faculty are invited to submit poetry, translations of poetry, and book reviews.

Manuscripts should be prepared in accordance with MLA style and should be submitted as an electronic file accompanied by a hard copy. Essays should not exceed 3500 words (10-12 pages), stories 3000 words, book reviews 1250 words, poems five pages, and MA thesis abstracts 250 words. With your submission please include a brief biographical statement.

Please submit material to the Department of English, SUNY New Paltz and/or [kemptond@newpaltz.edu](mailto:kemptond@newpaltz.edu); the deadline for Volume XXII of the *Review* is December 15, 2010.



## VIII Contributors

**Kevin Larkin Angioli** is an MA student in English and Teaching Assistant at SUNY New Paltz. As an undergraduate at New Paltz he was awarded the 2007 Vincent Tomaselli Award for the Creative Writing of Poetry, and his work has recently been published in the anthology *WaterWrites*.

**Amanda Boyle** is an MA student in English and Teaching Assistant at SUNY New Paltz. She has presented papers the ALA, SAMLA, and EMRS conferences. This summer she will present a paper at the Imagism Conference at Brunnenburg Castle (Italy), where she will also read her poetry, and at the International Hemingway Conference in Lausanne, Switzerland.

**Stella Deen** is an Associate Professor of English at SUNY New Paltz, where she teaches early twentieth-century British literature. She is the editor of *Challenging Modernism: New Readings in Literature and Culture 1914-45*. She is currently working on fiction by E. H. Young, on early twentieth-century assessments of literature, and on short-story anthologizer Edward O'Brien.

**Joann K. Deiudicibus** is an instructor of and Staff Assistant for the Composition Program at SUNY New Paltz, where she earned her MA in English (2003). She has read her poetry locally since 1995 and has been published in *The North Street Journal*, *Orange Review*, *Literary Passions*, *Fortunate Fall*, *Chronogram*, and the *Shawangunk Review*. Her work was selected for The Woodstock Poetry Festival, 2003. In 2007 she presented a paper at the Spring NYCEA Conference. She is the Associate Editor (poetry) for *Hudson River Reader*, an anthology celebrating the Hudson River.

**Dennis Doherty** is an Instructor in English and the Director of Creative Writing at SUNY New Paltz, as well as Chair of the Poetry Board. He has published essays, stories, and poems. His first book of poems, *The Bad Man*, was published in 2004, and his second collection, *Fugitive*, appeared in 2007.

**Nick Haines** received his MA in English with honors from SUNY New Paltz in December 2008. This past year he presented a paper at SAMLA. He currently teaches English at SUNY Ulster as an adjunct.

**Andrew C. Higgins** is an Assistant Professor of English at SUNY New Paltz. His focus is on poetry, especially the work of Henry Wadsworth Longfel-

low. He has published on Walt Whitman, Longfellow, Sarah Piatt, and Civil War soldiers' memoirs. His poetry has appeared in the *New York Quarterly*, *Footwork: The Paterson Literary Review*, *Limestone*, *Chronogram*, and the *Portland Review*.

**Chris Lawrence** is an MA student in English at SUNY New Paltz. In 2010 he will present papers at the John Muir/John Burroughs Conference at SUNY Oneonta and the Southern Writers/Southern Writing Conference at the University of Mississippi.

**Jes Mackenzie** is an MAT student in English-Secondary Education at SUNY New Paltz. In 2010 she will present a papers at the Southern Writers/Southern Writing conference at the University of Mississippi.

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**Thomas G. Olsen** is an Associate Professor of English and Chair of the English department at SUNY New Paltz. He specializes in Shakespeare and early modern English literature and has published in such journals as *Studies in English Literature*, *Annali d'Italianistica*, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, *Shakespeare Yearbook*, and the *Yale Library Gazette*. His edition of the *Commonplace Book of Sir John Strangways* for the Renaissance English Text Society appeared in 2004.

**Malorie Seeley** is an MA student in English and Teaching Assistant at SUNY New Paltz. After graduating, she intends to pursue an MAT in English-Secondary Education and plans to teach at the college or high school level (or both).

**James Sherwood** recently earned his MA in English from SUNY New Paltz and is now pursuing the MAT in English-Secondary Education while serving as a Graduate Assistant in the English Department. His poetry and essays have been published in *Chronogram*, *Shawangunk Review*, and *WaterWrites*, the 2009 anthology of Hudson Valley writers.

**Barbara Smith** is in the MFA Metal program at SUNY New Paltz and a Teaching Assistant in the School of Fine and Performing Arts. She also holds an MA and Graduate Teaching Certificate in Photography and Related Media.

**Kelly Spencer** is an MA student in English at SUNY New Paltz and the managing editor at the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College.

**H. R. Stoneback** is Distinguished Professor of English at SUNY New Paltz. He is a Hemingway scholar of international reputation, author/editor of nineteen books and more than 175 articles on Durrell, Faulkner, Hemingway, Roberts et al. He is a widely published poet, author of eight volumes of poetry including, most recently, *Amazing-Grace-Wheelchair-Jumpshot-Jesus-Love-Poems* (Des Hymnag-

istes Press 2009) and *Hurricane Hymn & Other Poems* (Codhill Press 2009). His recent critical study *Reading Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises* (2007) has been nominated for the prestigious SAMLA Studies Award in Literary Criticism; his most recent critical volumes (2008) include three co-edited collections of essays, one on Richard Aldington and two on Elizabeth Madox Roberts.

**Kelly Tempest** is an MA student in English at SUNY New Paltz. Her interest in travel stems from the semester she spent studying abroad in Scotland and her work in the international education field before coming to New Paltz. She is currently teaching her first composition course as a TA, which is themed, appropriately, "Travel."

**Robert H. Waugh** is a Professor of English at SUNY New Paltz and Director of the annual Lovecraft Forum. He is the author of *The Monster in the Mirror: Looking for H. P. Lovecraft* and many articles on science fiction, horror, and fantasy literature, which have been published in such journals as *Extrapolation* and *Lovecraft Studies*. He is also a widely published poet, and his chapbook, *Shorewards, Tideways* appeared in summer 2007.

**Emily Wejchert** completed the MAT in English-Secondary Education in December 2009 and is now an MA student in English and Teaching Assistant at SUNY New Paltz. Her literary interests include Shakespeare, Virginia Woolf, and medieval literature.

**Tom Whalen** completed his MA in English at SUNY New Paltz in December 2009. He lives in New Paltz, where he manages a used music store and reads voraciously.

