



# Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury

A CENTENARY CELEBRATION

EDITED BY JANE MARCUS

# VIRGINIA WOOLF AND BLOOMSBURY

*A Centenary Celebration*

*Edited by*  
Jane Marcus

**M**  
MACMILLAN  
PRESS

Chapters 1–2, 4–15 and editorial matter © Jane Marcus 1987  
Chapter 3 © Michael Holroyd 1987

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1956 (as amended).

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

First published 1987

Published by  
THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD  
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS  
and London  
Companies and representatives  
throughout the world

Printed in Hong Kong

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury: a centenary celebration.

1. Woolf, Virginia – Criticism and interpretation

I. Marcus, Jane

823'.912 PR6045.072Z/

ISBN 0–333–39397–X (hc)

ISBN 0–333–39398–8 (pbk)



*Also edited by Jane Marcus*

NEW FEMINIST ESSAYS ON VIRGINIA WOOLF

VIRGINIA WOOLF: A Feminist Slant

THE YOUNG REBECCA: Writings of Rebecca West,  
1911-1917

*For Jason*

# Acknowledgements

The editor and contributors are grateful to Quentin Bell for permission to quote from published and unpublished materials, to Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, editors of Woolf's letters, and to Anne Olivier Bell, editor of her diaries.

This book began as a series of Virginia Woolf Centenary Lectures at the University of Texas in autumn 1982. I should like to thank the University of Texas, in particular Robert King, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, for generous support of the lectures, the University Research Council for a grant for the preparation of the typescript of this book, and Susanne Fawcett for help in typing. The Women's Studies Program and the English Department also sponsored the lectures, as well as the Humanities Research Center, home of an enormously rich collection of Bloomsbury manuscripts, letters and papers. Ellen Dunlap and Sally Leach opened the resources of the Humanities Research Center to students and visiting scholars; Kurth Sprague and his British Studies Seminar were excellent hosts; my colleagues and students in the seminar contributed to the lively debate sparked by the lectures. Standish Meacham, Kay Avery, Elizabeth Cullingford, Alan Friedman, Beverly Stoeltje, and B. J. Fernea worked to make the visiting lecturers and their seminars comfortable and successful.

To Melissa Hield I owe the warmest and most sincere thanks, for it was entirely owing to her unflagging energy and cheerful and efficient work that the semester-long conference was so well organised and well received. And finally I should like to thank my husband and sons for their patient and humorous toleration of yet another year when Virginia Woolf was a daily figure in family life, an invisible presence, like a brilliant and absurd great aunt dominating the dinner table.

The essays by Noel Annan, Nigel Nicolson, Michael Holroyd, Louise DeSalvo, Carol MacKay and Angela Ingram were written for and delivered at the University of Texas Virginia Woolf Centenary Celebration; Sandra Shattuck was a student in that

seminar. Sandra Gilbert's and Catherine Smith's papers were presented at the Virginia Woolf Society Seminar at the Modern Language Association meeting in Los Angeles in December 1982. Mine was read at the Brown University Symposium on Virginia Woolf and Sexual Difference, organised by Elizabeth Weed and Roger Henkle. Kathleen Dobie's paper was written for Louise DeSalvo in an undergraduate class at Hunter College. Laura Moss Gottlieb's paper was read at the Woolf sessions organised by Beth Riegel Daugherty at the National Women's Studies Meeting in Columbus, Ohio, in June 1983. Elizabeth Abel's essay is part of her forthcoming book on Woolf and Freud, and Judith Johnston's will also appear in her book on women writers and fascism.

It is perhaps not impertinent to suggest that Virginia Woolf would have enjoyed the solemn and hilarious, the scholarly and polemical, the frivolous and forthright tone of this posthumous birthday party, and that it was celebrated so well in Austin, Texas, not in Cambridge or London. There are moments she would have relished – the dismantling of the security system of the Humanities Research Center to smuggle out a copy of *Orlando* in which Nigel Nicolson inscribed his notes regarding obscure references to Vita Sackville-West, her family and dogs, and the unwavering smile with which he took a student's paperback copy, stamped USED in large yellow letters, to annotate as a memento of the occasion.

The moment I treasure most was the appearance at one seminar of an angular, stern and very beautiful old woman in a picture hat, looking in profile exactly like the woman whose work we were celebrating. She sat very still and listened intently, vanishing completely at the end of the talk. She looked like a poet and a 'bag lady', like Sara Pargiter in *The Years*, ferocious, eccentric, wickedly judgemental and capable of shameless glee. It is that elusive creature whose birth we celebrate in this volume, on a January day in 1882 when she burst from the amniotic bliss of her mother's womb. Like no other writer before her, Virginia Woolf captured that universal desire to merge with mother in *To the Lighthouse*. Yet there was no more unremitting critic of the patriarchal family. Family life and friendship as she described them and lived them hardly exist any longer. In remembering Virginia Woolf, we remember the social institutions which she attacked and whose demise she celebrated, not the least of which was the university. The University of Texas cannot claim to be the

new, free university Woolf demanded in *Three Guineas*. But it is, in a sense, far more democratic than the universities which shadowed her life, and I like to think she would have enjoyed being fêted in such an atmosphere.

*Austin, Texas*

*Jane Marcus*



# Source Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout in references.

## WRITINGS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

Almost all the works and collections listed below are published by the Hogarth Press in London and by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (predecessors Harcourt, Brace and Co., Harcourt, Brace and World) in New York. Unless otherwise stated, the editions used by the contributors are published by Harcourt Brace, dates as indicated.

- AROO    *A Room of One's Own* (1929)  
 BA       *Between the Acts* (1941)  
 BA, 1969   *Between the Acts*, Harvest paperback (1969)  
 BP       *Books and Portraits*, ed. Mary Lyon (London: Hogarth Press, 1977)  
 CDB      'The Captain's Death Bed' and Other Essays (1950)  
 CE       *Collected Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf (1967)  
 D        *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*  
           I: 1915–1919, ed. Anne Oliver Bell, intro. Quentin Bell (1977)  
           II: 1920–1924, ed. Anne Oliver Bell and Andrew McNeillie (1978)  
           III: 1925–1930, ed. Bell and McNeillie (1980)  
           IV: 1931–1935, ed. Bell and McNeillie (1982)  
 DM      'The Death of the Moth' and Other Essays (1942)  
 JR      *Jacob's Room* (1922)  
 L        *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann  
           I: 1888–1912 (1975)  
           II: 1912–1922 (1976)  
           III: 1923–1928 (1977)  
           IV: 1929–1931 (1978)

- v: 1932–1935 (1979)  
 vi: 1936–1941 (1980)
- M* 'Melymbrosia': *Early Version of 'The Voyage Out'*, ed. Louise A. DeSalvo (New York: New York Public Library, 1982)
- MB* *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (Brighton: Sussex University Press, 1976)
- MD* *Mrs Dalloway* (1925)
- ND* *Night and Day* (1919)
- O* *Orlando* (1928)
- P* 'The Pargiters': *The Novel–Essay Portion of 'The Years'*, ed. Mitchell A. Leaska (1977)
- PH* 'Pointz Hall': *The Earlier and Later Typescripts of 'Between the Acts'*, ed. Mitchell A. Leaska (New York: University Publications, 1983)
- RF* *Roger Fry: A Biography* (1940)
- TG* *Three Guineas* (1938)
- TL* *To the Lighthouse* (1927)
- VO* *The Voyage Out* (1915)
- W* *The Waves* (1931)
- WD* *A Writer's Diary*, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1953)
- Y* *The Years* (1937)

## JOURNALS

- BNYPL* *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*  
*PMLA* *Publications of the Modern Language Association*  
*TLS* *The Times Literary Supplement*

## MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

- Berg* Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, New York Public Library, Astor, Lennox and Tilden Foundations  
*BL* British Library  
*CUL* Cambridge University Library

## Notes on the Contributors

**Elizabeth Abel**, Assistant Professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley, edited *The Voyage In* and *Writing and Sexual Difference*. She is completing a book on Woolf and Freud.

**Noel Annan** (Lord Annan), Victorian scholar and public administrator, has just published a revised and updated version of his classic intellectual biography of Leslie Stephen.

**John W. Bicknell**, Emeritus Professor of English at Drew University, is preparing an edition of the letters of Leslie Stephen to his wife and others.

**Louise A. DeSalvo**, Associate Professor at Hunter College, is the author of *Virginia Woolf's First Voyage* and editor of *Melymbrosia, Between Women* and *Vita Sackville West's Letters to Virginia Woolf*, as well as the author of numerous essays. She has just finished a book on Hawthorne.

**Kathleen Dobie** was a student at Hunter College in New York when this essay was written. She is now a reporter for the *Brooklyn Phoenix*.

**Sandra M. Gilbert**, Professor of English at Princeton University, is co-editor with Susan Gubar of the *Norton Anthology of Women's Literature*. Together they wrote the classic of feminist criticism, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, and they are completing a sequel. Professor Gilbert is also a poet. Her latest volume is called *Emily's Bread*.

**Laura Moss Gottlieb** is the co-editor of *Virginia Woolf Centennial Essays* and publishes an annual bibliography of Woolf criticism in *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*.

**Michael Holroyd** is the biographer of Lytton Strachey and Augustus John, and is writing the authorised biography of Bernard Shaw.

**Angela Ingram**, Assistant Professor of English at Southwest Texas State University, has recently published *In the Posture of a Whore: Changing Attitudes to 'Bad' Women in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*. Her current research is on censorship and women's writing in the 1920s.

**Judith L. Johnston**, who has taught at Columbia University, is an independent scholar working on a book called *Years that Ask Questions: Women Novelists' Responses to Fascism, 1936-1946*.

**Carol Hanbery MacKay**, Associate Professor of English at the University of Texas, has written articles on Dickens, Carlyle, Thackeray and Hawthorne. She has completed a study of soliloquy in nineteenth-century fiction and is preparing a critical introduction to Anne Thackeray Ritchie's prefaces to her father's canon.

**Jane Marcus**, Associate Professor of English at the University of Texas, has edited two volumes of Woolf criticism, and *The Young Rebecca West. Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy* and *Art and Anger* were recently published.

**Nigel Nicolson** edited his father's papers as well as the six volumes of Virginia Woolf's *Letters* and is the author of *Portrait of a Marriage* as well as other books.

**Sandra D. Shattuck** is a graduate student at the University of Texas, currently in Germany on a Fulbright research grant.

**Catherine F. Smith**, Associate Professor of English and Director of the Writing Program at Bucknell University, is the author of essays on the English mystic Jane Lead and Virginia Woolf. She is currently working on a book on the mystical tradition in women's writing.

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Source Abbreviations</i>	xii
<i>Notes on the Contributors</i>	xiv
Introduction: Umbrellas and Bluebonnets <i>Jane Marcus</i>	1
1 Bloomsbury: the Myth and the Reality <i>Nigel Nicolson</i>	7
2 Bloomsbury and the Leavises <i>Noel Annan</i>	23
3 Bloomsbury and the Fabians <i>Michael Holroyd</i>	39
4 Mr Ramsay was Young Once <i>John W. Bicknell</i>	52
5 The Thackeray Connection: Virginia Woolf's Aunt Anny <i>Carol Hanbery MacKay</i>	68
6 As 'Miss Jan Says': Virginia Woolf's Early Journals <i>Louise A. DeSalvo</i>	96
7 'The Sacred Edifices': Virginia Woolf and Some of the Sons of Culture <i>Angela Ingram</i>	125
8 'Taking the Bull by the Udders': Sexual Difference in Virginia Woolf – a Conspiracy Theory <i>Jane Marcus</i>	146
9 'Cam the Wicked': Woolf's Portrait of the Artist as her Father's Daughter <i>Elizabeth Abel</i>	170
10 This is the Room that Class Built: the Structures of Sex and Class in <i>Jacob's Room</i> <i>Kathleen Dobie</i>	195

11	Woman's Sentence, Man's Sentencing: Linguistic Fantasies in Woolf and Joyce	<i>Sandra M. Gilbert</i>	208
12	<i>Three Guineas</i> : Virginia Woolf's Prophecy	<i>Catherine F. Smith</i>	225
13	The War between the Woolfs	<i>Laura Moss Gottlieb</i>	242
14	The Remediable Flaw: Revisioning Cultural History in <i>Between the Acts</i>	<i>Judith L. Johnston</i>	253
15	The Stage of Scholarship: Crossing the Bridge from Harrison to Woolf	<i>Sandra D. Shattuck</i>	278
	<i>Index</i>		299

# Introduction:

## Umbrellas and Bluebonnets

JANE MARCUS

I used to think that the notion that there was a Virginia Woolf Cult was a fabrication of conservative critics to discredit both Virginia Woolf and her readers. But, shortly before its demise as the arbiter of American middlebrow taste, the *Saturday Review* published a coy article on the subject, attributing the revival of Woolf's reputation to her own feminism and the interest of feminist critics. There is obviously some truth to this, as *A Room of One's Own* is required reading in many Women's Studies courses. On what authority I do not know, the writer in the *Saturday Review* named me as the leader of the Woolf Cult, a fact I learned with some dismay as a pile of letters (mostly from women in small Southern American towns) arrived, asking to join. No one would use the word 'cult' to describe the drinking of green beer on Bloomsday or the myriad readings, conferences, plays, speeches and newspaper articles which celebrated the Joyce centenary. Yet Joyce fans do seem to be more prone to ritual observance and religious enthusiasm than Woolf fans are. (I do remember at a conference years ago an all-night collective reading of *The Waves*, but it is the only incident which could even vaguely confer cult status on readers of Virginia Woolf.) Shortly afterwards, Peter Watson quoted the *Saturday Review* article for readers of the *London Times*, mocking the vulgarity of American readers and critics for the tastelessness of an interest in Virginia Woolf which he compared to the Marilyn Monroe following – all based on madness, suicide, odd marriages and feminism. Again I was singled out, for the folly of responding to Quentin Bell's characterisation of American feminists as 'lupine critics' by declaring that we ought to wear the label proudly as long as we can't escape it. I once compared us to a tall, hardy variety of lupine which flourishes in the Wind Rivers in Wyoming. But now that I am in Texas, there is a natural parallel in the state flower, a lupine called

Bluebonnet, native to Texas and planted by Lady Bird Johnson in abundance along the highways.

As Nigel Nicolson explains in his essay (Ch. 1), Bernard Levin's 'Cry, Woolf, but I Won't Be Listening' (*The Times*, 8 May 1980) is a fair example of the attitude of some British readers toward Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury. In Noel Annan's essay on Bloomsbury and the Leavises (Ch. 2), one may find an answer to their contempt for Woolf in that there appears to be no professor of literature at a major university untainted by the Leavis hatred of all they thought she stood for, who could come to her defence or organise a conference in her honour. Nigel Nicolson is correct in pointing out that there were no British celebrations on Woolf's centenary except, I have since been informed, a conference organised by a librarian at King's College, Cambridge. Even *The Times Literary Supplement*, a journal for which she faithfully wrote for a lifetime, made no mention of the event, though Joyce was duly fêted both in the universities and in the journals (see *TLS*, 25 Feb 1982).

But it is not only the Leavises' poisonous pronouncements which produce British diffidence and distaste. In an interview in the *Guardian* (21 Mar 1982) Quentin and Olivier Bell were quoted as saying, 'she wasn't a feminist and she wasn't political'. They 'kept their heads down', hoping that Woolf's centenary would not be celebrated, were 'relieved' that it was not celebrated in her mother country and sorry that Americans see her as Joan of Arc. 'The shunning of the anniversary in Britain has not caused pain to the Bells.' In the next column Frank Tuohy reviewed volume V of the diary 'of a notoriously touchy lady', admitting that he found Woolf's novels 'nearly unreadable'. He said that her images are 'meaningless as a hiccup', complaining of 'woozy pretentiousness' in her fiction. Bernard Levin went even further and declared that he would never read anything about Woolf or Bloomsbury again as long as he lives. He boasted that he hadn't read her fiction ('in my opinion all Virginia Woolf's novels are unreadable, and none of them would be worth reading even if they weren't').

In Mr Levin's opinion, all of Bloomsbury, with the exception of Forster, deserves no more than a footnote. But that footnote has spawned:

forty shelvesful of books, ranging from three . . . volume studies of her use of the semi-colon to the memoirs of her chiropodist,



from massive biographies of the manager of the shop where she used to get her coffee (by post) to examinations of the parallels between her work and that of Damon Runyon, from books designed to prove that the early essays attributed to her were in fact written by George the Fifth to books designed to disprove the theory that Radclyffe Hall was one of her pseudonyms. (It was as a matter of fact.)

Levin claimed that he was being persecuted by Bloomsbury and said that he would shortly turn around and hit it with his umbrella. One may see this book as a loaded umbrella with which to do battle with the likes of Mr Levin, though I sincerely regret that we have no essay on Woolf's use of the comma. My hope is that it is now being written in the wilds of North Dakota, and will turn up in the next Bloomsbury book. What I find most amusing about Levin's essay is his complete ignorance of the fact that his anti-academic stance of 'common reader' against the professors of literature, his comic intimacy with his reader, even his umbrella-brandishing, derive directly from Virginia Woolf's own reviewing-style! It was she who gave him the language and form for his essay. It was, after all, Virginia Woolf who wrote, 'It is always well to re-read the classics. It is always wholesome to make sure that they still earn their pedestals and do not merely cast their shadows over heads bent superstitiously from custom' (*TLS*, 7 Feb 1918). I envy Mr Levin his first reading of *To the Lighthouse* on some clear day when the clouds of the Leavises' spirits have stopped raining on the literature departments of British universities.

Lest the reader have the impression that umbrella bashing is exclusively a British sport, let me call attention to a syndicated column by the conservative American George F. Will which appeared on 9 January 1983. He attacked the Equal Rights Amendment, using *A Room of One's Own* as his club (or umbrella), misreading a great democratic document as a 'flight of chilling whimsy', arguing for the education of only an intellectual elite of women. This is a direct reversal of the message of the text. Where did Mr Will get the notion that Virginia Woolf was an elitist? Not, I assure you, from any writings of hers, but from those books about Bloomsbury which maintain this myth. Whose interest, we may ask, does the maintenance of this myth serve?

It is the purpose of this book to show the wealth and diversity of Woolf criticism on both sides of the Atlantic. Her novels and