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Virginia Woolf's Publishing Archive

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VIRGINIA WOOLF'S PUBLISHING ARCHIVE

John Lehmann, who served two stints as the managing partner with the Hogarth Press, recalls in his memoir that when

a book boomed and orders were heavy, [Virginia Woolf] would often join Miss Belsher, Miss Strachan and Miss Walton in the front office, doing up parcels. Young authors, coming in to leave a precious manuscript, would never suspect that they were actually in her presence as the drab figure in the gray overalls busied herself with scissors and string. (17)

In various recent conference papers, for the IVWS, MLA, and MSA, I have argued that Woolf the publisher remains that “drab figure in the gray overalls” for many Woolf scholars, despite an abundance of archival material documenting Woolf’s role as publisher. The most familiar Woolf archives are of course the manuscripts and drafts, many now in print, that have inescapably changed the way we read Woolf’s published texts. As Brenda Silver notes, “Once we are aware of the manuscript versions and their alternate readings, it becomes impossible, except by a willed act of commitment to a particular interpretive stance, not to be conscious of their presence within the ‘final’ text” (194). But the publishing archives, held primarily at the University of Sussex, the University of Reading, and Washington State University, offer compelling evidence for a recovery of Woolf as co-owner of her own publishing firm, not merely its most important author. Woolf worked not as an author isolated from textual production but as one immersed in what she once called “life on tap down here whenever it flags upstairs” (*Diary* 4:63), an elegant reminder that 52 Tavistock Square housed both the creative and business spaces for the Woolfs.

As Hogarth’s fiction editor, Woolf helped usher into print more than 50 novels and short story collections between 1917 and 1938 (when she sold her share in the firm to Lehmann). The Hogarth list during this period included Woolf’s own major contributions to modernism

as well as such notable texts as: Katherine Mansfield’s *Prelude*; I. A. Bunin’s *The Gentleman from San Francisco*; F. M. Mayor’s *The Rector’s Daughter*; William Plomer’s *Turbott Wolfe* and *The Case Is Altered*; Italo Svevo’s *The Hoax*; Vita Sackville-West’s *The Edwardians* and *All Passion Spent*; John Hampson’s *Saturday Night at the Greyhound*; Christopher Isherwood’s *Memorial* and *The Berlin Stories*; Julia Strachey’s *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding*; Laurens van der Post’s *In a Province*; and Yuri Olesha’s *Envy*. Even more powerfully than T. S. Eliot at Faber & Faber, I would argue, Woolf influenced the course of British modernist fiction, opening Hogarth and its readers to a variety of literary perspectives outside the mainstream: Russian fiction by Bunin and Olesha; attacks on South African racism by Plomer and van der Post; Continental modernism from Svevo; homosexual narratives by Plomer and Isherwood; a working-class story by Hampson; and feminist satires by Sackville-West and Strachey. In addition, Virginia occasionally consulted with Leonard and Lehmann about advertising; and she served, with Leonard, as the firm’s book traveler for several years. Finally, Woolf was, of course, her own editor; this is true of every author to some degree, but the most direct manifestation of Woolf’s publishing freedom is that she and Leonard sought no outside opinions about her work (except in their famous consultation with Lehman regarding *Between the Acts*).¹

That editorial freedom depended always on Hogarth’s commercial success. As Woolf concludes in the draft version of *A Room of One’s Own*, “You can only have [intellectual?] freedom / if you have money. & / And you can only write if you have unbroken freedom” (179). (In an interesting rhetorical softening, “money” becomes “material things” in the published *Room*.) Two kinds of archival materials that demonstrate the link between Woolf’s intellectual freedom and Hogarth’s money are advertisements and sales records. Perhaps the most surprising Hogarth ad for Woolf’s books appeared in November 1928 for *Orlando*, with the following blurb from Arnold Bennett, of all reviewers: “You cannot keep your end up at a London dinner party in these weeks unless you have read Mrs. Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*.” While Woolf the author famously uses Bennett as a foil for her diagnosis of Edwardian fiction, Woolf the publisher capitalizes on his praise to market the new “biography” by “Mrs. Woolf.” (Woolf worried about the sales effects of her insistence that bookstores shelve *Orlando* outside of the fiction section, but this book proved even more profitable than *To the Lighthouse*, which had financed the Woolfs’ first car.)

Leonard’s sales ledgers, now in the Sussex and Reading collections, also illustrate this confluence between Woolf’s conflicting and reinforcing roles. There are separate account books, for example, charting sales for Woolf and Sackville-West, suggesting both an effort to track Hogarth’s two most popular authors and to map their shifting personal relationship onto the professional sphere. Hogarth records also single out sales of Woolf’s Uniform Edition, a series designed both to reach a broader audience (the volumes were usually priced at 5s.) and to confer canonical status on Woolf through what she called her “Collected Edition” (*Diary* 3:225).² Finally, the archival records reveal that Hogarth paid Virginia both as an author and as a co-owner. For example, the Reading account books indicate

author's royalties of £455 for *Orlando* in 1928-29, and profits for the Press of £339, of which £169.5 was Woolf's publisher's share. Woolf received no royalties for *Jacob's Room* in 1922, however; as Leonard explains, "Virginia Woolf, the publisher, had to some extent swindled Virginia Woolf, the author" (73). Once the Press's expanded commercial horizons proved successful, Woolf resumed both roles.

Such "swindling" also represents the dual feminist goals advanced by Woolf in both professional roles. While as an author she could famously remark, "Call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, or by any name you please," as a publisher she was marketing "Virginia Woolf" as a brand-name, in an effort to avoid the business mistakes for which she criticizes Jane Austen and others in *Room*. Only as author and publisher, that is, could Woolf revise the aesthetic and commercial roles available to modernist women writers.

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Notes

¹ Whereas Hermione Lee, then, calls Hogarth's "editorial acumen (mostly, but not entirely, Leonard's)," while acknowledging that Virginia's "taste, decisions, and her influence are part" of Hogarth's history, even if she "was not the Press's main editor" (367), I would join Catherine Hollis in arguing for a broader conception of the Hogarth Press as a truly collaborative enterprise, in which Leonard and Virginia formed a larger, corporate whole. All Hogarth books read "Published by Leonard & Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press," a literal description of their mutual endeavor. Beginning in 1928, Hogarth adopted as its standard marketing symbol a wolf's head, a striking visual representation of a publishing firm whose most important author was also involved in all aspects of textual production.

² See also my "Canonicity and Commercialization in Woolf's Uniform Edition," in *Virginia Woolf: Turning the Centuries*, eds. Ann Ardis and Bonnie Kime Scott (New York: Pace UP, 2000).

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REVIEW:

VIRGINIA WOOLF AND THE DISCOURSE OF SCIENCE; THE AESTHETICS OF ASTRONOMY

by Holly Henry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xiii + 208 pages. \$55 cloth.

In a recent "Talk of the Town" piece in the *New Yorker*, Bill Nye, host of the PBS show, *Bill Nye the Science Guy*, recalls watching his shadow lengthen on a beach: "When you understand how many stars are out there, more stars than there are grains of sand on the beach, you can think you're just a speck orbiting a speck in the middle of specklessness" (quoted in Friend 28). Nye's observation echoes reflections on the size of the universe that popularizers of science made in the twenties of the last century. Holly Henry's *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science* has as its major subject the relationship between popular accounts of astronomy and modern literature, especially the short stories and novels of Woolf, and the much less well-known fiction of Olaf Stapledon.

In her introductory chapter, "Formulating a Global Aesthetic," Henry clearly sets forth the scope of her investigation. "This study," she writes, "theorizes how Woolf's aesthetic perspectives, as well as her pacifist politics, were shaped by advances in astronomy and by