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Bloomsbury between Élite and Mass Culture

edited by
Marina Lops and Antonella Trotta

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Acknowledgments

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Was Bloomsbsury a coterie or a democratic avant-garde, an intellectual authority or an eccentric circle that "lived in squares and loved in triangles?": these are some of the questions discussed during the conference, starting with the notion of "democratic highbrow" in which Melba Cuddy-Keane, in her seminal study *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual and the Public Sphere* (2003), identified the distinctive feature of the Bloombury Group's intellectual experience.

This volume takes up and expands this project, including both the papers presented on that occasion and essays by other scholars who have decided to join forces on the theme in a multidisciplinary perspective encompassing the history of art, economics and the history of ideas, literature and cultural history. We wish to express our sincere gratitude for the enthusiasm with which they accepted our invitation to participate in this collection.

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Marina Lops and Antonella Trotta*

Bloomsbury between Élite and Mass Culture
A Selective Introduction

Between élite and mass culture

Of similar social background and sharing a progressive political faith and a sheer contempt for the conventions of their age, the artists, writers and intellectuals of the Bloomsbury Group represented a new way of living and working that marked a definitive break with the Victorian tradition and paved the way for modernity in English culture. The Group had fluid boundaries: its members included Clive Bell, Vanessa Bell, E. M. Forster, Roger Fry, Duncan Grant, Lytton Strachey, Desmond and Molly MacCarthy, John Maynard Keynes, Saxon Sydney-Turner, Adrian Stephen, Thoby Stephen, Leonard and Virginia Woolf, but David Garnett, Lidia Lopokova, Vita Sackville-West and Dora Carrington at least were "key associates" (Rosner 4). Furthermore, some members of the Group itself were convinced it had come to an end with the First World War, whilst others distinguished between the Old Bloomsbury before the war and the Later Bloomsbury that flourished in the 1920s and 30s.

Inspired by the "tremendous intellectual (also emotional) influence" (L. Woolf, *Old Bloomsbury* 141-45) of G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (1903), the Bloomsbury Group identified faith in goodness as inherent in human nature, the condemnation of utilitarianism and belief in the absolute value of human relationships and the aesthetic experience as the premises on which to base a modern ethics. Following these principles, in Cambridge some of them joined the meetings of the "Apostles" and in London all opted for voluntary exile from Kensington, the district

* Antonella Trotta is the author of sections 1 and 2, Marina Lops is the author of section 3.

of the wealthy classes, and moved to the streets and squares between London University and the British Museum.

In 1905, this "high Bohemia," according to the felicitous definition with which Wyndham Lewis expressed the widespread resentment towards the avant-garde between the two wars (48), met at 46 Gordon Square, home to the brothers Thoby and Adrian Stephen and their sisters, Virginia, future wife of Leonard Woolf, and Vanessa, who married Clive Bell in 1907. The house, whose decoration and furnishings expressed a "new domesticity" (Reed 150), hosted a modern *civilization of conversation* in which debates on philosophy, economics, politics, literature, the figurative arts and amorous relationships turned Bloomsbury into the headquarters of experimentalism.

In 1910 "human character changed" (V. Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" 321): England buried King Edward VII before such a panoply of monarchs that in retrospect the event appeared to herald the "curious drama" of liberal England (Dangerfield 13) and the funeral of the unjust and imperialist Europe of the 19th century (Stansky 3-4). Social unrest, unemployment, independence movements and the clash over women's suffrage had endangered the solidity of state institutions and George V was the "respectable monarch" Englishmen had never cared for: alien to the public and private conduct of his father, the new king did not conform to the image that "the industrialized world had left of an ancient divinity" (Dangerfield 38-39). The passage of Halley's comet, sighted by Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith as he returned from France to attend the king's funeral, multiplied the presentiments of doom or the prophecies of revolution.

Amidst these political and social upheavals, Roger Fry inaugurated *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, an exhibition extraordinary for the quality and quantity of the works on display devoted to the artists active in France between 1880 and 1910. It caused a cultural earthquake: for Vanessa Bell, the exhibition was an encouragement "to feel for oneself" (V. Bell 130); for Fry, the post-impressionists had found in form an equivalent of life without representing it (*Post-Impressionism* 82); and for Clive Bell from then onwards viewers should no longer ask what a painting represented, but "what does it make us feel" (Harrison,

English Art and Modernism 64). Virginia Woolf, who was working on *The Voyage Out* (1915), her first novel, found confirmation of her diffidence towards the realistic interpretation of the English novel that she later repudiated in the famous manifestos of modernist fiction; E. M. Forster published *Howards End*.

The exhibition was a *succès de scandale*: the public "was thrown into paroxysms of rage and laughter" and the newspapers wrote of it as an off-colour joke whose objective was to poke fun at the logical meaning of *Englishness* (V. Woolf, *Roger Fry* 153-54). For Fry, "the most inveterated and exasperated enemies of the new movement" were among the educated public, who had hitherto supported his career as a *connoisseur* of the Old Masters and who at the Grafton Galleries had "felt instinctively that their special culture was one of their social assets:"

> It was felt that one could only appreciate Amico di Sandro when one had acquired a certain considerable mass of erudition and given a great deal of time and attention, but to admire a Matisse required only a certain sensibility. One could feel fairly sure that one's maid could not rival one in the former case, but might by a mere haphazard gift of Providence surpass one in the second. ("Retrospect" 192-93)

The exhibition presented the most important exponents of the modernist movement, from Manet to Picasso and Matisse, celebrating them, and particularly Paul Cézanne, as the champions of a new era of history and art history founded on the value of the specific qualities of form, on the end of the hegemony of content and on the aesthetic experience as a new ethics. Similarly, Fry, Bell and the Bloomsbury painters and writers were working to radically revise the practice of art and literature and the criteria of critical judgement, with the aim of overturning "a social rather than an aesthetic prejudice" (193) and establishing "a new world and a new reality" (Stansky 3).

In 1912, by contrast, the *Second Post-Impressionists Exhibition*, curated by Fry and introduced by Bell for the section devoted to English disciples of the modernist movement like the "Bloomsberries" Vanessa Bell, Grant and Fry, was a *succès d'estime*: "Happily,—wrote Bell at the time—there is no need to be defensive. The battle is won" ("The English Group" 9).

Indeed, between 1909 and 1914, writes Claudio Zambianchi in this volume, Roger Fry had worked "to provide a safe guidance for those artists and critics who wanted to make sense of the shocking novelties proposed by modern art" (p.103). Certain that "art and its emotional content was something that an audience could be taught to experience and appreciate" (p. 93), in "An Essay in Aesthetics" (1909) he identified the *expression of emotions* as "a critical category of prime importance when defining the aims of Post-Impressionism, in order to introduce it to a vast audience" (p. 97). This notion, concludes Zambianchi, revealed itself so "effective in justifying works of art that were not meant to be a sheer representation of the external world" as to form the key to discourse on modern art not just in the UK but also in the USA, where the organizers of the Armory Show (1913) were themselves "struggling with problems of definition of the new art, while the art critics reviewing the exhibition had to introduce modern European art to an audience that was barely aware of its existence" (p. 100).

Precisely in the name of the expressive quality of form, between 1913 and 1919 Vanessa Bell, Grant and Fry, with Wyndham Lewis, Edward Wadsworth, Frederick Etchell, Paul Nash and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska created textiles, painted screens and ceramics inspired by European contemporary art with the Omega Workshops, transforming the interiors of middle class homes with fauve shawls, post-impressionist chairs or Cubist gowns, and challenging Edwardian culture and aesthetics with a new way of understanding art and life.

In 1914, Clive Bell published *Art* and invented the formula of *significant form*. This mysterious system of relationships between lines and colours, this shared and distinctive quality of objects that trigger the aesthetic emotion explained Poussin, the stained glass windows of Chartres, Piero della Francesca, Byzantine mosaics, Cézanne, Persian vases but also the experimental stories of Virginia Woolf—*The Mark on the Wall* (1917) and *Blue and Green* (1921)—and the only four abstract paintings by Vanessa Bell. In 1922, Virginia expressed this new awareness of form in *Jacob's Room* and Vanessa, who would never again work with pure abstraction "because, having done it, there seemed nothing

else to do" (Q. Bell 119), recalled this exercise in "technical and conceptual sophistication" in portraits, still lifes, interior paintings and in her craft practice (Watney 100). Some aspects of this temporary conversion can be found in the decoration of Charleston in Sussex, now threatened by its excessive popularity but a quiet refuge for the Group during First World War, "the most disillusioning historical event in the Bloomsbury's own history" (Haule 4).

In 1918, Lytton Strachey obtained an astonishing success with *Eminent Victorians*, for David Garnett "the first explosive 'post-War' book" (Shone 180), and in 1919 Maynard Keynes became "a public man" with his prophetic *The Economic Consequences of Peace*, "a book that influences the world without being in the last a work of art" (V. Woolf, *Diary* 2: 33).

In 1920, Leonard Woolf published *Empire and Commerce in Africa* and Fry *Vision and Design*, a selection of "stimulating and provocative" essays whose success confirmed his influence in the art world (Spalding, *Roger Fry* 232-38).

Like *Art* and *Eminents Victorians*, Fry's book was published by Chatto and Windus. These were fairly cheap editions, very different from those of the Hogarth Press, the publishing house founded by the Woolfs in 1917 as an autonomous, undemanding publisher of Virginia's own work and later a fully-fledged press whose pre-eminence was widely acknowledged. In 1919, its catalogue comprised *Kew Gardens* by Virginia, *Prelude* by Katherine Mansfield, *The Critic in Judgement* by John Middleton Murry, *Poems* by T. S. Eliot, *Stories from the Old Testament* by Logan Pearsall Smith, and in 1923, Hope Mirrlees' *Paris: A Poem* and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. It later published Gorky, Chekhov, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, Italo Svevo, Rainer Maria Rilke and Sigmund Freud.

The key moment in the production procedures of the Hogarth Press was book design, fundamental to the success of the texts and the authors with the public and often entrusted to the artists of the Group. However, as Ilaria Andreoli writes in this volume, "in the torrent of books and essays on the Bloomsbury artists over the last thirty years or so, scant attention has been paid to their graphic work" (p. 188), although some practices are exceptional

within the contemporary world of the printed book, starting with the free use of materials and techniques, "for the torment of bibliographers and the delight of bibliophiles" (p. 181). These practices, which Andreoli reconstructs in their complex (and not always successful) development, between "amateurism and experimentalism," demonstrate on the one hand the enduring influence of the Omega Workshops, with which the Hogarth Press shared "a closer relationship of art and industry," and on the other a new "open, pragmatic, even humoristic approach to book production" (p. 188).

In 1928, the Hogarth Press, which had already published *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Common Reader* and *To The Lighthouse*, was popular with the public and with the market, in the UK and the USA. In the 1940s, Leonard sold the Hogarth Press to Chatto and Windus, with the proviso that it was to keep its name and himself retain the privilege of defining its catalogue, starting with the posthumous editions of Virginia's works such as *The Death of the Moth* (1942), *A Haunted House* (1944), *The Moment and Other Essays* (1947), and *The Captain's Deathbed and Other Essays* (1950).

In the late 1920s, "the name of Bloomsbury" was famous in Berlin, Paris and New York (Mortimer 310) and in London it was identified with an avant-garde similar to that advanced sector of the intellectual *haute bourgeoisie* that in 19th-century France had supported the values of the new art (Harrison, "Englishness and Modernism Revisited"). This social and cultural aristocracy, for which England had coined the term *highbrow*, was opposed by a wider public consisting of the new middle class that, thanks to economic growth and the consolidation of educational reforms, now made its appearance on the market for art and literature. This new majority, the *middlebrow*, did not share the values of Modernism and the *mid-taste* in the figurative arts was supported by the Royal Academy, just as the *mid-taste* in literature was catered for by the *book selections* of organizations for the promotion of reading such as the Book Society, established in 1927 and led by the novelist Hugh Walpole. But, as Nicola Wilson shows in this volume, Bloomsbury "sought to work beyond such cultural and geographical confines" (p. 154). Though the docu-

mented public record contains little evidence of the relationship between the Hogarth Press and the Book Society, from its early days the Hogarth Press worked with large commercial publishers to increase the scale and reach of its production. It also published many works that became "bestsellers," often thanks to the patronage—and the large readership—of the Book Society: letters in the Hogarth Press archive clearly show that, "despite contemporary misgivings about the role and possible effects of the new book club, Leonard and Virginia Woolf were, in common with other publishers of the time, keen to work with the Book Society selection committee," (p. 162) and that there were tangible connections between Bloomsbury and Belgravia, where the Society was located, "at the heart of royalist London and its powerful symbols of ceremony and Empire" (p. 157).

Thus, a genuine culture war was being fought in England between the two world wars, fed by novelties in communication technology and the mechanization of publishing. Publishing, newspapers and radio had created a new audience and new spaces for the negotiation of values. As converts to wireless, Forster, Keynes, the Woolfs, Clive Bell and Roger Fry were committed to making "their deeply held aesthetic and ethical beliefs" suitable for the times and means of the new medium of mass communication, whose potential for shaping the public sphere was extraordinary (Avery 36).

In the fall of 1929, for example, Roger Fry gave a series of talks for BBC Radio entitled *The Meaning of Pictures*: aired weekly, these radio broadcasts guided listeners through a comprehensive understanding of some significant works of art, selected as "case studies" and used to test the theoretical principles of Fry's formalist doctrine. As Salvatore Bizzarro writes in this volume, "Fry's effort was very remarkable" (p. 213), especially considering that, in the late 1920s, he tried to revise the very foundations of his criticism, starting from the relationship between form and content, so important at the time of the battle over Post-Impressionism. Switching on their radio, writes Bizzarro, the public learned "the art of being a spectator," (p. 226) thanks to the mediation of the critic, whose notions, if they did not succeed in driving listeners to "take the next omnibus to the

National Gallery, there to gratify the desire for seeing that has been so miraculously stimulated" (V. Woolf, *Roger Fry* 228), certainly elicited "the sense of communion […] that is primarily a communication between human beings" (p. 226), in the truest spirit of Bloomsbury.

In the meantime, articles, reviews of and by members of the Group, literary portraits and photographs appeared in major newspapers and magazines. For *Vogue*, Clive Bell explained modern art in "easily consumable bites" (Garrity 42) with such success that he was included in the magazine's "Hall of Fame" as "one of the pre-eminent art and cultural critics in Europe" (Hall 48). Virginia Woolf was photographed in an ill-fitting Victorian dress with an irresistible "backward-looking" effect that "a twenty-first-century woman novelist might have turned […] to her advantage, using it to preview a forthcoming novel" (Spalding, *Virginia Woolf* 125). In 1924, a picture of the Woolfs' living room at 52 Tavistock Square, decorated by Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, was published as a "period room" of the present day (14). The decoration, like the house, was destroyed by the bombings of 1940: this timely photograph now preserves its only surviving fragment as "a fragile reminder of a different age, a different way of life" (15).

The consequences of this public exposure were, on the one hand, the renewal of political and cultural communication and on the other the identification of the Group with a *lifestyle*, perceived by the British public either as a stronghold of culture and civilization against barbarism or as the despicable epitome of modernist intellectual elitism. "Bloomsbury" became a moniker for a group of cultural figures who spent a lot of time at the BBC (Whitehead 121), in the editorial offices of glossy magazines or the studios of fashionable photographers. For Mary Butts, a modernist writer and early biographer of the Group, "civilization [was] their business" (44).

A preposterous history

In private, however, for Bloomsbury there was no room "for comfort or support, certainly not [for] applause:" from 1920, its

members cultivated friendship, sharing and the irony of serious entertainment in the Memoir Club. The intimate nature of these meetings is illustrated by Vanessa Bell's famous painting of 1943:

> [...] seated in a circle are Desmond MacCarthy, Molly MacCarthy, Quentin Bell, Forster, David Garnett, Vanessa Bell in a hat, Duncan Grant, Leonard Woolf, Maynard Keynes, Lydia Keynes. And on the wall are Bloomsbury portraits of the three deceased members, Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey and Roger Fry. Desmond MacCarthy, appropriately, is reading a paper. (Haule 6)

Whilst for the public Bloomsbury had just been born, the Group was already looking to its past and telling its history through private readings of autobiographical texts whose influence on the public life and work of each of its members has been studied only in part (Rosenbaum, *The Bloomsbury Group Memoir Club* 80-153). At the Memoir Club, every conversation began with the phrase "Before the War," which for Bloomsbury had "an added poignancy, a wistful regret, while never running over into nostalgia, served as some kind of touchstone by which to measure the quality of life afterwards" (Shone 203).

In 1928, Molly MacCarthy announced the last meeting of the Club, to hear Virginia Woolf—who had just finished *Orlando* and started *A Room of One's Own*—reading a text on the Group's beginnings. "What was supposed to signal the end of the Club, however, seems to have resuscitated it" (Haule 8): the meetings continued more or less regularly until the mid-1960s, though for the public the meaning of Bloomsbury was either being lost or had in fact always been ambiguous.

In *The Georgian Literary Scene* (1935), for example, Franck Swinnerton described the Group as a gathering of "ill-mannered dilettanti:" excessively influential in political and cultural life thanks to their class privilege, the "Bloomsberries" were actually only interested in establishing a "dictatorship of brains," whose sworn enemy was Democracy (163-66). These attacks were "severe swingeings" that wounded the Group "as a robin affects a rinocheros–except in the depths of the nights" (V. Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* 240): was it not true that Leonard was "a very

active Socialist," Virginia wrote in support of women's rights, Forster of the liberal cause and Keynes was "a leading figure" in the Labour government (van O'Connor 51)? In 1937, however, these accusations must have been distressing: not only had they all supported the event at the Royal Albert Hall for the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, but on 20 July 1937, Julian, Vanessa and Clive Bell's son, had died driving an ambulance for Spanish Medical Aid. In 1938, Virginia helped to fund the exhibition of Picasso's *Guernica*, with over sixty preparatory paintings, sketches and studies for the composition at the New Burlington Galleries (Spalding, *Virginia Woolf* 155).

At the same time, a new generation of art critics like R. H. Wilensky, Adrian Stokes and Herbert Read favoured a new season of the artistic avant-garde that, critical of the interests of Bloomsbury, had declared the outdatedness of the "formalised naturalism" of Post-Impressionism to the advantage of Surrealism and abstract art. In 1934, Read published *Art and Industry*, a volume designed by Herbert Bayer and dedicated to Walter Gropius and Laslo Moholy-Nagy, and sponsored the first exhibition by Unit One, which achieved a *succès de scandale* second only to the exhibitions at the Grafton Galleries: "art for art's sake, Pure Form, went by the board totally," wrote Anthony Blunt retrospectively, and this young generation of artists and intellectuals was determined to replace Fry and Bell with Marx and Engels (164).

So, in 1934, Clive Bell published a new book, *Enjoying Pictures*, to offer a (disinterested) approach to the experience of art thanks to a new critical method, descriptive rather than normative, hierarchical and non-exclusive: in the midst of the "battle of brows," writes Antonella Trotta in this volume, Bell was ready to say that "nevertheless, even from an impure interest in art something is gained" (p. 207), and aimed to show it to many an open-minded gentleman who look at paintings as they read a book. Recalling the pleasure and dismay with which he had followed Fry at a marching pace around museums and galleries, Bell devoted to this ordinary visitor a guided tour, offering an accessible definition of "How to look at pictures:" he was now ready to assert that there is no reason why the average member

of the public should not enjoy art as "just good things amongst the other good things of life" (p. 207), partly in response to their own preferences, idiosyncrasies, predilections, prejudices, literary and philosophical inclinations. For Bell and the sensitive and gifted minority, "art does work miracles", but for others it is fair to assume that it gives a "fillip" to common experience (p. 209).

"Bloomsbury was the most constructive and creative influence on English taste between the Wars," wrote Stephen Spender at the time; he owed his career in part to the Hogarth Press and his visits to 52 Tavistock Square, but for his generation, "unable to withdraw into exquisite tale-telling and beautiful scenery" and "terribly involved in events and oppressed by them," (402) the Group seemed like the image of "a luminous grotto made of crystal leaves colored agate or jade" (395), simultaneously fascinating and repellent, and above all posthumous.

In 1947, in Cambridge, the Finnish writer Irma Rantavaara was so disconcerted by the contradictory judgements that she heard in lectures on the Group by her professors that she attempted to describe them in "Bloomsbury atmosphere," the most interesting chapter of *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury* (1953), a historiographical effort in the context of the "New Critical era." By this time Bloomsbury "belonged to myth" and the myth presented:

> [...] the ironic Mr. Strachey tittering over some stupidity, the 'illuminated' Mr. Fry turning his X-ray eyes on a French painting, the stiff and elegant Mrs. Woolf writing and rewriting her luminous sentences, and all of them, with their innumerable friends laughing and talking, ever so intelligently. This is not quite the way it was either, but it offers a pleasant image for the historian to analyze. (van O'Connor 51)

So, in *Punch*, R. G. G. Prince concluded that, if the Group had wished to overturn the institutions of the family, politics, culture to the cry—shrill as the voice of Lytton Strachey—of "preposterous," "absurd," "ridiculous" (van O'Connor 50), the only revolution it had ever achieved was that "the arts may be killed by kindness." In the 1950s, for young writers and artists Bloomsbury was "a great wall of orthodoxy blocking [their] way," albeit "a more civilized orthodoxy than the one it supplanted," as evidenced by the consolidated success of the programmes broad-

cast on the third channel of the BBC, the quality and quantity of books borrowed in public libraries and the number of visitors to London museums (51), in whose rooms the portraits of members of the Group appeared to the eyes of visitors as icons of "un altro tempo" (Vergine).

In 1949, Leonard Woolf commissioned Raymond Mortimer—"second generation Bloomsbury" writer, essayist, already author of the monograph *Duncan Grant* (1946) and of essays on Virginia Woolf and Lytton Stratchey—to write a biography of the Group for the American audience. The book was never published, but two decades earlier Mortimer himself had already composed a well-received account of the Group, thanks in part to the use of a *preposterous* literary fiction: projecting the Group into the correct distance of the near future of the 1960s he had described its character (and predicted its success) quoting from an imaginary "seventh volume of Sir Raymond Mortimer's trustworthy if academic *Studies in Twentieth Century Culture* (Hogarth Press, 1960)" (310).

In fact, by the end of the sixties Bloomsbury had become a cultural icon, since its values, subject to a complex process of rediscovery and reinvention that mirrored the changing values of posterity, were seen as foreshadowing the experiences of the counterculture. "[It is] not preposterous that the past should be altered by the present, as much as the present is directed by the past," wrote T. S. Eliot (15), and today the Group is a major presence in the cultural industry.

The gardens and squares where they lived are home to more libraries, museums, and educational establishments than any other part of London, young people flock to the area's inspiring cultural enterprises and tourists walk through streets seeking the blue plaques that commemorate Bloomsbury celebrities. In this book, Francesca Manes Rossi, Alessandra Allini and Riccardo Macchioni consider the potential for adopting a territorial report in the context of this intellectual district. Within this perspective, a territorial report may play a dual role, as a tool for accountability and legitimacy demonstrating to all stakeholders what has been achieved and as a basis for planning new strategies and activities involving the whole community.

"Democratic Highbrow"

An exclusive and elitist coterie or an intellectual avant-garde inspired by an authentically democratic vocation? The history of the reception of Bloomsbury runs within the perimeter traced by these questions and the opposition between these divergent points of view defines the terms of the critical debate over the Group, which became particularly heated from the 1960s onwards and to which Flora de Giovanni devotes the opening chapter of this volume. Tellingly entitled "Citizens of the Bloomsbury Nation", the essay traces the fortunes of the Group, culminating in the definitive consecration of its members (above all Virginia Woolf) as true cultural icons of our time. Above all, it aims to shed light on a series of crucial questions in Bloomsbury criticism, without attempting a definitive answer but with the objective of offering the reader the tools to navigate this extremely rich and complex web of judgements and proposed interpretations. Though in the statements of some of its members the assertion of the primacy of the individual and his autonomy led to the rejection of the existence of a group proper, capable of identifying itself in a "common theory, system, or principles" (L. Woolf), yet, de Giovanni notes, "paradoxically, it is precisely the recognition of the sovereignty of the individual which binds Bloomsbury together" (p. 30). The reflection on the nature and identity of Bloomsbury takes on particular importance in the light of the controversial and complex relationship linking this experience with the world of mass culture. Unavoidable, in this context, is the reference to the positions expressed by Melba Cuddy-Keane (2003), to whom we owe the felicitous oxymoron "democratic highbrow"—not coincidentally borrowed explicitly for the title of this volume. The expression, observes de Giovanni, reinterprets "the connection between highbrow intellectual values and mass audience" (p. 32) from a new perspective and in doing so calls into question an established critical paradigm postulating the radical incompatibility of modernist experimentation with the conventions and forms of expression of mass culture. Cuddy-Keane's study belongs to a recent critical tradition, carefully reconstructed by de Giovanni, which in the past twenty years has favoured research into the relations between

Bloomsbury, the cultural industry and the new media. The final pages of the essay are thus devoted to the presence of Bloomsbury in the cultural industry, and the author stresses that members of the group made a crucial contribution to their own canonization as "celebrities." They exploited the new means of communication not only as a way to disseminate their texts and ideas, but also as an instrument of self-promotion and to convey their own identity as artists and intellectuals whose eccentric and unconventional lifestyle "was advertised as a marketable commodity" (p. 33).

It is no coincidence, then, that in the interwar period their reputation was also based on their participation in BBC radio broadcasts and their articles in the pages of *Vogue*. The essays by Rossana Bonadei and Gerardo Salvati are devoted to the significance of Bloomsbury's presence on the radio.

In her "In Wireless Conversation. Bloomsbury and the BBC" Bonadei provides a close (and insightful) reading of Virginia Woolf's "Craftmanship," the talk aired on 29 April 1937 as part of the series *Words Fail Me.* As Bonadei stresses, Woolf's appearance on the BBC, though controversial and at times contentious, was a deliberate way of measuring up to the challenge of language and the whole discourse on the art of writing by other means, on new grounds and with a broader and "unknown" audience in mind. It was a challenge aimed at mass readers, at the modern interpreter caught up in the hasty language of the media; an interpreter who, just like the "radio talker," was coming to terms with the elusive nature of words and the precarious, relational and contextual meanings of each speech act. Thus Woolf conceived her collaboration with radio as an opportunity to give new voice and strength to the search for that "Common Ground" made up of language, ideas and imaginaries that famously embodied her poetic/political programme. Dizzyingly metatextual and constructed as a tribute to "nomadic" words and the many challenges that language poses to writing and reading, "Craftsmanship," as Bonadei argues, shows language in a double act, between performance and essay construction, and examines the new landscapes of mass culture.

Woolf's problematic "conversion" to wireless is further explored by Gerardo Salvati in his "Virginia Woolf, the Dandy and

the BBC." Starting from the assumption that Woolf's position on radio "was essentially political to the extent that she was extremely aware of it as a new cultural medium for shaping public opinion" (p. 230), Salvati develops his argument by focusing on "Beau Brummell," the solo talk broadcast on 20th November 1929 as the second of a three-part series entitled "Miniature Biographies." Woolf's humorous and ironic portrait of the famous dandy, he claims, can be interpreted as an attempt on her part to question the widespread critical opinion that identified Bloomsbury with a cultural élite completely detached from the world around them and to trace "a clear perimeter of her artistic vision. A vision that does not include the figure of the dandy, but, on the contrary, includes the figure of the engaged artist" (p. 235). Discussing "Beau Brummel" in the wider context of her literary criticism, Salvati shows that Woolf made use of the radio as a "complementary place where she could explain and discuss her vision of art and literature" (p. 230), fully aware of the democratic potential of the new medium and of the opportunity it offered to share her modernist aesthetic credo with a new and wider audience.

Traditionally conceived as a repository of humanist-liberal values, Forster's *oeuvre* testifies to his life-long commitment as one the most authoritative intellectuals of interwar and postwar England and bears clear evidence of Bloomsbury's social and political concerns. Class conflict, democracy and the role of intellectuals in Edwardian England are the issues tackled in his masterpiece *Howards End*, the object of Maria Teresa Chialant's careful reading in "Poets, Empire-builders and Proles: Class Conflict and England's Destiny in E. M. Forster's *Howards End*." Interpreting the novel as an analysis of class relations at the turn of the 20th century, Chialant sheds light on the text's ambivalences. Based on a set of binary oppositions that coincide with the contrasting worldviews of the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes, the narrative seems to attempt to overcome these dichotomies. However, Chialant argues, the values of social harmony and inner equilibrium epitomized in the famous epigraph "only connect…" are somewhat contradicted by the manner in which the events play out. Considered one of the novel's weakest points in terms of

inner coherence and textual consistency, this contradiction is re-evaluated here as evidence of the text's dialogic and polyphonic aspect. This is a text that, as Chialant claims, by containing the flaws and weaknesses that can be perceived in Forster's own ideological position, "gains rather than loses" (p. 89). A similar critical stance is adopted by Marina Lops in her "'England belonged to them.' Edward Carpenter and Forster's 'Utopia' of Masculine Love in *Maurice*." Starting from Forster's own account of the genesis of the novel after a visit to Edward Carpenter, the essay explores the complex and ambivalent relationship that connects Forster's tale of homosexual self-discovery to Carpenter's thought and life and investigates the way in which Forster's narrative draws on Carpenter's evolutionary progressivism and reworks his utopian vision. Subverting traditional class and gender distinctions, the cross-class homosexual relationship between Maurice and Alec seems to create room for a new and different model of social and sexual relations. However, as Marina Lops argues, the much-discussed "happy" ending of the novel, with its generic turn from realism to pastoral fantasy, transforms Carpenter's nineteenth-century optimistic stance into a more sombre view, which problematically questions "the very possibility for the homosexual subject of a concrete and successful integration into the collective social body" (p. 127) and closes the narrative on a dull note of scepticism and disenchantment.

Experimentation and innovation in fields as multifarious as literature, economics, art, psychoanalysis represent only part of Bloomsbury's legacy. With their bohemian lifestyles, their sheer contempt for the conventions of their age, their espousal of homosexuality and heterosexual sex outside marriage, the artists, writers and intellectuals of the Group marked a definitive break with the Victorian ethos and embodied the new spirit of modernity in their everyday experience as much as in their outstanding intellectual achievements. The blurring of the boundary between "private" and "public" is thus a key to understanding Bloomsbury's successful afterlife and helps to explain much of its enduring appeal. Paradigmatic in this respect is the case of Lytton Strachey, to whom Todd Avery devotes the essay "A Mandarin for the Masses. Lytton Strachey's Jesus Complex." Avery's reading of Strachey's

unpublished letters to his lover Roger Senhouse introduces a new critical perspective from which to investigate the close connection between Strachey's queer sexuality and his broader ethical and spiritual concerns, and, in particular, his hitherto unexplored interest in the figure of Jesus. As Avery argues, this interest, expressed in an extremely unusual and transgressive form towards the end of his life, gave Strachey an opportunity to assert in an unprecedented and provocative way the value of freedom of choice and action in private and sexual matters as a pre-requisite of civilization and to imagine, along with his Bloomsbury friends, "the simultaneously personal and political, biological and cultural arena of sexuality, […] as a workshop of democratic civilization" (p. 116).

If Bloomsbury helped to pave the way for modernity and revitalized British culture, enabling it to eschew its traditional insularity, it was in part thanks to its crucial role in popularizing psychoanalysis in the English-speaking world. The publication of Freud's works by the Hogarth Press, as Benedetta Guerrini degl'Innocenti reminds us in her "'A house full with unrelated passions.' Bloomsbury and Psychoanalysis," was a major cultural event and to Bloomsbury's influence, she claims, we should attribute the characterization of psychoanalysis as a literary rather than a scientific discourse that became a leitmotif in England. With reference to both Virginia Woolf's fiction and autobiographical writing, Guerrini discusses the writer's ambivalent attitude to psychoanalytic thought and concludes her essay with a touching evocation of Woolf's first and only meeting with Sigmund Freud, in January 1939.

Finally, in Francesca Orestano's "Virginia Woolf and the Art of Cooking" we are introduced to the private realm of the writer's domestic life. In line with the recent critical focus on Bloomsbury's material culture and drawing on the results of this research, Orestano sets out to analyse the many ways in which the art of writing and the art of cooking mingled in the course of Virginia Woolf's life and work. A meaningful token of cultural identity, food is the key to understanding the complex network of lowbrow-highbrow relationships that existed within her household and, in particular, within the space of her kitchen. Generally precluded to the Victorian mistress, the kitchen acquires a

new and different connotation when Virginia no longer limits herself to presiding over it, as her mother had done, but actively participates in the preparation of food, for example by teaching her cook, Louie Mayer/Louisa Annie Everest, how to bake cottage loaf. The proximity of mistress and cook, and their shared intimacy, "no longer channeled in the conventional master/servant, order/obedience pattern," (p. 45) as Orestano observes, acts as an implicit questioning of consolidated social hierarchies and habits and reflects that change in "human character" that Woolf celebrated in her "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1924). A change that Bloomsbury helped to enact and that certainly represents an essential part of its invaluable legacy.

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Flora de Giovanni

Citizens of the Bloomsbury Nation

For a century now the Bloomsbury Group has been the subject of a heated cultural debate, starting from D. H. Lawrence's 1915 fierce attack on the Cambridge of Russell and Keynes, which disgusted him with "its smell of rottenness." "Gloomsbury" in Berenson's words; "a rotten crew" according to Russell, who was nonetheless connected with it; "a select and snobbish club" which substituted money for talent in the opinion of Wyndham Lewis; a corrupt clique which infected the cultural establishment, as the Leavises maintained: these were some of the definitions applied to the Group. Others, however, considered it be "the most constructive and creative influence on English taste between the two Wars […] which became almost a cult" (Spender 140). Today such influence—such cult—is more pervasive than ever, as Rosner states in her introduction to the recent *Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group* (2014), mentioning the legacy of Keynes and Virginia Woolf (2). The Group is still well-known, and not only for its outstanding intellectual achievements in the fields of Post-Impressionism, literary Modernism, macroeconomics and psychoanalysis, to name just a few, which marked the shift from Victorianism to modernity, rejuvenating British culture and allowing it to eschew insularity. It also promoted a change in customs, championing a new, unconventional kind of domesticity, which is the main reason why today its members have an existence in popular culture, one that is based on their image rather than their *oeuvres* (Golsdworthy 186). Although it is undeniable, however, that much of Bloomsbury's appeal lies in their personal lives and sexual attitudes, the key to its successful afterlife appears to be the absence of any clear-cut distinction between their private and public dimensions, so that "the group's artistic advances and

attitudes color their love lives and domestic decisions, and vice versa" (Marler, "Bloomsbury's Afterlife" 216).

Coined as a private joke and publicised in the press in the '20s, the name became a "word of abuse" in the '30s, when its members reached the apex of their ascendancy and power. According to Quentin Bell, "Bloomsbury was always under fire," as often happens to those circles which, contributing to the thought of their time, arouse hostility in their contemporaries (*Bloomsbury* 153). Among other things, its detractors perceived it as "a mutual admiration society," whose influential position allowed it to promote its acolytes' works and ideas, refusing the due recognition to those who did not belong to it. Not surprisingly, therefore, the members strenuously denied that such a group ever existed other than as a group of friends. According to Virginia Woolf, it was "largely a creation of the journalists" (*Letters* 5: 91), while Clive Bell defined it "a collection of individuals" and Leonard Woolf, affirming that they had "no common theory, system, or principles," remarked that their achievements in art, economics, politics and literature were "purely individual" and "had nothing to do with any group" (25-26). Yet still, as Williams argues, they were keenly aware of being different from "the outside world"—from the dominant sector of the ruling class in which they belonged—for their candour, rationality, open-mindedness, and especially for their social conscience. Therefore, in his opinion, the clue to the essential definition of Bloomsbury lies in the seeming contradiction of disclaiming their status as a formal group while insisting on their group qualities. Paradoxically, it is precisely the recognition of the sovereignty of the individual which binds Bloomsbury together. Its true organizing value, in fact, was "the unobstructed free expression of the civilized individual" (Williams 165), which any shared system of thought would have undermined, their various positions being "all in effect *alternatives* to a general theory" (Williams 167).

If we acknowledge Bloomsbury's social concern as one of its constituent features, we cannot but disagree with those who blamed it for being a coterie of languid aesthetes and moneyed *dilettanti* completely detached from the world around them, a criticism intimately connected with the indictment of elitism

they were often charged with. In listing all the activities in which they were engaged and the causes to which they were committed, Virginia Woolf concludes: " […] they have done their very best to make humanity in the mass appreciate what they knew and saw," also mentioning, as a proof, the wide circulation of such her essays as *The Common Reader, A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, which reached "a far wider circle than a private little circle of exquisite and cultivated people" (*Letters* 6: 419-20). The interrelated issues of Bloomsbury's supposed elitism and disengagement are also tackled by Quentin Bell, who, while admitting that the Bloomsbury artists and Virginia Woolf in some of her novels were decidedly elitist since they "could have only appealed to a small minority," maintains that the prose writers such as Keynes, Strachey, MacCarthy, Leonard Woolf (and Woolf herself as an essayist) should not so much be thought of as "'literary artists' but rather as social theorists who made use of language," a language that any English-speaking person can easily understand ("The Vulgar Passion" 240). Rejecting the image of the Group as one entirely devoted to the pleasures of art and human intercourse, Bell conflates the notions of elitism and disengagement, showing how Bloomsbury's main concern was to defy "the vulgar passion"—i.e. intense emotions elicited by those emotive ideas and rhetoric which are "the very stuff of reactionary politics" (242)—in the name of reason, whose use in the management of public affairs they regarded as essential. And among the examples of Bloomsbury's "war with the forces of unreason," he aptly mentions *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919), where Keynes clearly states that no nation is authorised, by whatever belief or principle, to take revenge on its enemies' children for their parents' misdoings, a position apparently very unpopular in interwar Britain. Questioning established mythologies, discussing enduring taboos, Bloomsbury acts, in Bell's opinion, as a sort of antibody attacking the viruses of "the vulgar passion" whenever they menace the values of liberal England. Crediting the Group with a crucial role in imposing the restraint of reason on the untempered emotionalism that endangers English cultural and political life, Quentin Bell provides an early version of the relationship between Bloomsbury

and contemporary culture in terms of moral commitment and dissemination of democratic ideas. Along these lines, Cuddy-Keane's seminal study *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual and the Public Sphere* (2003) further articulates the connection between highbrow intellectual values and mass audience, showing how Virginia Woolf "opposed the increasing standardization or 'massification' of the reading public implicit in the process of mass production and distribution." By encouraging a dialogic relation with her readers, she recasts "'highbrowism' as a radical social practice," based on "democratic inclusiveness and intellectual education" (1-2). Hence the oxymoronic but illuminating definition of "democratic highbrows."

Today it is widely recognised that, far from being two reciprocally exclusive phenomena, Modernism and mass culture are "historically related and dialectically interdependent" (Pease 197). In the wake of Huyssen's *After the Great Divide* (1986), where Modernism is seen as constituting itself "through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture" (vii), a lively debate has been sparked off among the scholars. Though convinced that the relation between high and low culture was more dynamic and ambivalent than it has been admitted in the past, apparently the critics do not agree as to how and to what extent the two were interrelated and mutually influential. Some of the issues at stake are: how far reaching and pervasive "the anxiety of contamination," which cannot be dismissed altogether, was; how Modernism altered the way in which the market was perceived, changing its nature once and for all (Wicke 5); whether the market influenced modernist aesthetics, which appears to be "embedded in the very type of writing its logic and development tended to erase" (Jaffe 6); whether "radical poetics of Modernism were 'co-opted' by market society" or rather, they were the expression of "the very essence of post-traditional modernity" (Cooper 217); in what ways "early-twentieth-century artists engaged mass-culture practices to enhance or advance their work" (Pease 200); how the market-savvy modernist in the incipient age of celebrity sought to expand the literary market, transforming his/her unmistakable style into a means of promotion.

In many recent studies, Bloomsbury's connection with mass culture has been convincingly dealt with. Cooper, for instance, has interestingly analysed Bloomsbury's genetic link with market society, resorting to the notion of noetic community—a subcultural formation, that is, organised around shared affects, experiences, interests and goals, whose ties with the past and the nation become increasingly looser, like those of the capital, which no longer recognises national borders or past loyalties. Arguing that "the noetic communities themselves are the fissures and fractures in the cultural monolith under the disintegrative pressure of the market-form" (147), Cooper maintains that the Bloomsbury Group, one of late modernity's founding enclaves, "provides market society with its most typical form of social and cultural development" (246), and claims that "[t]oday we are all citizens of the Bloomsbury nation" (248). Also the vexed question of the Group's mixed attitudes towards the new media has been examined, not surprisingly, since Bloomsbury was "the first aesthetic movement to be subject to the now familiar phenomenon of media hype" (Whitehead 121). Undoubtedly, the Group's contribution to fashion magazines like *Vogue* and BBC programmes testifies to their willingness to bridge the Great Divide between high and mass culture. But whereas in his influential *Radio Modernism* (2006), Avery points out that their involvement in radio is a key example of how they "strove to preserve their deeply held ethical and aesthetic beliefs […] while adjusting them to fit the demands of an increasing technologized mass culture" (35), other scholars mainly focus on the circulation of their image promoted by the mass media, where they appeared less as artists and intellectuals than as eccentric "personalities" whose fashionable lifestyle was advertised as a marketable commodity (Whitehead, Garrity). As a consequence, Bloomsbury's elitism has been radically questioned, whether by reinterpreting their aesthetic principles in a more inclusive, accessible way (an example being the post-impressionist emphasis on form, apparently perceived as troubling by Woolf herself, which has been credited with a new democratic appeal) (Goldman 132, Spalding 491), or by highlighting, especially in her case, "the tension between the urge to decry the institutions of the literary market-

place and the need to master and manipulate those institutions" (Collier 363), with the result that she is seen as both a subject and an object of manipulation as far as her relationships with the marketplace are concerned.

Bloomsbury's appearance in interwar British media both as contributors and "personalities" is largely responsible for their current image in popular culture and can be considered the first step toward their canonization as celebrities. Though their fortunes rose and fell in the course of last century—as sometimes happens to those intellectuals who are ahead of their times once the innovations they have introduced have been progressively absorbed into the established culture and superseded—the late '60s saw the inception of Bloomsbury revival, started by Holroyd's biography of Lytton Strachey, which made them seem revolutionary again "at a moment when rebellion of every kind was most likely to find a receptive audience" (Marler, *Bloomsbury Pie* 93). A favourable cultural shift was taking place—one that the Group had seemingly anticipated in ethos and ideology—and Bloomsbury's radicalism, likened to the youth movement's, was recognised as such and welcomed by the new generation. The circle was mainly associated with queer rights and women's struggles, respectively through Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf, whose extraordinary posthumous success is in fact deeply indebted to second wave feminism. Her rise to fame and iconicity, brilliantly described by Silver in *Virginia Woolf Icon* (1999), is a most fascinating example of border crossing between "'high culture' associated, variously, with the academy and/or intellectuals and the realm of mass-produced and/or popular culture" (4).

Also Leonard Woolf played a crucial role in the Bloomsbury revival both as his wife's attentive and keen literary executor in the years of neglect and as the author of a five-volume autobiography (1960-1969) which was very well received by the reading public, becoming, as Marler maintains, "the bridge between Bloomsbury itself and what would become the Bloomsbury industry" ("Afterlife" 221). Today such industry is a thriving and ever expanding one, as attested by films such as Gilbert's *Tom & Viv* (1994), Hampton's *Carrington* (1995), Daldry's *The Hours* (2002), the forthcoming *Vita & Virginia*; BBC dramas (Kaijser's

2015 *Life in Squares*); ballets (*Bloomsbury/It's not Real* and *Woolf Works*); novels such as Giménez-Bartlett's *Una habitación ajena* (1997), Seller's *Vanessa and Virginia* (2008), Parmar's *Vanessa and her Sister* (2014); exhibitions both in England—*The Art of Bloomsbury* (1999) and *A Room of their Own: Lost Bloosmbury Interiors 1913-1940*—and abroad (*Un altro tempo. Tra Decadentismo e Modern Style*, Rovereto 2012); and by the favour enjoyed by Monk's House and Charleston as tourist attractions. The list is far from complete and, moreover, does not include the great number of scholarly studies devoted to the Group and its members, but it certainly provides ample evidence of Bloomsbury's popularity and strong presence in mass culture. And although it is undeniable that the Group's reputation and fame are partially built on the current Woolf craze that is sweeping both the academy and popular culture, I am inclined to think that she owes part of the fascination she exerts as an author and icon to her Bloomsbury connection. Because Bloomsbury, "a pleasant reverberating sound" in Vanessa Bell's words (95), still evokes freedom and experiments, the courage to speak one's mind and the rupture with the past, mutual influence and cross-collaboration, but also tolerance in sexual matters, fun, gossip and a touch of frivolity—all ingredients, it appears, of an everlasting myth which does not seem to be on the wane.

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Francesca Orestano

Virginia Woolf and the Art of Cooking

If we set focus on the art of Virginia Woolf—undoubtedly the art of writing—the space surrounding her life has at its core the room of her own, the writing desk and the printing press, manuscripts and proofs, notebooks and diaries, and the tools for typing and book-binding. The desk of the writer is markedly different and physically distant from the kitchen table: the former strewn with papers, cards, pens, pencils, inkpots, which speak of the trade of the writer, editor, reviewer, publisher; the latter quite invisible, at least during her youth, being placed behind that "red plush curtain which […] hid the door that led from the dining room" (Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past" 117) to the rest of the house—to the dark underworld of the basement, described as a domestic inferno where the "denizens of the kitchen" (132) toiled.

On reading "A Sketch of the Past" one gets a precise notion of the symbolic plan of 22, Hyde Park Gate. The room at the top was the brain of the establishment and, being Sir Leslie's studio, its intellectual and spiritual peak: at the bottom material functions occurred, in convenient obscurity and distance; in the bedroom on the first floor the same bed was set for rites of life and death. The drawing room was the centre of the Stephens's social intercourse, and the tea table its focal spot (118). Julia Stephen presided over it, daily. Given the physical distribution of areas thus symbolically charged, and loaded with highbrow/lowbrow connotations, the purpose of these notes is to explore in which ways the art of writing and the art of cooking mingled, in the course of Virginia Woolf's life, and in her work. Recent research on her socio-cultural environment provides us with documents, photos, tools, sketches and drawings, which cannot be described as essentially literary. With her *Virginia Woolf and the Servants* (2008), Alison Light explored a territory partially covered by bi-

ography (Lee 1996), but very useful in the context and theme of the present collection. Maggie Humm's *Snapshots of Bloomsbury* (2006) took us nearer to the private lives of Virginia and her Group, allowing glimpses of those who worked behind the red plush curtain; the publication of *The Hyde Park Gate News* (2005) and *The Charleston Bulletin Supplements* (2013) adds precious material to such highbrow-lowbrow relationships, while the recent interest in food as a meaningful token of cultural identity is testified by *The Bloomsbury Cookbook* (2014). Altogether, these precious relics of Bloomsbury's material culture and of its attitude towards "the denizens of the kitchen" provide a dialectic foil to the image of the writer intensely and exclusively concentrated on her books, and on the artistic, literary, intellectual issues discussed by the Group around her.

The cook at the dawn of modernity

If human character sits at the core of Woolf's art project—and if we keep in mind her 1919 statements about "the proper stuff of fiction" ("Modern Fiction" 5-12)—we realize the full measure of her attempt at catching within one single vision "the activities of the intellect" and "the splendour of the body" (12). Despite her criticism against the materialists, the material world is summoned to enhance perception and to prove its physical alloy with the brain: to the extent that in her essay "On Being Ill" (1926) the body actually enslaves the mind. Therefore it should come as no surprise that at the core of one of her most frequently quoted statements about the essence, quality and meaning of modernity, the material culture of the kitchen enters the immaterial precincts of art.

The well-known sentence: "In or about December 1910, human character changed," taken from her 1924 essay "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (70), has been justly wielded by critics and scholars—Peter Stansky's book the case in point—as a token of Woolf's awareness of a change in human character, in human relationships, in society; a change in the character of the age, which would affect relationships "between masters and servants, husbands and wives, fathers and children" (71). The shift in hu-

man relations would in its turn affect "religion, conduct, politics, and literature" (71)—indeed class and gender, offering new fodder to the novelists, new fellow-travellers to readers and writers alike. Of course change was in the air, in 1910, with the death of the King, the suffragettes, the post-impressionist exhibition at the Grafton Galleries, and Woolf's statement has to do with this cluster of memorable events. But in this famous essay there is also a segment which provides a good starting point to our theme. Woolf argues that, in 1910:

> In life one can see the change, if I may use a homely illustration, in the character of one's cook. The Victorian cook lived like a leviathan in the lower depths, formidable, silent, obscure, inscrutable; the Georgian cook is a creature of sunshine and fresh air; in and out of the drawing room, now to borrow the *Daily Herald*, now to ask advice about a hat. Do you ask for more solemn instances of the power of the human race to change? (70-71)

Thus among the signs of modern times the cook is evoked, as harbinger and protagonist of a new era. The adjectives Woolf employs to describe the Victorian cook convey the force of the Biblical monster, endowed with obscure power and authority, occasionally despotic: the Leviathan also evokes the digestive functions experienced by Jonah. Out of those depths then comes the Georgian cook, who is also a reader, which makes all the difference. From the low digestive functions we are heaved upwards, towards fresh air, light, and the rooms where the printed word has its importance. One could not wish for a clearer statement of the case. Let us have a look at the past.

Victorian kitchens

According to Isabella Beeton's weighty *Book of Household Management* the Victorian household had to march like a factory. Three meals a day, with a rigid schedule, were served at the table, according to the fashion *à la Russe*, observed in Julia Stephen's household. To quote from Beeton: "as with the commander of an army, or the leader of any enterprise, so it is with the mistress of a house" (7). Together with the mistress of the house, residing

upstairs, the Victorian cook held undisputed sway, albeit in the depths: together, mistress and cook, they are the Zenith and the Nadir of the Victorian household. Between them, Beeton details an elaborate ranking not only of vegetables, animals, fishes, according to seed-scattering mechanisms or reproductive habits as described by Charles Darwin: she delineates the role and function of "the household's human inhabitants" (Hughes 186), marshalled into a set of clear-cut hierarchies. "From the mistress at the top to the scullery maid at the bottom, everyone has their place, their price, their specialist function" (Hughes 186).

The reign of the cook was the kitchen, placed in the basement; in the kitchen, ranges or "kitcheners" had to be stocked with fuel, coal or wood, kept in storerooms nearby. Mrs Beeton mentions the Leamington range as a modern domestic appliance. Candlelight provided scanty illumination.

No timer, thermostat or heat regulation. Hard work and punctuality were the rule. A manual of the 1880s tells plain cooking apart from "professed cooking" (Light 33); actually the general cook enjoyed a certain prestige, lording it over kitchen maids, scullery maids, and skivvies of very low rank. It took a remarkable open-mindedness, and a decided detour from the upper regions of the house, for Woolf to focus on the Georgian cook, and recent criticism has given us plenty of food for thought, especially with the book by Alison Light, where the lifelong relationships between Woolf and a crowd of servants and cooks are finely brought to light and analysed. The book brings to the fore a host of people working for the Stephens, the Duckworths, and subsequently for the enlarged Bloomsbury Group. Here is a brief survey.

Denizens of the kitchen. From 22, Hyde Park Gate to Bloomsbury

The oldest, Sophia Farrell, from 1886 worked at 22 Hyde Park Gate, where in the role of general cook she "was dominant over all the other 'denizens of the kitchen'" (Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past" 132); Sophia then followed the siblings when they moved to Bloomsbury and afterwards worked for Adrian and other members of the Duckworth tribe. Annie Chart was the cook at

Asheham and Hogarth House in 1915-16, during Woolf's illness. Rose Bartholomew, Lydia Bartholomew, and Rachel Ann Dedman were occasional cooks at Monk's House. Nellie Boxall, formerly employed at Roger Fry's residence, was with the Woolfs as "cook general" from 1916 until 1934, when she was dismissed. Louisa Annie Everest, "Louie," cook and housekeeper from 1934 until 1969, in 1936 obtained a Diploma in Advanced Cooking, and would be fondly remembered by Leonard in his autobiography. Mabel Haskins, servant and cook at Tavistock Square from 1934 until 1940, was the last live-in servant in the Woolfs' household. Lottie Hope was housemaid and cook between 1916 and 1924. Anne Louisa Thompsett, cook and daily help to the Woolfs in the late 1920s and 1930s.

The remarkable thing, to be gathered from Light's fascinating book, is that the cooks mentioned (excluding housemaids, gardeners, and other servants) belonged, in a sense, to the entire Bloomsbury Group: their destinations varied in time, and according to need they shifted between the homes of the Woolfs (both in London and the country) and those of Clive and Vanessa Bell; some would come from Durbins where the Frys lived; some would stay on with Adrian, or move into the Duckworth circle; some worked for John Maynard Keynes, or for Duncan Grant. The MacCarthys and the Stracheys are also part of the picture. These servants shuttled between London and the countryside locations where weekends and holidays were spent. It could be safely admitted that the servants of the Bloomsburies made as thick a net of relationships as those who were their masters, much in the same way—perhaps—as described by Doris Lessing in "A Home for the Highland Cattle" (1953). In this story, set in Southern Rhodesia, the elegant homes of the whites in Cecil John Rhodes Vista have at their back a dust lane, or sanitary lane, inhabited by their black servants, where gossip, exchange, mimic attitudes, closely and comically imitate whatever happens on the front, starched and stiff and rigid. Highbrow and lowbrow have their distinctive, albeit mutually hinged together, rituals. Frigid convention and high drama dovetail into the warmth of low comedy and parody. Yet Light also reminds us that the Bloomsbury people had very informal households; nobody dressed for dinner;

there was no table waiting at meals; servants were not expected to go to church and unmarried mothers were employed. Bloomsbury was sympathetic and decent, sociable and fun: servants in a sense borrowed their glamour from their famous masters, "and in a pathetic tribute to Bloomsbury, mirroring the cliquish world in which they moved, the servants called themselves 'the click'" (Light 156-57).

But Bloomsbury could also be possessive and insular. When, in 1905, having left 22 Hyde Park Gate, the siblings move to Gordon Square, Sophia Farrell goes with them, to ensure that the usual schedule of three meals a day may still be followed by the young Stephens. Life changes, but in Bloomsbury, at first, the rituals of Victorian eating are still observed (Light 53). The kitchen is still in the dark basement. After Vanessa's wedding, Virginia and Adrian, with Sophia Farrell, move to Fitzroy Square in 1907. In 1910 Virginia's headaches and sleeplessness convince Dr. Savage to place her into a private nursing home at Twickenham, where she is treated with "deliberate overfeeding" (Light 63; Lee 175-200; Glenny). This will be the cause (or the effect) of her attitude to food, to fleshiness, and the association of bodily weight with mental torpor. Glenny suggests that

> dwelling on food was, as Woolf saw it, an act of female liberation. It was part of the process both of seeing the world through our own, female, lenses and, more actively, of righting a skewed world which had purged the sensual and elevated the rational. […] Writing was for her a pursuit that took place within the context of domesticity, not in monastic seclusion from the activities of the kitchen. (xii)

In 1911, when Virginia moves to Brunswick Square, where John Maynard Keynes and Leonard are also lodged, she makes a rule to have a tablet placed in the landing with the menus for the daily meals. *Each* lodger has to set his or her own initials next to the desired items: then trays will be prepared accordingly, punctually placed in the landing, and punctually withdrawn when empty. Sophia Farrell still presides, made invisible yet immensely efficient, over the meals of this kind of cloistered collegiate system. After 1912 Sophia is dismissed: Virginia will run her married home. But she will still be in need of a cook.

Sophia Farrell and Nellie Boxall. Past and present

Speaking now of the cook Sophia Farrell, we have the photo taken in 1890 where she—proud, strong, buxom, smiling—wrapped in a long starched white apron, holds the tools of her trade, the pot and ladle. This portrait made by Gerald Duckworth, and stuck in the album with those of other servants, is like those genre paintings that portrayed "low life"—as remarked by Maggie Humm in her invaluable *Snapshots of Bloomsbury* (49). But her photo also shows a confident smile, a degree of affection, an intimacy which according to the Hyde Park Gate News was discouraged: the kitchen was forbidden territory for the children of the house. Yet the cook was part of the household, part of the family. Sophia, "an illiterate, illegitimate farm-labourer's daughter […] had gone into service with Julia as a child, taught herself to read, […] and stayed doggedly loyal to the family all her life" (Lee 238). In Woolf's sketch "The Cook" we read: "Her room is hung with photographs. Her mind is like a family album" (qtd. in Light 70; Lee 49). The room of the servant looks like a lumber room, full of the detritus from the masters' life, discarded from the upper parts of the house: Sophie is the slab of stone where dates and names are engraved. In *The Years* (1930s) Sophie and Shag will reappear as Crosby and the old family dog Rover—dog and servant united, if anything, by their faithful disposition, even when the family group they belong to has been dispersed by time, life and death.

Alison Light also suggests that Sophia may have been a kind of surrogate mother figure for Virginia (73-74): two portraits, of Julia and Sophia, are placed *vis-à-vis* in Humm's text (45). One is a 1890 sketch by Sir William Rothenstein, of Julia's elegant profile, evanescent and almost spectral. The other is a 1890 photo of Sophie, frontally facing the camera, full of life and buoyant energy. Actually what we register is that Woolf's relationship with the servants would become increasingly difficult, and Virginia eventually wished not to have resident servants anymore. While her Victorian mother was a disturbing ghost from the past, that could be written down and thus set to rest, other Victorian surrogates had to be dismissed in order to ease her mind. The full dimension

of Woolf's attitude, her revulsion as well as her anguish will be articulated between April 1939 and November 1940 in "A Sketch of the Past." At 22 Hyde Park Gate, she remembers:

> The basement was a dark insanitary place for seven maids to live in. "It's like hell," one of them burst out to my mother as we sat at lessons in the dining room. My mother at once assumed the frozen dignity of the Victorian matron; and said (perhaps): "leave the room;" and she (unfortunate girl) vanished behind the red plush curtain which […] hid the door that let from the dining room to the pantry. (116-17)

The Victorian matron will resurface again and again in Woolf's work—the Angel in the house that has to be hit with the inkpot, and killed. Cooks are a different kettle of fish.

After the reign of Sophia Farrell, the last Victorian cook, dismissed by the Woolfs in 1912 (Light 318-19), Nellie Boxall, "cook general," and Lottie Hope "housemaid and cook," arrive in 1916 at Hogarth House. They both come from Durbins, Roger Fry's residence where modern conveniences ease a servant's life: they will be friends and work together until 1924. Nellie will stay on until 1934. If we compare a photo of Nellie and Lottie, taken in 1922 (Light 158), with the rigid pose of Sophia Farrell, still wearing in 1912 and 1914 the starched white apron, from which she derives at once identity and power (Humm 70, 110), we may remark that Nellie and Lottie look just like two modern girls in the open air of the countryside, with short hair, pretty hats, and smiling faces, easy postures and no aprons or uniforms. Nellie will work for 18 years at the Woolfs' with frequent rows, threats, words of love and jealousy, waspish behaviour, reconciliations, as stated by Woolf in exasperation:

> And today, for the 165th time, Nelly has given notice—Won't be dictated to: must do as other girls do. This is the fruit of Bloomsbury. On the whole, I'm inclined to take her at her word. The nuisance of arranging life to suit her fads, & the pressure of 'other girls' is too much, good cook though she is, & honest, crusty old maid too, dependable, in the main, affectionate, kindly, but incurably fussy, nervous, unsubstantial. (6 January 1925, *Diary* 3: 3)

They have much in common, mistress and cook, due to the proximity and the shared intimacy that, no longer channeled in the conventional master/servant, order/obedience pattern, shows,

as Light remarks, the naked exposure of emotions, in their (my emphasis) *all too familiar ferocity* (164-72).

The impression we get from the photos and the collected evidence is indeed of a close relationship between the two women, stemming from the critical attitude toward old traditions endorsed by the Bloomsburies, and the difficulties this creates to all the actors involved. Such attitude is at once highbrow and lowbrow, a tension of inherited patterns and bold experiment, with attempts, from both sides, at extricating oneself out of them. Humm remarks that "[t]he Woolfs' photographs are ambient props against the social and personal instabilities of the 1930s" (37). The tension is at once horizontal, involving two classes, Virginia and Nellie, mistress and cook, but also vertical, as it invests two generations, Julia and Virginia, mother and daughter. The maternal imprint seems to hold, despite all the poignant awareness of gross injustice. Despite Woolf's 1918 remark, "My opinion never changes that our domestic system is wrong," repeated in 1929: "the fault lies in the system." (Friday, 28 November 1918, *Diary* 1: 314; Saturday, 13 April 1929, *Diary* 3: 220). And, as it happens with Woolf, all precipitates into fiction.

Food and the art of writing. The cook as artist

In *To the Lighthouse* (1927), the Ramsays with children and friends are enjoying their holidays in Cornwall, much like the Stephens did at Talland House, St. Ives. Woolf places here a significant episode about the art of cooking.

In the first part of the novel, "The Window," family and guests gather around the mother and hostess Mrs Ramsay for dinner, and as Margaret Drabble remarks "harmony is struck as they enjoy a *boeuf en daube*" (xvii). Yet Mrs Ramsay is not the author of the culinary masterpiece. She does not do her own cooking. The *boeuf en daube* is created by the cook; although made to a French recipe of Mrs Ramsay's grandmother, it is specifically described as "Mildred's masterpiece" (xxi). This is the passage:

> They were having Mildred's masterpiece—*Boeuf en Daube*. Everything depended upon things being served up the precise moment they were ready.

> The beef, the bayleaf, and the wine—all must be done to a turn. To keep it waiting was out of the question. (Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 108)

Mark the word masterpiece; the tongue-in-cheek ironic remark about the original French recipe. And then: "An exquisite scent of olives and oil and juice rose from the great brown dish as Marthe, with a little flourish, took the cover off. The cook had spent three days over that dish" (135). Mrs Ramsay helps a guest, Mr Bankes, to a tender piece of beef, and peers into the dish, "with its shiny walls and its confusion of savoury brown and yellow meats, and its bay leaves and its wine" (135) thinking simultaneously of her social success, and affected by contrasting emotions, love bearing in its bosom the seeds of death. Mr Bankes praises: "It's a triumph," and Mrs Ramsay replies: "It is a French recipe of my grandmother" (136).

And it's a French recipe indeed, because we find the same episode ensconced in the writer Woolf was most intensely reading in those years, Marcel Proust, and namely in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (1919), when the narrator's family invites for dinner the marquis de Norpois, whose good offices allow the young protagonist to attend a theatre matinée with the great actress Berma as *Phèdre*. Proust sets the art of Françoise, the cook, in close counterpoint with the art of the Berma. In fact,

> depuis la veille, Françoise, heureuse de s'adonner à cet art de la cuisine pour lequel elle avait certainement un don, stimulée, d'ailleurs, par l'annonce d'un convive nouveau, et sachant qu'elle aurait à composer, selon des méthodes sues d'elle seule, du boeuf à la gelée, vivait dans l'effervescence de la création; comme elle attachait une importance extrême à la qualité intrinsèque des matériaux qui devaient entrer dans la fabrication de son oeuvre, elle allait elle-même aux Halles se faire donner les plus beaux carrés de romsteck, de jarret de boeuf, de pied de veau, *comme Michel-Ange passant huit mois dans les montagnes de Carrare à choisir les blocs de marbre les plus parfaits pour le monument de Jules II.* Françoise dépensait dans ces allées et venues une telle ardeur que maman voyant sa figure enflammée craignait que notre vieille servante ne tombât malade de surmenage *comme l'auteur du Tombeau des Médicis dans les carrières de Pietrasanta.* […] Ce jour-là, si Françoise avait la *brûlante certitude des grands créateurs*, mon lot était la cruelle inquiétude du chercheur. Sans doute, tant que je n'eus pas entendu la Berma, j'éprouvai du plaisir. (26-27; my emphasis)

The comparison between the blocks of Carrara marble and the best cuts of meat, between the *boeuf* cooked by Françoise and the masterpieces of the great Michelangelo, culminates after a crescendo in which the narrator's ardent wish to see the art of Mme Berma at the theatre is given full vent; but then we are back to the table, and Françoise's "grande creation," "une daube de boeuf" (41) appears: "Le boeuf froid aux carottes fit son apparition, couché par le Michel-Ange de notre cuisine sur d'énormes cristaux de gelée pareil à des blocs de quartz transparent" (41).

This seems indeed the source of the French recipe of Mrs Ramsay. While Light reminds us of the course in French cuisine taken by Nellie, at Boulestin's (236), Mildred's art has been compared to an impressionist canvas (Knapp). Virginia Woolf, in many passages of her diary, and as early as 1923, admits that reading Proust is for her a challenge and a possible influence: *To the Lighthouse* is indeed about the *Temps Perdu* and the *Temps Rétrouvé*, and Drabble remarks that, like Proust, Woolf tries to "redeem and release loved ones from death into the eternity of art" (xxiv). Both resurrectionists, Proust and Woolf have recourse to art as the only medium granting eternity to life; and here the art of cooking and the *art de la cuisine*, Mildred's "masterpiece" and Françoise's "grande creation," belong to the same sublime rank as Michelangelo and the Berma. The passages interweave past and present, high and popular culture, and suggest thereby a "more complex experience of modernity/modernism […] at odds with many of modernism contemporary critics" (Humm 29).

It is indeed relevant that neither Woolf's Mrs Ramsay nor Proust's mother figure create their masterpiece: their servants are the authors—and artists. In this sense both mothers belong to the older generation, garnering the praise due to their cook. They both live, ideally speaking, before December 1910. Yet by placing food and the art of cooking at the core of their novels, Proust and Woolf not only do fully exploit the symbolic force of the symposium knotting together, in presence and memory, the threads of life and death: the past and the future. They also make a decided move toward the culture of modernity, by giving relief and identity to those anonymous figures of the past who preside over the body, in all its functions and pleasures. In her *Diary* for

1925 Woolf wrote that Proust's prose is "tough as catgut & as evanescent as a butterfly's bloom. And he will I suppose both influence me & make me out of temper with every sentence of my own" (Wednesday, 8 April 1925, 3: 7).

The art of cooking

While Bloomsbury enjoyed France, and French cuisine, as in Vanessa's house in Cassis, Virginia in London sent Nellie Boxall to take lessons of French cuisine from the chef Marcel Boulestin, who ran cookery courses at Fortnum & Mason, and was the celebrity chef of the Restaurant Français, decorated by Duncan Grant. Virginia herself slowly mastered the secrets of the omelette. Thus we are gradually moving toward recipes, toward real food. And to the kitchen. The great change occurred with the new cooker the Woolfs bought in 1929. The old solid fuel range was replaced by a modern oil stove, and in enthusiast tones Virginia writes in her diary:

> But what interests me is of course my oil stove. We found it here last night on coming back from Worthing. At this moment it is cooking my dinner in the glass dishes perfectly I hope, without smell, waste, or confusion: one turns handles, there is a thermometer. And so I feel myself freer, more independent—& all one's life is a struggle for freedom—able to come down here with a chop in a bag & live on my own. I go over the dishes I shall cook—the rich stews, the sauces. The adventurous strange dishes with a dash of wine in them. (Wednesday, 25 September 1929, 3: 257)

Virginia is now stepping down to the basement, wishing to emulate the Georgian cook: or rather they are meeting halfway. The art of cooking (the *boeuf en daube* still evoked) is contrasted and compared with the art of writing, with surprising results, as she writes to Vita Sackville-West:

> I have only one passion in life—cooking […] I have just bought a superb oil stove. I can cook anything […] I cooked veal cutlets and cake today. I assure you it is better than writing these more than idiotic books. (Woolf, *Letters* 4: 93)

To become "free forever of cooks," as she writes to Vita, does not mean to give up cooking, but perhaps increasingly to assess and realize its value, to appropriate its manifold meanings, to use its symbolic potential in the context of writings where food is asked to perform a cultural office. It also means to get rid of a class system that relegates the cook to the lowest ranks of society, and the mistress to her drawing room.

Cooking and gender

In *A Room of One's Own* (1929) cooking tells apart colleges for men and women, providing at once gender and class distinction. At Oxbridge the description of food in a male college is charged with so many adjectives, metaphors, references to sugar waves, white cream counterpanes, rosebuds and waves of sugar, flashes of yellow and crimson, that it becomes itself the exuberant portrait of social pomp and circumstance:

> […] the lunch on this occasion began with soles, sunk in a deep dish, over which the college cook had spread a counterpane of the whitest cream, save that it was branded here and there with brown spots like the spots on the flanks of a doe. After that came the partridges, but if this suggests a couple of bald, brown birds on a plate you are mistaken. The partridges, many and various, came with all their retinue of sauces and salads, the sharp and the sweet, each in its order; their potatoes, thin as coins but not so hard; their sprouts, foliated as rosebuds but more succulent. And no sooner had the roast and its retinue been done with than the silent serving man, the Beadle himself perhaps in a milder manifestation, set before us, wreathed in napkins, a confection which rose all sugar from the waves. To call it pudding and so relate it to rice and tapioca would be an insult. Meanwhile the wineglasses had flushed yellow and flushed crimson; had been emptied; had been filled. (9-10)

It has to be remarked that the description of this meal is not introduced as the background or discursive context in which "something very witty […] was said," but that Woolf, setting herself against "the novelist's convention not to mention soup and salmon and ducklings" (9), intentionally dwells on the art of cooking, rather than on the conversation. At the other college, for women, we are given another description of inverse import (pov-

erty *versus* wealth) but of equal artistic ambition. Food is central again, in its own right, a powerful marker of cultural identity:

> Dinner was ready. Here was the soup. It was a plain gravy soup. There was nothing to stir the fancy in that. One could have seen through the transparent liquid any pattern that there might have been on the plate itself. But there was no pattern. The plate was plain. Next came beef with its attendant greens and potatoes—a homely trinity, suggesting the rumps of cattle in a muddy market, and sprouts curled and yellowed at the edge, and bargaining and cheapening and women with string bags on Monday morning. There was no reason to complain of human nature's daily food, seeing that the supply was sufficient and coal-miners doubtless were sitting down to less. Prunes and custard followed. And if anyone complains that prunes, even when mitigated by custard, are an uncharitable vegetable (fruit they are not), stringy as a miser's heart and exuding a fluid such as might run in misers' veins who have denied themselves wine and warmth for eighty years and yet not given to the poor, he should reflect that there are people whose charity embraces even the prune. Biscuits and cheese came next, and here the water-jug was liberally passed round, for it is the nature of biscuits to be dry, and these were biscuits to the core. That was all. The meal was over. (15-16)

Food here tells a story of scanty supplies, of denial, of a relentless saving policy, of liberal poverty. For the writer, to master food description means to illuminate a whole social scenario, and to make its nature affecting, evident, and culturally poignant.

Actually, the more we follow Woolf's life as a writer who relies on the effect to be drawn from food and cooking (Lowe; Southworth), the more we perceive that both activities are pursued not in mutual exclusion but in unison. In 1930 and after, Woolf more and more enjoys the freedom she is acquiring at home, the fact of not having a live-in cook and servant; she learns to cook mushrooms, to prepare fruit for stewing, to pare cold mutton for a hotpot. Bread she already knew how to make, and we shall see to this in the conclusion of my notes.

It was necessary indeed to get rid of the actual cook, and the system it stood for, to replace it with her own art of cooking. This happens in 1934, when Nellie Boxall "the affectionate domestic tyrant" is finally dismissed.

Transformations

But Nellie will soon find another excellent job at the Laughtons, Charles and his wife Elsa Lanchester. They were the most famous theatre and cinema stars in Britain, and they lived in a very modern apartment at 38, Gordon Square. Thus Nellie will remain in close contact with "the click" (Light 212), that is, she will not be parted from the familiar group of the Bloomsbury servants. But as the cook of the famous Mr and Mrs Charles Laughton, Nellie will enjoy fame and publication when her ability and rank as refined cook are mentioned in the page of a newspaper in order to confer reliable prestige to the Regulo, the New World Gas Cooker. The Regulo and Nellie's own words are quoted in a page of the *Daily Mail* in 1936:

> "A fillet of beef, weighing about 4 pounds, is a favourite in our household" states Miss Nellie Boxall—Mr and Mrs Laughton's cook, when interviewed in her spotless little kitchen with its gleaning New World Gas Cooker of which she is very proud. "I go myself to the butcher's to choose it" […] "Another tip is to use plenty of fat—five to six tablespoons—because fillet of beef is, of course, lean. I set the Regulo at '7' for twenty minutes before putting in the meat. Once it is in, the New World does the rest. After about an hour and a quarter the beef is beautifully cooked." And Miss Boxall added, "I wouldn't be without my New World Gas Cooker for anything". (Light 217)

Nellie Boxall—the Georgian cook—now not just a reader but a writer, and a published authority on cooking, has acquired a voice, her own proud voice. Even more poignantly, Nellie becomes a literary author in the novel by Alicia Giménez-Bartlett *Una habitación ajena* (1997; *Una stanza tutta per gli altri* 2009) where her 1919-1934 diary makes the bulk of the story, interwoven with Woolf's diary, and offering a totally different perspective. In this recent novel we get the full sense of a transformation affecting social relationships and disrupting the bastion of Victorian rules: a transformation starting from within the culture of the Bloomsbury Group and fully endorsed by "the click" as Nellie's acute remarks and prompt response indicate. Along a reverse path, Virginia Woolf would proceed from the page to the kitchen.

On February 1st 2013, Paula Maggio publishes the article "Virginia Woolf: writer and bread baker," quoting an article that appears in *The Guardian* on the very same day: it's Woolf's 131st birthday, and Maggio reminds us that the US food-and-lit blog *Paper and Salt* had just included a recipe for the cottage loaf, exactly as Virginia Woolf used to make it. The source was Joan Russell Noble's *Recollections of Virginia Woolf by Her Contemporaries*, in which Louie Mayer/Louisa Annie Everest, the Woolfs' cook at Rodmell from 1934 to 1969, describes how Virginia Woolf taught her to make bread:

> But there was one thing in the kitchen that Mrs Woolf was very good at doing; she could make beautiful bread. The first question she asked me when I went to Monks House was if I knew how to make it. I told her that I had made some for my family, but I was no expert at it. "I will come into the kitchen Louie" she said, "and show you how to do it. We have always made our own bread." I was surprised how complicated the process was and how accurately Mrs Woolf carried it out. She showed me how to make the dough with the right quantities of yeast and flour, and then how to knead it. She returned three or four times during the morning to knead it again. Finally, she made the dough into the shape of a cottage loaf and baked it at just the right temperature. (Cooks Grigson; Light 318)

The recipe follows. And many more recipes are contained in the recent *Bloomsbury Cookbook*, where they alternate with images of artworks, paintings, decorations, and where, together with the Victorian authority of Mrs Beeton, many Bloomsburies (Molly MacCarthy, Frances Partridge, Duncan Grant, Helen Anrep, Angelica Garnett, Dora Carrington, Vanessa Bell for the marmalade) appear to be very busy in the kitchen and with food. Certainly this very collection is the outcome of a change in attitude which stems from Bloomsbury: the Group envisaged and fully enjoyed the greater creative freedom which the blurring of distinctions between high and low permitted. This would affect not only social mores, but the very evaluation of art and ultimately the very notion of cultural identity. In *The Pargiters* (soon to be separately wrought into *Three Guineas* [1938]) and *The Years* [1937]) Woolf conveys the full measure of the change affecting at once men and women, indeed housemaids, kitchen maids and cooks:

> He goes into the library—an august apartment which he is accustomed to have all to himself—and finds the kitchen maid curled up in the arm chair reading Plato. He goes into the kitchen and there is the cook engaged in writing a Mass in B flat. He goes into the billiard room and finds the parlourmaid knocking up a fine break at the table. He goes into the bed room and there is the housemaid working out a mathematical problem. (qtd. in Barrett xxvi)

One could not wish for a clearer statement describing the transformations going on within the Group: not just in 1910, when "human character changed," but in the following decades, despite the war and its losses.

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Rossana Bonadei

In Wireless Conversation
Bloomsbury and the Radio Days

The Bloomsbury Group at the BBC. The élites speak to the masses

> The mass is a matrix from which currently all customary responses to work of art are springing newborn.
>
> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*

The Bloomsbury Group "landed" at the BBC around the mid-1920s, when Desmond MacCarthy, a journalist and critical essayist who was to become the mediatic soul of the Group, was appointed resident literary critic for the BBC. Since then, with ups and downs but with an undoubtedly "well thought-out" presence, many prominent members of the Group (including John Maynard Keynes, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Harold Nicolson, Clive Bell, Roger Fry, Edward Morgan Forster) established a meaningful collaboration, which in the decade to come would reach the peak of its ascendancy.

As Avery Todd remarks in his comprehensive study on Radio Modernism, by the 1930s, as the "joingoist" conservatism that had marked the birth of the BBC under the leadership of John Reith began to wane, the action of the Group (and more generally of the intelligentsia of the time) started to pave the way to a major cultural "offensive," the implementation of a new policy of knowledge primarily addressed to art and the popularization of science.

Interesting keys to understanding a debate tinged with political and ethical overtones are the editorials and articles

published in *The Listener*, where a good number of the BBC "talks" were also made available to the readers. As stated in the 30 October 1929 *Listener* editorial, the beginning of a new era was taking shape, "the process of converting intellectuals to wireless," and their "gradual reconciliation with the multitude" (Avery 35). It was a welcome turning point in a society that perceived intellectuals as "cautious and conservative […] very much afraid of having [their] mental craftsmanship degraded or superseded by mental mass-production" (45). In spite of ambivalences and contradictions, the radio also became the opportunity for some interpreters of the modernist avant-garde. In radio talks and conversations meant for the mass public they were finally able to give voice to the tremendous and yet unacknowledged issues of culture and aesthetics raised in the philosophical and scientific debate among the intellectual élites (from Wittgenstein to Frege to Freud). The global revolution that Virginia Woolf herself sensed "in the air" could now literally travel "across the air" thanks to the radio waves: thanks to Harold Nicolson's serial broadcasts on "modern novelists," or Gerald Heard's narratives on scientific discoveries, and many other distinctive voices that allowed the radio to introduce into people's homes unprecedented conversations ranging from literary experiments to the existence of the atoms (an image apparently devoid of common sense that would soon become familiar to the mass public).[1]

But more than this, it is arguably at this stage that, thanks especially to the contribution of the Bloomsbury Group, a stylistic revolution in radio talks occurred. For if it is true that, in the words of its founding fathers, the radio was to be the microcosm of the nation, the official organ of the better part of a national community, in actual fact, as Avery again observes: "the Bloomsbury challenged the BBC's cultural politics from behind BBC microphones, testimony to how in a very short period of time, the institutionalized technology of radio began to outgrow its ideological origin" (36).

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[1] For a broad view of the cultural debate, as reported in recent related academic literature see Feldman, Mead and Tonning; Chignell; and Cohen, Coyle and Lewty.

Paradoxical as it may sound, the BBC's involvement with this so-called British élite—repeatedly branded as snobbish and radical by English intellectuals—seemed ultimately inscribed in the pedigree of the Group. The encounter between Bloomsbury and the radio was in a sense unavoidable, albeit at times controversial. No matter how elitist, the Group's practices were consistent with a hazardous mediatic turn: all they did—the active promotion of social events, the marketing strategies they adopted for self-promotion, even their scandalous sexual coming-outs—became exposed to mass reception. For most of them, using the radio in order to change the cultural climate meant:

> […] to preserve their deeply held ethical and aesthetic beliefs […] while adjusting them to fit the demands of an increasingly technologized mass culture—and more specifically, the demands of a new and, in terms of its capacity to enable connection with vast numbers of people, an unprecedented medium of mass communications. (35)

On the other hand, such exposure also entailed the double-edged responsibility of large-scale manipulation. And while such political animals as Keynes, MacCarthy and Clive Bell heartily embraced the prospect, Virginia Woolf kept wavering between celebration of the radio's egalitarian potential and fear of its easily perverted use.[2] As Gillian Beer remarks in her report on the impact of the radio on modernist intellectuals:

> The idea of the 'general audience' could produce a new form of bland authoritarianism, in which the speaker and programme maker pre-select what the listener is supposed to be able to grasp. But in the first years of the BBC it also produced an energetic attempt to address the listener as an equal in intelligence, if not in technical information. ("Wireless" 200)

[2] Woolf's ambivalent opinion is evident in *Three Guineas* (1938)—the composition of which she interrupted to write a script for her last BBC talk—where she fiercely criticized late Victorian values and advocated a social ideal grounded in the ethical demand to resist, as words resist, to the "ceremony and conventions" of a society "infected with infantile fixations." The wireless is here presented both as a "public psychometre" for these fixations and as a useful tool for spreading new ideas.

The Group's allegiance to the BBC signalled a concerted endeavour to redress rigid cultural determinations within a British milieu still entrenched behind class differences:

> Bloomsbury involvement in radio is also an important example of how some modernist intellectuals bridged the cultural Great Divide—the categorical distinction between high and mass culture of the early twentieth century […] while embracing the medium itself in order to shape the mass culture of which radio was quickly becoming an integral part (Avery 36).

But talking about matrices and cultural backgrounds, the allegiance may be traced back to the "conversational facility" of the Cambridge Heretics, which relied on a set of principles, practices, and shared standards of selection notably inspired by Moore's philosophy. In a brief memoir on the Bloomsbury days, J. M. Keynes recalls those "principles" as the result of a work "method,"[3] which required keen introspection (hence Moore's doctrine of the "states of mind") and recovered the value of "human intercourses" (then understood as a "loving" attention to the other—in terms of friendship, delicacy, social obligation). Such method demanded a "stringent dialectic education," a focus on language and its expressive potentials at large which was ultimately grounded in conversation: a most "agonistic" style of conversation, based on constant and rigorous "conceptual clarification," and following a clear line of argument where words are weighed, scrutinized, challenged on the basis of contexts as well as of Dictionary:

> It was a method of discovery by the instrument of impeccable grammar and an unambiguous dictionary. "What *exactly* do you mean?" was the phrase more frequently on our lips. If it appeared under cross-examination that you did not mean exactly anything, you lay under a strong suspicion of meaning nothing whatever. (Keynes 440)

It comes then as no surprise that MacCarthy, Keynes, Nicolson, Leonard Woolf, all deeply involved in journalism and politically

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[3] For an insight on the crucial contribution of Keynes to Bloomsbury rhetorics see Bonadei "John Maynard Keynes."

committed from the start, should also be among the first and most determined intellectuals to "act" in and with the BBC. They believed in the importance of a communication that could, in Keynes' words "bring to everybody in the country the possibility of learning […] new games which only the few used to play, and […] forming new tastes and thus enlarging the desires of the listener and his capacity for enjoyment" (qtd. in Avery 57).

In this perspective, by shaping "a new idea of the public, one far more intermixed, promiscuous and democratic than the book could cater for" (Beer, "Wireless" 200), the radio could contribute to create a new forum of exchange about what was worth knowing and useful to discuss for a community of readers that had become "General Audience." As Beer again here suggests, the radio promoted a new sense of belonging—a sense Woolf herself was yearning for at a time when she felt bound to fragmentation and "dispersion:"[4] "What held them together was the English language and a newly forming and changing British identity" (200), processed by a "radiocracy" that made available a range of ideas to people who could use them even without the traditional badge of higher education.

It is in fact an intimate "we" rather than a merely anonymous audience that the Bloomsbury broadcasters seem to have in mind when they "talked" on the radio. With the wireless, a fascinating new horizon was then opening to anyone who wanted "to do things with words." It was an experience that scientists themselves (many of whom published in *The Listener*) did much to present as a modern miracle: the "wireless" apparatus evoked a "mysterious" reality, solid though invisible—and even poetic, when it comes to sound cascades through the wave systems of the universe "like an ocean roller a mile from crest to crest, through the ripples of heat, and the minor ripples of light, which are one fifty-thousandth of an inch apart" (Braggs qtd. in Beer, "Wireless" 201).

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[4] "*Dispersed are we* the music wailed, *dispersed are we* […] then the music petered out on the last word *we*," so Isa in *Between the Acts* seeks a cure in books and comforts herself with rhyme, sharing her agony with the audience assembled for the pageant (60).

"Words fail me." Virginia Woolf at the BBC

> A forger can imitate a painter's brush stroke or a writer's style and make the difference between them imperceptible, but he will never be able to make his own their obsession, what forces them to be always going back toward that silence where the first imprints are sealed.
>
> Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*

Before and besides the fantastic array of scientific imagery popularised in the media, Virginia Woolf had distinguished herself as a product of the Bloomsbury intellectual "education." When we search for generative models, habits of feeling, inclinations, and discursive practices, we discover that the involvement with the Cambridge Heretics and the Midnight Society certainly played a formative role for those, like Virginia Woolf, who practiced the art of witty conversation and discussion, to learn ways of suiting different audiences. The tradition that inspired the debates of the Midnight Society (with Wittgenstein and Russell as members) was mainly philosophical, but increasing attention was given in fact to issues of aesthetics, art and contemporary literature: it was a true "epistemological turn" aimed at bringing awareness and knowledge within a multidisciplinary approach, equally based on a new centrality of language and a new conception of the public space.[5] But it is certainly in the intellectual and imaginary landscape of the "conversation" of the Cambridge Heretics (which counted her father Leslie Stephen among its founders), that Woolf first encountered the complexity of the idea underlying the "discursive" dimension of reality, where images and words shape the human mind, seen in an endless "intercourse" with other minds. And according to Leslie Stephen, it is to such intercourse, and to it alone, that the process of knowledge must be traced:

> Time and space are the warp and woof upon which is embroidered all the shifting scenery of consciousness. By means of it signals

[5] On these topics and on the relevance of Woolf's involvement in the "public space" see Cuddy-Keane.

> are thrown to us from other centres: our isolation ceases and our very thoughts are built up by the action and reaction of other minds. (*An Agnostic's Apology* 94)

Exchanges, dialogues and narrations, either heard, remembered, or imagined: this is the stuff we are made of and the basis of much of Woolf's writing. Her diaries and letters bear a marked, structurally dialogic imprint; her novels are literally transcripts of "ongoing" conversations caught "in the air," on a train, in a garden, in the city streets, or reverberating "within," in the "serpentine caves" of one's mind. "Conversation" is the title of one of Vanessa Bell's pictures, which convinces Virginia of the innovative reach of her sister's art. Through conversation, a conversation that bears in mind paternal and Moorian values, one can hope to bridge the gap between oneself and the other, between oneself and the world, testing the capacity of the human spirit to exceed boundaries.

The same dialogic and clarifying obsession that mobilized the Bloomsbury intellectuals animates Woolf's writings: a challenge, but also a painstaking task, in her case a veritable "battle" with words and meanings, to search, to choose, to set apart (Bonadei, *Virginia Woolf* 19-22). Writing was thus to her the way to evoke the "intercourses" that she perceived as the very core of reality: a "reality" then described as at one time flickering and solid, the subtle web of intersubjective and interverbal transactions that surrounds our life from its start as in a "transparent envelope" (as she argued in her first, seminal essay "Modern Fiction"). It could be a poetic and narrative word, invoked with dedication and tenacity, launched in defiance of time to redeem *the other* from oblivion (as in her initial "Life of the Obscures" written in memory of those gone by, of whom we would otherwise have no trace). Or it could be a critical word, conceived to make those endlessly "demanding" newspaper and magazine readers come to terms with the unknown. In either case, her writing always came through as a "necessary" act, marked with a distinctive epistemic flavour, never free in its task to affect the world, which she imagined as a curtain of air or water within which we are to make inroads with a sign, a trace, in order to leave behind a legacy, a memory.

As especially attested in the pages of her *Diary,* often conceived as a guide to her daily "agonic" endeavour, an exhausting tension between "articulation" and "risk" inspired her writings, where she often lingered on the admission of the artist's fragile condition (Spivak 41-42), hers being in fact a task never quite finished and never completely rewarding in itself. Sharing Lecia Rosenthal's view, one may say that the task involved, however, was somehow also "salvific" and tinged with "reassurance," albeit counterbalanced by the constant, humble, recognition of a "counter-archival repository" (Rosenthal 53), made of "unsaid" and "unknown." In "The Fascination of the Pool," sight and word come to terms with the opacity of water and some unfathomable depths, "certainly one could not see to the bottom of it" (Woolf 226). As though aware of a life all clustered inside a dense "semiosphere"—which seems to foreshadow some features of Jurij Lotman's well-known semiotic model—the narrator is wholly engrossed in the pursuit of utterable words but seems no less fascinated by "what remains" (Rosenthal 52), and humbly accepts the evidence of the "unspeakable" side of reality:

> All kinds of fancies, complaints, confidences, not printed or spoken aloud *but in a liquid state,* floating one on top of another, almost disembodied […] the charm of the pool was that thoughts had been left there by people who had gone away and without their bodies thoughts wandered in and out freely, friendly and communicative, in the common pool. (Woolf 226, our emphasis)

The reference to language in its fascinating liquidity, to meanings "allowed to remain sunken, suggested, not stated, lapsing and flowing into each other like reeds on the bed of a river," is to be found also in "Craftsmanship," a text where Woolf once again confronts the plasticity—this time "air-based" rather than "water-based"—of words.[6] Depth and instability of reference, capacity to survive in new circumstances and interplay of allu-

[6] "Craftsmanship" (1937) was included in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*, edited by Leonard Woolf soon after Virginia Woolf's death. All quotations from the text are from the First Harvest edition, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974. For the above quotation see page 202.

sions: this is what makes words especially fascinating and challenging. In order to find them, to make them suitable to a new context, to ply them into a speech, effort and labour—a humble labour—are needed. Words are both individual and communal, as they include others than the self. They must be extricated from the tangle that keeps them together. The writer's humble job is to challenge their liquidity, to search into the meanders and intricacies of their meanings: one must patiently fish for shadowy images and echoes, in order to pull them back to the surface, materials and debris need to be redefined and reorganized, to be woven into new thought, and into narrative. Stored with meanings and memories as they are, words often "failed" her, as she by and by admits and by the way confirms facing the adventure of the radio talks.

"Craftsmanship," formerly conceived as a script for a radio broadcast (between 2000 and 2500 words, according to George Barnes, a friend of the Woolfs and a member of the BBC Talk Department), will result in a talk of seventeen and a half minutes. Aired on the BBC April 29, 1937 as part of the series *Words fail me* and published soon after in *The Listener*, the text is the only extant sound record of Virginia Woolf's voice, since other BBC talks she gave were presumably lost. Leonard Woolf republished "Craftsmanship," in its *Listener* version, in the collection *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942). To make the whole matter more muddled, the script of Woolf's recorded talk was published under the title "Words Must Have Their Liberty" in *London Calling: The Overseas Journal of the British Broadcasting Corporation* dated 14 September 1950. As a matter of fact, the arduous publishing course of "Craftsmanship" offers a paradigm case for examining folds of Woolf's politics of language still relatively unexamined by critics. For this is a text that addresses in fact the issue of language in the new media-centric environment of the two interwar decades. More specifically "Craftsmanship" engages with the meaning and the weight of words "processed" by the wireless medium.[7]

[7] Some archival texts and notes are relevant to Woolf's sound and record experience. See especially Haller.

Although writing between and with the genres is a common predicate in Woolf's canon, "Craftsmanship"'s trans-medial history and textual hybridism make for a special case. Floating between "script," writing and performance, the text/script enhances the broken voice it puts on record: a speaking/reciting/narrating voice, suspended between the "transience" of transmission and the alleged "permanence" of the written language, between essay and theatrical performance, between journalism and wireless talk. A dense text where the interweaving of "authorial" voices reminds us—as Leila Brosnan notes—"of the relevance of context to the process of plotting any locus of meaning within the text" ("*Words fail me*" 68).

On the one hand it is a "live" voice, addressing "living" listeners who, thanks to the artifice of technology, listen to words that can simultaneously "sound" differently to different ears, bound to the time of utterance and yet imbued with an "unconscious" sense generated by "sunken meanings allowed to remain sunken, suggested, not stated, lapsing and flowing into each other like reeds on the bed of a river" ("Craftsmanship" 202). Tensions and divisions, virtual struggles and cross conflicts, alliances and matrimonies referred both to language and to human experience: the unstable environment we inhabit every day is metaphorically set up in this Woolfian text. It is a text loaded with "political unconscious" in a Foucauldian fashion, where words are "marked" by the events of the time (such as the "unspeakable" Royal scandals of the day). But those references which listeners, abreast with the latest news, would have recognized immediately, can in fact sound incomprehensible if taken "out of context," and therefore deprived of a sense that was there at that time of the utterance, but is soon bound to sink into oblivion.

On the other hand, the technophonic medium itself produces a "pure" voice, a voice suspended in the limbo of a meta-moment, which is "past," no longer existing, and yet is being. Precisely this voice—that was then recorded and somehow consigned to "eternity"—comes across timidly at first and gradually grows more confident, as if to taste words rather than utter them, as if to court them, to release them, at least temporarily, from their nomadic fate. And more than ever, those words uttered on the radio

cannot be "pinned down"—they manage to regroup into different discursive clusters, refractory to the presumption of intention impressed by the speaker, unpredictable because of the yet unprobed senses towards which they move, open to odd trajectories and contradictory diversions.

Struggling with words, struggling with one's own voice

We know, from Derrida, that we are merely guests of language, in the sense the language greets us, but we always welcome it, making it our own, putting it to the test of our lives. We use it—we choose words in order to make utterances, to create feeling. Or we fail to find and use words altogether. Everything in language is ever a "trial"—as Woolf constantly reminds herself and us (Colaiacomo 1993). "Craftsmanship" starts exactly from the possibility or impossibility of ascribing a specific "use" to words, of tying them down to one "truthful" use or meaning—and it does so, meta-textually, first of all by questioning the "congruity," the appropriateness of the word that was suggested (by the BBC editor) as the title of the ensuing "talk:"

> We must suppose therefore that the talker is meant to discuss the craft of words—the craftsmanship of the writer. But there is something incongruous, unfitting, about the word craftsmanship when applied to words. The English Dictionary, to which we always turn in moments of dilemma, confirms us in our doubts. It says that the word 'craft' has two meanings: it means in the first place making useful objects out of solid matter—for example a pot, a chair, a table. In the second place, the word 'craft' means cajolery, cunning, deceit. […] Therefore, to talk of craft in connection with words is to bring together two incongruous ideas, which if they mate can only give birth to some monster fit for a glass case in a museum. (198)

Incongruous and monstrous bodies, generated by queer "marriages," transfers of sense the Dictionary foresees and rushes to clarify: an apparent yet deceptive solidity—in fact inherent in the nature of words—undermines the very possibility of discourse, which is therefore partially "decapitated" from the start: a talk which, like a headless chicken, turns around a blind spot waiting

to collapse (198). The "suicidal" and vaguely grotesque metaphor carries in itself a hard and fast premise, or promise.

"A Ramble Around Words" could be—as Woolf admits—a less ambitious but promising way to start. She prepared thus herself to work on words, as an urban flâneur works on collective imagination and on memory: a "walk" then, vague movements of an enshrouded subject who, enthralled by words, indulges on the euphoria of their sounds among "vagrant" and half-cast bodies, and diverts her path in search of assonances and associations. But certainly, if "the power of suggestion is one of the most mysterious properties of words," words, in their long lasting life, "are full of echoes" (203) that turn them into mysterious archives of meanings.

In line with a poetic manifesto that has taken on the contentious challenge of modernity, the talker investigates the life of language, pondering on the layered life of words and on the further layers of meaning words take on when they combine into sentences. The starting point of her walk will be an instrumental announcement, one among the many to be heard in the Tube: "Passing Russell Square." The new start brings in an abrupt change of setting—from the monologic space of a radio broadcast to the brightly lit, cacophonous scenario of the London Underground. Author and listener are plunged into the "crowded dance" of urban masses: the new scene conjures up a new textual environment, made of the transit and fast motion of metropolitan subjects who "pass" quickly from one space to another and are entangled in words that resist a purely functional or referential use:

> When we travel on the Tube, for example, when we wait on the platform for a train, there, hung up in front of us, on an illuminated signboard, are the words 'Passing Russell Square.' We look at those words, we repeat them, we try to impress that useful fact upon our minds, the next train will pass Russell Square. We say over and over again as we pace. 'Passing Russell Square. Passing Russell Square.' And then, as we say them, the words shuffle and change, and we find ourselves saying, 'Passing away saith the world, passing away. …The leaves decay and fall, the vapours weep their burthen to the ground. Man comes. …' And then we wake up and find ourselves at King's Cross. (199)

Words combine, "they combine unconsciously together" (202). With their secret and ephemeral trove they "impress" the

mind. They inspire the writer "without the writer's will, often against his will" (202), leading along unexpected trails: with its emphatic reiteration, the "s" assonance unfolds a range of phonic associations that become literary quotations; the surface meaning contains so many sunken meanings, that eventually connect King's Cross to a biblical landscape. The originally referential sense of "passing the station" in the euphoric thrill of speed slips away (with the irruption of "away," etc.) into tragic otherness ("passing away with the world"). Mulled over and over, such "passing" opens up unexpected depths, seeps into transcendent thoughts, ventures along poetic and even theological paths. In the material and immaterial transitioning that massively marks the modern world, the subject experiences herself, *the other* and the world within a setting of sliding, floating surfaces which betray her precarious state. And yet, at the same time, even ordinary everyday experiences—such as an announcement in the underground—are endowed with sudden bursts of enlightenment, profound revelations called forth from the ancient fabric of language.

In her preface to Woolf's short pieces on modernity and media, including "Craftsmanship," Rachel Bowlby, aptly records the persistent references to the "passing" of individuals exposed to this "swift passing" in space and time, in body and mind:

> With its words flashing on and off, and its actual citing of the 'passing' word, this sign looks as though it might have been made (as well as to guide the traveller on the Tube) to illustrate Baudelaire's definition of the modern as the 'transitory, the fleeting, the contingent,' completed, as it comes to be in the narrator's associations, by 'the other half… the eternal and the immovable' by the biblical connection. (Bowlby xxviii-xix)

Inside the Tube station, a collective space where the radio talker leads us in her passionate but rigorous "digression," an electronic panel short-circuits with the Holy Scriptures: a mechanical warning turns into Biblical language and common words are literally "married"—says Woolf—to schools of thought steeped in philosophy. All that happens in a flash, in a short-circuit triggered by words, words which are bound to a long, albeit ever changing, life:

> Language too is drawn into this drift, as part of the heterogeneous world encapsulated by 'its dresses, and its dances and its catchwords' […] words are granted values not in themselves, but only in so far as their meaning is not determinate, not useful. (Bowlby xxviii)

We are all "passers-by," invested with words which are themselves "passing-by." We are subject to a relentless interpretative tension which ideologies, grammars, and customs have tried to stem by imposing paths of order and "truth." These are truths that the author hands over to the laws of speech, to the mesh of cultural and mental litigations that speakers inhabit: "According once more to the Dictionary there are at least three kinds of truth […]. But to consider each separately would take too long. Let us then simplify, and assert that the test of truth is the length of life" ("Craftmanship" 201).

After this apparent "relief," which in fact brings to the fore a model of experiential and relational subjectivity endlessly debated in Woolf's work ("truth is the length of life"), discourse waxes "poetical," and the tone of her radio voice becomes lighter, closer to the surface, somehow seduced by the sounds words carry with themselves, and by the effects they have, their capacity to mesmerize. In this perspective, the medium of the radio appears as the ideal environment to make words resonate as "pure" signifiers, in an out-of-time suspension of reality. And if we tune into its wavelength we will have more chances to capture unexpected nuances of meaning or to lose ourselves in their drift.

Radio is then a manifestation, close at hand, of the nature of life itself, the perfect metaphor of the on-going fabric of ideas and images we are made of. As it produces disembodied voices and actions at a distance, the wireless—Gillian Beer recalls—accesses the tumult always at work in our silences and intermittently discloses the invisible traffic passing through us. The ultramodernist scientists who were seeking an image for the end of the physical world would actually view reality itself as a "stupendous" wireless broadcast (Eddington 71).

Wireless was then less obsessive than fascinating. All Bloomsbury was magnetized by a medium that was perceived as "magic" since it could also shape words into "music," into a landscape made of echoes and resonances where sense seemed

to multiply and endlessly expand, in a "wireless" environment, through waves which invade the universe.

"Words are full of echoes" ("Craftmanship" 203), and the radio certainly magnified the words' mysterious, "diabolical" power of evocation. When uttered "in the air" words become even more volatile, "irreclaimable vagabonds," "the wildest, freest, most irresponsible, most unteachable of all things" (204). Heedless of cultural, national or racial barriers, words are first of all seductive, and sexy: "they have been out and about, on people's lips, in their houses, in the streets, in the fields, for so many centuries […] and they have been contracting so many marriages" (203). The English language, "our dear Mother English […] an impure mother whose past one is well-advised not to examine too deeply" (205), is for Woolf there to testify the melting pot where "Royal words mate with commoners. English words marry French words, German words, Indian words, Negro words if they have a fancy" (205), to record wars and colonial endeavours, legal or illegal trades and liaisons—like the "embarrassing" affair between Prince Edward and Lady Simpson. The bold allusion to Royal sexual transgressions—a "turning point" in the British Royal etiquette—goes together with a praise for words that are "highly democratic" (206), for their indifference to caste or class: "they believe that one word is as good as another, uneducated words are as good as educated words, uncultivated words as cultivated words, there are no ranks or titles in their society" (206). "Craftsmanship" stands thus also as the humble attempt to shape a thought in face of the liberty of words: on the BBC a voice tried to break the surface of silence, "muttering" even something political.

It may have been a failure: "the little wretches are out of temper; disobliging; disobedient; dumb. What is it that they are muttering?" (207). Or perhaps not at all, if we consider that Virginia Woolf nowadays stands somehow as the icon of the emerging transmodal artist, a voice "open for, and productive of, a wide range of passionate attachments" (Rosenthal 71).

What is left, once the time of radio performance has elapsed, is after all not silence; the discourse has moved elsewhere, into other media. In order to "tempt words," to set up bridges, "inter-

courses" and affections, in order to talk about ourselves and talk about the world: "to come together in one of those secret marriages which are perfect images and create everlasting beauty" ("Craftmanship" 207), the ways are many, and the writer well knows them.

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Maria Teresa Chialant

Poets, Empire-builders and Proles
Class Conflict and England's Destiny in E. M. Forster's *Howards End*

Who shall inherit England?

> England was alive, throbbing through all her estuaries, crying for joy through the mouths of all her gulls, and the north wind, with contrary motion, blew stronger against her rising seas. What did it mean? For what end are her fair complexities, her changes of soil, her sinuous coast? Does she belong to those who have moulded her and made her feared by other lands, or to those who have added nothing to her power, but have somehow seen her, seen the whole island at once, lying as a jewel in a silver sea, sailing as a ship of souls, with all the brave world's fleet accompanying her towards eternity? (Forster, *Howards End* 165)

The last question posed by this passage deals with one of the crucial issues in *Howards End*: "To whom does England belong?", or—as Lionel Trilling first put it—"Who shall inherit England?" (102). The answer is not easy: "England here is a feminized national body whose ownership is disputed between two highly romanticized factions or castes, the nation-builders and those capable of imagining the nation—the soldiers, that is, and […] the poets. But this division not only simplifies but, in some respects, actually falsifies the national conflict that the novel presents" (Parrinder 301). In fact, although the novel is structured around the contrast between the Wilcoxes, wealthy businessmen, and the Schlegels, "aristocratic" intellectuals, the plot includes a third element that complicates this too simple polarization: the Basts, whose social position is more difficult to describe. One could label them as pauperized petit-bourgeois: Leonard, whose ancestors were dispossessed-and-urbanized farm labourers, is a low-level clerk, and his prospective wife Jacky is an ex-prostitute: "One guessed him

as the third generation, grandson to the shepherd or ploughboy whom civilization has sucked into the town; as one of the thousands who have lost the life of the body and failed to reach the life of the spirit" (*Howards End* 109). With the three families who represent different social strata, *Howards End* (1910) can be read as an analysis of class relations in England at the turn of the 20th century, with the ambition of prophecy. Edward Morgan Forster (1879-1970) was thirty when he composed it: the England represented in the novel was for him "the here and now, and formed a sad contrast with the world he saw vanishing" (Page 76).

The story could be briefly summarized as the encounter of the Schlegel sisters, on the one hand, with Leonard Bast and his humble, dull life that is only enlightened by his passion for books; on the other hand, with the Wilcoxes and their country-house. Two narrative lines interweave: a love plot—with Margaret who marries Henry Wilcox, and Helen who first falls for his son Paul and then lives a one-night affair with Leonard, which leads to the birth of a child—and a "political" plot, with a class conflict that involves the three families as well as the English social structure in the years before the First World War. [1]

The terms I have chosen for the first part of my title are intended to define the three groups of characters at a metaphorical level as well as at a sociological one: the enlightened bourgeoisie (the poets), the ruthless capitalists (the empire-builders) and the representatives of the half-submerged yet aspiring lower-middle class (the proles). The last word—which overtly recalls George Orwell's "swarming disregarded masses, 85 per cent of the population of Oceania" in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (59)—probably renders well the Basts' condition "on the verge of the abyss," although they cannot be properly identified as working class.[2] The

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1 Rex Warner, acknowledging his debt to Trilling, writes that "*Howards End* is a novel about England's fate. It is a story of the class war" (22).

2 According to H. G. Oliver, "Leonard is more satisfying as a symbol than as a character in a novel; and he symbolizes, roughly, the British working class that, deprived of its place on the land, has never quite come to terms with the modern 'civilization' that is offered it instead" (48).

difficulty of assigning Leonard "a definite status" is acknowledged by the narrator at the beginning of Chapter VI:

> The boy, Leonard Bast, stood at the extreme verge of gentility. He was not in the abyss, but he could see it, and at times people whom he knew had dropped in, and counted no more. […] Had he lived some centuries ago, in the brightly coloured civilizations of the past, he would have had a definite status, his rank and his income would have corresponded. But in his day the angel of Democracy had arisen, enshadowing the classes with leathern wings, and proclaiming, "All men are equal—all men, that is to say, who possess umbrellas," and so he was obliged to assert gentility, lest he slipped into the abyss where nothing counts, and the statements of Democracy are inaudible. (44)

What seems to be suggested, here, is that class confusion rules modern times, and Democracy is only social sham; and yet, Democracy has always been at the centre of Forster's intellectual vision and creative imagination. It is no coincidence that he chose, for his collection of essays, articles and broadcasts, the title *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1951). In "What I Believe" (1939), the best known piece of the book, he says he believes in aristocracy, of which he gives an interesting definition: "Not an aristocracy of power, based upon rank and influence, but an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky. Its members are to be found in all nations and classes, and all through the ages, and there is a secret understanding between them when they meet. They represent the true human tradition, the one permanent victory of our queer race over cruelty and chaos" (82).

Forster is clearly evoking Matthew Arnold's "best selves," the "*aliens*" of each class, "persons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by a general *humane* spirit, by the love of human perfection" (Arnold 109).[3] But Forster's aristocracy is a wider entity than Arnold's; it is formed by the best members to be found not only in "all classes"—that is, the Barbarians, Philistines and Populace, as the aristocratic, the middle and the work-

[3] On Arnold's influence on Forster, see McGurk. The sentence "to see life steadily and see it whole," which often recurs in *Howards End*, is also taken from Arnold's poem "To a Friend", referred to Sophocles: "Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole;/The mellow glory of the Attic stage,/Singer of sweet Colonus, and its child" (Arnold 2).

ing classes are named in *Culture and Anarchy*—but also in "all nations." The twentieth-century writer's view is more inclusive than the Victorian's; though they share liberal-humanist values, Forster transcends class distinctions to adopt a truly democratic and cosmopolitan perspective, as later witnessed by the multiracial and multiethnic vision of *A Passage to India* (1924).

Howards End, like the latter novel, is much more ambitious in scope than Forster's earlier fiction, as it focuses on the condition of England in Edwardian times and England's destiny: "The period it deals with is the high-water-mark of economic and intellectual expansion. It is no accident that the heyday of the Schlegels (the 'Bloomsbury' liberal people in the book) was also the heyday of the Wilcoxes (the Tory business people)" (Gransden 55). Forster seems to evoke these two families, and recall what they stand for, in "What I Believe," where he speaks explicitly of "the world of personal relationships and the world of business relationships" (78).

Further on in the essay, he writes of his ideal "aristocrats," whose temple is "the Holiness of the Heart's Affection, and [whose] kingdom, though they never possess it, is the wide-open world" (83). Interestingly enough, "affection" is invoked by Margaret in the novel as a fundamental value. She defends it when she tries to silently help her younger sister Helen in a moment of crisis, using "the voiceless language of sympathy" (10): "The affections are more reticent than the passions, and their expression more subtle" (10); when she bitterly realizes that it is lacking in her husband, who surrounds himself with the wrong sort of people and who seems, anyhow, not to care much for them: "If Henry had shown real affection, she would have understood, for affection explains everything. But he seemed without sentiment" (194); and when she tells him how fond she is of her sister: "It all turns on affection now. […] Affection. Don't you see? […] I like Helen very much, you not so much […] And affection, when reciprocated, gives rights" (271).[4]

[4] Forster wrote in a later article, "De Senectute" (1957), that "[t]he true history of the human race is the history of human affection. In comparison with it all other histories—including economic history—are false" (18).

It is evident from these passages that some of the main issues in *Howards End* are taken up and developed in "What I Believe" and in other pieces of *Two Cheers for Democracy*. As Frank Kermode has pointed out, some of the recurring elements in Forster's thought that are present in that essay are "touchstone passages" which he cites from "great works of the past […], assuming in his audience a decent or sufficient acquaintance with them" (132). Among these scholarly allusions, for instance, the order/muddle antithesis, borrowed from the Italian of the thirteenth-century Spiritual Franciscan poet Jacopone da Todi, and related by Forster to the praise and the defense of art (Kermode 133-34), is particularly interesting. *A Passage to India* is, in fact, based on that contrast: "India is a muddle" is one of the novel's leitmotifs, as opposed to England's supposed order.[5]

The plot of *Howards End* is based on contrasts which, in this case, coincide with the opposite worldviews of the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes: inner life and personal relationships *vs* the world of "telegrams and anger," art and culture *vs* money, freedom of the mind *vs* social conventions. According to Norman Page, what are particularly interesting in this novel are "the structural principles that underlie the deployment of character, incident and setting; and here we find ourselves on familiar ground, for Forster turns again to symmetries and antitheses similar to those used in his earlier novels" (78). But while the behaviour of such peripheral characters as Charles, Evie and Dolly Wilcox—whom we could call "flat" (to borrow Forster's own narrative category)—seems to confirm those clear-cut dichotomies, some of the statements uttered by the main characters (or expressed through free indirect speech) contradict them. David Bradshaws's question—"*are* the Schlegels the *antithesis* of the Wilcoxes?" (154)—highlights the novel's ambiguity. Giving examples that prove "the Schlegels' blindness, crassness, hypocrisy, and bigotry," and support the

[5] "Forster's folk are famously always in a muddle: they don't know what they want or how to get it. It has been noted before that this might be a deliberate ethical strategy, an expression of the belief that the true motivations of human agents are far from rational in character. […] But what interests me is that his narrative structure is muddled also; impulsive, meandering, irrational […]" (Smith 2003).

view that "Forster never intended us to be as favourably disposed towards them as the first few chapters of the novel seem to encourage us to be," Bradshaw argues that "Forster's aim may have been to discredit the Schlegels by exposing them as merely skin-deep progressives" (157). This is a rather controversial statement, that becomes even more challenging if we add to the previous question another one introducing issues of narrative technique, and concerning the omniscient narrator's role and the point of view: to what extent is Margaret the author's mouthpiece?[6]

Places and people

> A place, as well as a person, may catch the glow. Don't you see that all this leads to comfort in the end? It is part of the battle against sameness. (*Howards End* 314)

There is no doubt that the pivotal image in *Howards End* is the eponymous country-house in Hilton, Hertfordshire.[7] This is the fulcrum of the text not only because it is here that the novel opens and closes and that its important episodes take place, but also because it carries a strong political and ethical significance: it stands for rural England, its traditions and cultural heritage, as well as for liberal values and the life of the spirit. In Margaret's free indirect speech, Howards End "was English, and the wych-elm that she saw from the window was an English tree" (192). Although it is a relatively modest farmhouse, not an aristocratic country-mansion, affective relations, a crisis of inheritance and family feuds unfurl around it: "[Howards End] is the main link between a realistic plot which can be grasped at one reading and

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6 Barbara Rosecrance calls the attention on the narrator's voice in the use of the techniques of self-dramatization and manipulation of the reader, and in the frequency and length of intervention, as well as on "the tendency of the narrator to step out of the action to formulate its larger significance. […] No other Forster narrator establishes so personal a hegemony" (121).

7 Howards End was modelled on Forster's own childhood home in Rooksnest, north of London, located near Stevenage, Hertfordshire, where he and his mother lived from 1883 to 1893.

a pattern of symbolism which throws the events against a wider background and makes them illuminate the modern world in general" (Beer 101). Its crucial role is also rendered by the different ways in which the various characters relate to it. For Ruth Wilcox, who descends from English yeoman stock, the Howards, it means much more than her family's property, her inheritance and her own past: it represents a whole community of resident workers who for decades shared the land and the house with its owners; for Henry, instead, it is merely an old estate, "one of those converted farms" (128) that needs repairing, refurbishing, and some rebuilding; for Margaret, it embodies a mystic link to Ruth, as she is the only other character in the novel who feels its magic:

> Her [Margaret's] evening was pleasant. The sense of flux which had haunted her all the year disappeared for a time. She forgot the luggage and the motor-cars, and the hurrying men who know so much and connect so little. *She recaptured the sense of space, which is the basis of all earthly beauty, and, starting from Howards End, she attempted to realize England*. She failed—visions do not come when we try, though they may come through trying. But an unexpected love of the island awoke in her, connecting on this side with the joys of the flesh, on that with the inconceivable. (191, my emphasis)

Howards End is the place where Margaret will try to reunite and "connect" the three families—three classes, actually—and construct the England of the future. So, if we take the house as the main signifier in the text, the question of who will inherit it after Ruth's death (as she is the last member of the Howard family), can be considered as the *mise en abîme* of the bigger question of the novel: "who shall inherit England?".

Howards End is defined, in spatial terms, not only by its country house, but also by a series of urban spaces, each of which is connected to a character or to one of the households who inhabit the text. So, the offices of the Imperial and West African Rubber Company are Henry Wilcox's reign, as Howards End is Ruth's. The description of these offices—which are wholly consistent with the world of "telegrams and anger"—is shot through with irony. When Margaret goes there for the first time, she hopes to get a clearer idea of the "main sources of [Henry's] wealth" (183): "Not that a visit to the office cleared things up. […] But

perhaps she was seeing the Imperial side of the company rather than its West African, and Imperialism always had been one of her difficulties" (183). A difficulty she has inherited from her father, Ernst Schlegel, a German "idealist, inclined to be dreamy," who defended poetry, philosophy and music, and attacked any sort of imperialism—either Pan-Germanism or British Imperialism—as his was "the Imperialism of the air" (28).

The neighbourhoods in which the characters live and their residences are very important in this novel: in London, Wickham Place (the Schlegels), Camelia Road and Tulse Hill (the Basts) and Ducie Street (the Wilcoxes); in the rest of England, Howards End, Hertfordshire, and Oniton Grange, Shropshire. But also such briefly-mentioned places as Charles Wilcox's houses in Epsom and Six Hills, and Aunt Juley's in Swanage. Wickham Place, where the Schlegel family had been living for years, is very much loved by Margaret and Helen; so, when they have to leave it because its lease has expired, and "[t]he particular millionaire who owned [its] freehold […] desired to erect Babylonian flats upon it" (103), the removal becomes an intensely dramatic event, whose description can be compared to that of a funeral:

> Houses have their own ways of dying, falling as variously as the generations of men, some with a tragic roar, some quietly, but to an after-life in the city of ghosts, while from others—and thus was the death of Wickham Place—the spirit slips before the body perishes. […] Then it fell. Navvies came, and spilt it back into the grey. With their muscles and their beery good temper, they were not the worst of undertakers for a house which had always been human, and had not mistaken culture for an end. (239-40)

London is very much present in *Howards End*. The introductory paragraphs, at the beginning of Chapter XIII, render the physical changes it goes through with great narrative strength; the narrator compares the city to a living organism that "rose and fell in a continual flux," ineluctably expanding, and damaging the landscape as well as human beings: "Nature withdrew: the leaves were falling by midsummer; the sun shone through dirt with an admired obscurity. […] We reach in desperation beyond the fog, beyond the very stars, the voids of the universe are ransacked to justify *the monster,* and stamped

with a human face" (102-03, my emphasis). The encroachment of suburbia on the countryside is well expressed by Margaret's sad remark, at the end of the novel, that "London is creeping" (316), and will probably extend as far as Howards End. This reminds us of the *incipit* of H. G. Wells's *Tono-Bungay* (1909), with the description of London's continual growth and unnatural expansion, which, in its turn, evokes William Cobbett's "Great Wen:" in all these cases, London is compared to a diseased body or a monster.

Throughout *Howards End*, one can sense a note of nostalgia for times past, when the countryside was still a source of inspiration; a nostalgia that is expressed by several allusions to pastoral memory and national folklore. One of the finest passages occurs in Chapter XXXIII, on Margaret's second visit to Howards End; wholly captivated by the beautiful landscape, she wonders why England has not "a great mythology," and her folklore has "stopped with the witches and the fairies." At this point she makes a comment that might be Forster's own:

> The great estates that throttle the south of Hertfordshire were less obtrusive here, and the appearance of the land was neither aristocratic nor suburban. To define it was difficult, but Margaret knew what it was not: it was not snobbish. […] In these English farms, if anywhere, one might see life steadily and see it whole, group in one vision its transitoriness and its eternal youth, connect—connect without bitterness until all men are brothers. (249-50)

This passage seems to focus on the possible destiny of the English nation, wondering whether its future may lie in a rural economy. A question that had already found a positive answer in the final soliloquy of Forster's *The Longest Journey* (1907), with uneducated and inarticulate Stephen Wonham—a Wiltshire boy who chooses to work on the land—as the inheritor of the nation (Parrinder 299-300). *Howards End* undoubtedly "takes up and expands the theme touched on at the end of *The Longest Journey*: who shall inherit England?" (Colmer 86), but can we equate its conclusion to that of the previous novel? It is certainly more complex and problematic, as it is Leonard and Helen's child who will come into possession of the house, and, symbolically, of England: that is, the offspring of two different

classes, who will live in the (however small) estate of the Howards, the representatives of the landed gentry.[8]

It is a fact that several contradictions arise when the narrator seems to exalt the stability of the countryside and of the traditional country-house as opposed to the "transitoriness" of the metropolis and of a London office. For instance, Oniton Grange, which belongs to Henry Wilcox, and where his daughter Evie gets married, is represented as a holiday site for rich townspeople; and yet, being an "historically determined place" like London, it is more authentic than Ruth Wilcox's "mythic" house (De Zordo 161-63). Then, towards the end of the novel, on Leonard's visit to Howards End with the intention of confessing his "sin" to Margaret (the "seduction" of her younger sister), two typologies of Englishmen appear on Hilton's Arcadian landscape as England's eligible inheritors: the yeoman and the Imperialist. We see them through Leonard's gaze: the first type, "half clodhopper, half board-school prig," is "England's hope;" the second "is not what he thinks or seems. He is a destroyer. He prepares the way for cosmopolitanism, and though his ambitions may be fulfilled, the earth that he inherits will be grey" (301).

At this point we should ask a further question: whether this "version of pastoral" (if I may borrow the expression from William Empson's book) is Forster's way of dealing with the two interrelated crises that, according to Peter Widdowson, *Howards End* represents: the crisis of Liberalism and that of the realistic novel in the 20th century. This text is a type of "fantasy," a fictional mode that has always been to Forster's taste (being one of the "aspects of the novel" in his eponymous essay), "a device for affirming an uncertain social vision against the logic of more 'empirical' perceptions. And it is here, of course, that the two 'crises' intersect" (Widdowson 14-15). Since the world can no longer be "'realistically' *described* without exposing the inefficacy of liberal-humanist values, […] the world has to be *remade*, by fictional contrivance, to accommodate

[8] Paul Peppis shares the view of those critics who read *Howards End* as a "condition of England" novel, and argues that "most of Forster's literary works can be understood as national allegories that diagnose an ailing nation and offer literary cures for the malaise they anatomise" (47).

them" (15). But this is only a—not wholly successful—attempt on the writer's part that confirms the complexity and ambivalence of *Howards End*: "[the] movement between 'realistic' specificity and generalizing rhetoric […] is characteristic of the novel as a whole, and bears witness to its uncertainty of mode" (20). Widdowson's argument is very convincing, also because his wide-ranging analysis takes into consideration the broad contexts in which this novel should be read.[9] Virginia Woolf, who held Forster in high esteem, had already expressed similar doubts in "The Novels of E. M. Forster," an article published in the *Atlantic Monthly* (November 1927); she considered *Howards End* a novel with all the qualities of a masterpiece but without being one, owing to the conflict of mode—the gap between realism and symbolism, poetry and satire, comedy and morality (110).

On the other hand, one of the strong points of the text lies in the narrative threads that "connect" its different parts: characters as well as places. So, the end of the novel is foreshadowed in Chapter XI: Mrs Wilcox's bequest of the farm to Margaret—which stands for the bond between rural virtue and the liberal ideal—somehow prefigures Margaret's decision to bequeath it, in her turn, to Helen and Leonard's son, as announced by Henry to his children in the last chapter. So, the heir of Howards End will be somebody who "synthesizes earth and intellect and embodies what hope remains for England's survival" (Rosecrance 108). And all this is made possible by the presence/absence of Ruth Wilcox, a character, who, like Mrs Moore in *A Passage to India*, "means" more after her death than before it, and whose role in the plot "is at once practical and highly symbolic" (Crews 111).

"Only connect…"

> Not even to herself dare [Margaret] blame Helen. She would not assess her trespass by any moral code; it was everything or nothing. […] Christ was evasive when they questioned Him. It is those who cannot connect who hasten to cast the first stone. (*Howards End* 290-91)

[9] According to David Medalie, *Howards End* is "a late-Edwardian response to what came to be known as the New Liberalism" (39).

The gospel of the "only connect", apparently preached by Christ, and endorsed, here, by Margaret in order to accept Helen's "trespass" (her sexual encounter with Leonard) without a word of blame, is advocated by the narrator throughout the novel either by direct intrusion into the text, or through free indirect speech. The day after accepting to marry Henry, Margaret sets about contributing "to the building of the rainbow bridge that should connect the prose in us with the passion. […] Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer" (174-75).

As the author's presumed mouthpiece, Margaret reiterates this "sermon" over and over again, proposing several versions of it, such as the following: "The business man who assumes that his life is everything, and the mystic who asserts that it is nothing, fail, on this side and on that, to hit the truth. […] It [truth] was only to be found by continuous excursions into either realm, and though proportion is the final secret, to espouse it at the outset is to ensure sterility" (182). From this statement it seems that attaining proportion is a process that requires direct knowledge of both the worlds of the visible and the invisible; in other words, the world of "telegrams and anger" cannot be dismissed too easily by liberal-minded intellectuals.

Although the novel's epigraph seems to prefigure, or hope for, the reconciliation of "the seen" and "the unseen," "the prose in us with the passion," the world of "telegrams and anger" and that of personal relationships, one wonders whether this message comes through by the end of the novel, and, more importantly, whether it is what the author *does* look forward to. Actually, the famous motto of *Howards End* proves to be more wishful thinking rather than an actual message, as it expresses only an aspiration to social harmony and inner equilibrium; these values are, instead, somewhat contradicted by the events that constitute the plot.

Forster's critics have extensively questioned this text's intentionality as regards the real differences between the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes, and the narrator's unease with Leonard. Some of them have identified the main feature of the novel in its ambivalence. Rosecrance speaks of a tension between "Forster's

efforts to 'prove' his humanistic values and to sustain Western society through reversion to rural virtues, and a countercurrent of disbelief, […] a vision of cosmic disorder and loss of meaning," and concludes: "The rhetoric affirms connection, but the undercurrent describes collapse" (110); Widdowson argues that "[t]he rich ambiguity, the fundamental *irresolution* of *Howards End* are key factors in its importance as a novel" (12); and Bradshaw (underwriting the latter critic's opinion) maintains that, "despite its narrator's poise and its assured (if sparse) social comedy, […] it is not *Howards End*'s certainties that catch the eye but its hesitations, tensions" (151). To judge from these evaluations, "it may be that we should see the novel as not so much presenting a case as conducting a debate" (Page 79).

Several antitheses are debated in *Howards End*; one of them is death *vs* money: "indeed, the whole direction of the novel as a narrative-pattern (running counter, as so often in Forster, to the dabbed-on generalizations) shows that money or property may be a more important inheritance than ideas" (Gransden 57). In spite of the moral superiority of Art and Culture, it is money that allows the Schlegels to exist; and even Howards End, in spite of its symbolic value as an embodiment of English history and tradition, would not exist without money. To Margaret's statement that the house "cannot stand by bricks and mortar alone," Mrs Wilcox answers: "it cannot stand without them" (73). As to confirm this opinion, Leonard—the only character in the novel who has real problems with money—says to Helen, after losing his job at the Dempster's Bank: "the real thing's money, and all the rest is a dream" (222).

Forster's concern for the economic origins of a secure and sheltered life—the one enjoyed by both the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes—and the affinities between the Schlegels' intellectual attitude and material interests and those of the writer are explored by Paul Delaney in "'Islands of Money': Rentier Culture in *Howards End.*" By discussing Forster's association with the rentier class (represented, in the novel, by the Wilcoxes, who are involved with imperial projects abroad, and whose capital goes overseas), he argues that the writer "had a lifelong preoccupation with the morality of living on unearned income," and that in this

novel "his aim was to move from his own experience of privilege to a comprehensive judgment on the kind of country Edwardian Britain was, and should be" (67). More in general, Forster's intention is presumed to be that of laying bare "the tangled economic roots of complacent liberalism," the premise of Delaney's thesis being that the writer, like Marx and Freud before him, "is possessed by the idea of *unmasking*" (67).

This leads to a further reflection as regards class conflict in the novel: the real opposition, here, is not between "telegrams and anger" and "personal relations," but between those—the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes—who "stand upon money as upon islands," and those like the Basts who "are down below the surface of the sea." This is Margaret's view as she illustrates it to her aunt, Mrs Munt:

> "You and I and the Wilcoxes stand upon money as upon islands. It is so firm beneath our feet that we forget its very existence. It's only when we see some one near us tottering that we realise all that an independent income means. Last night, when we were talking up here round the fire, I began to think that the very soul of the world is economic, and that the lowest abyss is not the absence of love, but the absence of coin."
>
> "I call that rather cynical."
>
> "So do I. But Helen and I, we ought to remember, when we are tempted to criticise others, that we are standing on these islands, and that most of the others are down below the surface of the sea." (58)

The contradiction between what the motto of *Howard End* implies and promises—a reconciliation of opposites, as expressed by Margaret's project—and what the narrative actually shows has been considered the weakest point of the novel in terms of inner coherence and textual consistency, but it is, instead, its strongest point at a discursive level, as it testifies to its dialogic dimension (Marroni 9-10).

The novel's polyphony is evident in the plurality of voices within each of the two opposite fronts. The Schlegel sisters, for example, are probably to be taken as the author's "two voices," confronting each other; Margaret and Helen have very different personalities—the former is self-controlled, the latter is passionate—and often express dissimilar views as the exponents of opposite intellectual stances: pragmatism *vs* idealism, rationality *vs*

mysticism. In the debate they have at their informal discussion club about the means of achieving a fairer distribution of money and culture, Margaret maintains that the best way to help people like the Basts, till Socialism comes, is to give them cash (instead of commodities), for "it is the warp of civilization, whatever the woof may be" (120). She thinks that "Henry would save the Basts as he had saved Howards End, while Helen and her friends were discussing the ethics of salvation" (215). Margaret is realistic, and refuses abstract, ideological positions; as Helen says, she "mean[s] to keep proportion, and that's heroic, it's Greek" (181). In spite of her belief in personal relationships, Margaret finds positive aspects also in nation-builders, in those who perform their duty, like Henry, and is in favour of such typical bourgeois values as activity and work. She comes to feel "an admiration, emotional rather than rational, for the Wilcox energy and ability to get things done" (Page 79), and explains to Helen that if people like the Wilcoxes "hadn't worked and died in England for thousands of years, you and I couldn't sit here without having our throats cut. There would be no trains, no ships to carry us literary people about in, no fields even. […] More and more do I refuse to draw my income and sneer at those who guarantee it" (164).

Helen holds a wholly different opinion from Margaret; as she explains to Leonard, she despises the Wilcoxes because they have never learnt to say "I am I" (222): "We are all in a mist—I know, but I can help you this far—men like the Wilcoxes are deeper in the mist than any. Sane, sound Englishmen! Building up empires, levelling all the world into what they call common sense" (222). But there is one issue on which the Schlegel sisters agree: they both want to take care of Leonard. The young man is so class-conscious that, when they ask him questions concerning his job at the bank, he resents it; he chooses to keep the world of "romance" (which means, for him, Art, Culture, the privileged classes and, therefore, the Schlegels) separated from his grey everyday life and work, lest the former be tainted by the latter: "He did not want Romance to collide with the Porphyrion, still less with Jacky, and people with fuller, happier lives are slow to understand this. To the Schlegels […] he was an interesting creature, of whom they wanted to see more. But they to him were

denizens of Romance, who must keep to the corner he had assigned them, pictures that must not walk out of their frames" (116).[10] When he tells them of his night walk into the woods, he cannot help mentioning Ruskin, Stevenson, Jefferies and other writers in order to communicate his fruition of Nature *via* Culture. This scene, which should confirm Margaret and Helens's perception of him as a naïve neophyte, throws light, instead, on their own snobbishness. They want Leonard to be "natural," and welcome his disappointment at the spectacle of the dawn, and his flat statement "it was only grey, it was nothing to mention" (113), as his only genuine moment. Cherishing the image of him as a "real" man who cares for adventure and beauty, they wish him to get rid of what they consider his cumbersome, artificial learning, but, in so doing, they prove to be insensitive to his inner needs. In wanting Leonard "to wash out his brain and go to the real thing" (137), they patronize him.

The Schlegel sisters' condescending approach to Leonard is also the narrator's implicit critique of their behaviour. On the other hand, the same narrator does not conceal his uneasiness with the young clerk, which emerges, for instance, in the treatment of his voice and in the representation of his language that betray Forster's own "genteel class prejudice" (Bradshaw 158). As Frank Kermode has acutely remarked, "Gissing would probably not have had as much trouble with the character of Leonard Bast […] as Forster himself did; he knew all he needed to know about 'board-school prigs' and the real or supposed tendency of the lower classes to steal the umbrellas of their better" (94). Leonard's sudden and violent death (after Charles Wilcox strikes him with the wrong side of the ancestral sword, and a bookshelf falls over him, he dies of a heart-attack) seems the only possible end for this character.

To conclude, no reader can deny that *Howards End* is structured, since its opening chapter, around the opposition between the "good" Schlegels and the "bad" Wilcoxes. And yet, "the thornier question of where the author's deepest sympathies lie,

[10] In this, Leonard reminds one of Wemmick, Jagger's secretary, in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, who makes a point of keeping his private life outside his office.

with his heavy-handed idealists or his sports-mad philistines, may well remain unsettled," as David Bradshaw writes (151), agreeing with Peter Widdowson's comment: "Whatever the flaws, weaknesses and contradictions we may perceive in Forster's own ideological position, *Howards End*, by containing them, gains rather than loses" (12).

The final scene, which shows Helen rushing into the house from the garden, "holding Tom [the farm boy] by one hand and carrying her baby in the other" (319), has a symbolic function as well as a prophetic meaning—at least in the author's intentions. If we take this sort of *tableau vivant* at face value, the answer to the initial question "who will inherit England?" seems to be: a hybrid breed, made of both an 'illegitimate' child (the progeny of intellectual bourgeoisie and lower-middle class) and a descendant of the old yeomanry. As suggested by Lionel Trilling (122), does this ending envisage a classless society in England's future?

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Claudio Zambianchi

From the Grafton Galleries to the Armory Show
Roger Fry's Influence in Britain and the U.S. (ca. 1910-1913)

In the years between the first and the second decade of the 20th century, thanks to the commitment of a few artists and critics, two countries that until that moment had been peripheral in the main stream of events in the world of modern art, Great Britain and the United States of America, had to address and deal with French Post-Impressionism and the influence it was having in the first ten years of the new century. The major difficulty was that in both countries artists, critics and intellectuals were not only unfamiliar with this new art, but also lacked critical and interpretative tools to understand a type of art which was quickly moving away from the representation of the external world. Such an understanding was somewhat urgent since modern art was being presented to a wide audience through large and important exhibitions: in particular by the two so-called "Post-Impressionist Exhibitions" held in London (*Manet and the Post-Impressionists* [1910] and the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* [1912]), organized by Roger Fry, and by the Armory Show (1913) in New York. The problem for art critics was to theoretically justify an art that was weakening its relation with the appearance of the external world in order to present a deeply reinterpreted image of it, as is the case with Expressionist art, or to dispose (almost) entirely of it, the way Cubism or abstract art does. The art critic who more than any other in the English speaking world of the time tried to offer answers to the questions posed by the new art produced (mostly in France) between 1886 and 1910, was Roger Fry. Fry had a good knowledge of the French and German symbolist criticism produced during the last decades of the century, and relied

mostly on these writings, rather than on the "decadent" art for art's sake theories which dated to late Victorian England. On these grounds, between 1908 and 1912, Fry was able to provide a strong and innovative critical and theoretical framework for the interpretation of post-impressionist art and its influence. Now that the referential function of art was lost, and the relationship between painting and visual sensations was in crisis, art could recover an expressive function; instead of representing the external world or transcribing the effects of natural light with colour on a canvas, art could instead express an emotion: with Post-Impressionism art becomes "a mode of experience" rather than "a mode of description" (Morrin 18).

In order to justify such a shift, in 1908 Fry stated that the move away from naturalism and towards expression was not new in art history: it had taken place, for instance, in the passage from late Roman realism to Byzantine art (Reed 72-75). After all, Fry had started out as a connoisseur and as an Old Masters scholar, and had discovered modern art and the work of Paul Cézanne (who in a few years was to become the pillar of his critical thinking about modern art) only recently, in 1906 (Spalding 116-17).

In one of his most important theoretical papers, produced in the first decade of the 20th century, "An Essay in Aesthetics," Fry points out that the aim of works of art is to express an emotion of a specific kind, very different from the emotions experienced in everyday life, an emotion whose appeal is addressed to the imaginative life. As he went along, Fry came to call this emotion the "aesthetic emotion:" such an emotion is conveyed not by the theme or the subject of an artwork, but by its form, or, even better, by the way the artist employs his or her specific means: line, colour, shading, mass, scale…

The task of the critic in analysing the quality of a work of art is something similar to what Immanuel Kant attempted in his *Critique of Judgment*: to give to the reader the anamnesis of his or her emotion in front of that form. And it is exactly because Fry identifies the point of origin of the aesthetic emotion in the form as such (and not in the form *qua* representation of something) that his theory is plastic and able to address any work of art, in any period of art history, in any place—from the Western world,

to "Mohammedan art" ("The Munich Exhibition" 81-91), to the "art of the Bushmen" ("Bushman Paintings"), only to mention a couple of areas related to non-Western art Fry was dealing with at the time he was supporting post-impressionist art (Green 126-27 and *passim*).

From 1910 to 1913 Fry had the chance to put his ideas about modern art to the test, both as curator of the two post-impressionist exhibitions (Fry was the one to invent the word "Post-Impressionism" in 1910) and as main supporter and promoter of modern French art in Britain. It was at the beginning of 1910, moreover, that he met Clive and Vanessa Bell, both much younger than him; he became friends with the two and also became acquainted with part of their circle of friends in Bloomsbury. In his articles on modern art written between 1910 and 1914, Fry displays a plastic thought: he is able to develop and evolve quickly, to correct his own weaknesses and mistakes, and clear obscure points. This is at least in part due to the fact that Fry had worked for museums—as curator for the painting department for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York between 1906 and 1910, and then in London as European adviser to the same department of the Met (Spalding 88-89, 101, 106)—and saw museums as institutions with educational purposes: art and its emotional content was something that an audience could be taught to experience and appreciate. Such a penchant for communication and divulgation characterizes Fry's propaganda in support of Post-Impressionism in the years following his discovery of modern French art. In his letters, especially those to his mother, Fry underlines his role in making modern art known in Britain. On March 28, 1913, for example, he writes: "As regards reputation, I'm not a failure […] I have accomplished a great deal for the understanding of art in England" (*Letters* 1: 366). I believe Fry's qualities, as communicator and supporter of contemporary art expressions, are to be found in his effort to build and bring about a better and broader understanding of modern art in Britain, in his insight, and in the brilliant way he had of asking his readers to follow him and share his ideas. This explains why Fry's theories are such a privileged source for those journalists and critics who, in Britain and the USA, tried in turn to explain to their audience a type of art that

they were not culturally prepared to fully understand. These journalists and critics seem to rely much more on Fry's thought than on Bell's: it can be said that Fry led the way, and that his thought was much less rigid than Bell's. As is well-known, Bell tends to put forward ideas that, although drawn from Fry, are interpreted in a stiff and in a somehow tautological manner: according to Bell only the works of art that possess what he famously called the "significant form" can arouse an aesthetic emotion in the observer, and the aesthetic emotion evoked in the observer is the only evidence that the work of art possesses a "significant form." On the contrary in Fry the theme of the emotion conveyed by the work of art is much more nuanced and the question concerning the relationship between form and emotion is much denser and more problematic.[1] Moreover, Bell's important book *Art* was published only in 1914, after the first (and abundant) wave of critical reactions to the post-impressionist exhibitions and the Armory Show.

Fry first addressed the issue of expression of emotions in the works of art in his 1900-1901 essay on Giotto ("Giotto"), in which he outlined the idea that would (with many developments and changes) gain continuity and centrality in his critical and theoretical work. In "Giotto" Fry maintains that emotions conveyed by the works of art are not fundamentally different from the ones experienced in everyday life and that they are suggested through the expressions and the poses given by the artist to the human figures, making these similar to actors on a stage (e. g. 116-18). Such a point of view has much in common with the old academic theory about how emotions are expressed in art. According to these theories feelings in art are conveyed by facial expressions or by the eloquent poses of the bodies of the characters represented. While the conveyance of emotions through the facial expressions or the bodies being represented is a typical issue dealt with by art academies from the 16th to the 18th century, the notion that an art work *is* above all an emotion being expressed, rather than a piece of beauty or the representation of a corner of the world, was

[1] The literature on this point is too abundant to be quoted in full. A classic reading is Lang.

drawn by Fry from a more recent source, that is, admittedly, Lev Tolstoy's *What is Art* (1897), despite the fact that in "An Essay in Aesthetics" Fry states that Tolstoy is wrong when he "values the emotions aroused by art entirely for their reaction upon actual life" (20). In the "Essay" Fry has come to consider the emotion raised by the work of art as a specific emotion, devoid of any immediate practical purpose and conveyed by the formal structure and means of the work of art itself. The sea change that leads to the "Essay in Aesthetics" has to be traced back to 1908, when Fry, in the letter on "The Last Phase of Impressionism," maintains that the vehicle of the artist's emotion no longer consists in the faces or the bodily poses of the figures represented in the painting, but can be identified in specific means of art ("organs of expression") such as "line, mass, colour" (73). In this letter Fry still struggles to find an exact definition of the quality of the emotion conveyed by the work of art: he fluctuates between a notion of the work of art as a direct manifestation of feeling, and art as the expression of a specific emotion, more rarefied and detached from everyday life. Some months later, in the same year, 1908, Fry reached a clearer understanding: in a lecture on "Expression and Representation in the Graphic Arts" maintains that "emotions aroused [by the work of art] do not at once translate themselves into action:" they are "ends in themselves" (64), the expression of something that differs from ordinary life. In fact they are connected to the imaginative life ("my idea—Fry writes to D. S. MacColl on February 28, 1909—is that there are moods of imaginative life and good for all arts" [*Letters* 1: 315]). In "An Essay in Aesthetics" Fry gives an even more exact definition of the quality of the emotions expressed by works of art, making a clear-cut distinction between the emotion conveyed by the works of art and the emotions experienced in real life; the latter have a practical function and enable us to respond adequately to the stimuli of the external world, while the emotions belonging to the imaginative life allow to concentrate on the "perceptive and emotional aspects of the experience. […] [T]he graphic arts are the expression of the imaginative life rather than a copy of actual life […]. Art appreciates emotion in and for itself"

(13, 15, 19). These pure emotions are conveyed to the beholder through "unity" and "variety" of design, and formal means such as the "rhythm of the line," "mass," "space," "light and shade," and "colour," which Fry defines as "the emotional elements of design" (23-24). Similar views on the quality of the emotion conveyed by the work of art were put forward with an awkward, difficult and at times obscure reasoning, in the introductory text ("The Post-Impressionists") to the *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* show, written by Desmond MacCarthy (the secretary of the exhibition) using notes by Roger Fry (rpt. in Reed 81-85). In the wake of the first post-impressionist exhibition Fry felt the moment had come to clarify to a wider audience his ideas about the history and the aims of modern art. Therefore, between 1910 and 1913 he became committed to an intense activity, as a lecturer and a journalist (Reed 86-132), trying on the one hand to better define the notion of art as the expression of the aesthetic emotion and, on the other, to enrich and specify the range of formal aspects capable of conveying such an emotion. The means he insists on in this phase are two: the decorative unity and the plasticity of the work of art. With the word "decorative" he meant the quality that defines the work of art as a self sufficient entity, independent from any referential connotation, and with the term "plasticity" a three dimensional quality that has to be evoked rather than simulated. This entails that in painting some sense of the third dimension must be suggested, not through illusionistic modelling however, but through modulation, as suggested by Paul Cézanne.[2] Fry's reflections on the work of Cézanne are actually the keystone of his entire critical building and, in treating the third dimension, he was probably reminiscent of Cézanne's doubts about the flatness of Gauguin's colours.

In his introduction to "The French Group" at the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, Fry epitomizes in a famous (and effective) formula his thoughts about the new art:

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[2] This is a point on which Fry and Bell do not completely agree, and it is probably Fry's insistence that leads Bell, in *Art* (27), to add the suggestion of a third dimension as a "non irrelevant" kind of representation; see, for example, Fishman 127.

> Those artists do not seek to give what can, after all, only be a pale reflex of actual appearance, but to arouse the conviction of a new and definite reality. They do not seek to imitate form, but to create form; not to imitate life but to find an equivalent for life. By that I mean that they wish to make images which by the clearness of their logical structure, and by their closely-knit unity of texture, shall appeal to our disinterested and contemplative imagination with some of the same vividness as the things of actual life appeal to our practical activities. In fact, they aim not at illusion but at reality. (167)

Decorative unity, plasticity and, especially, the expression of emotions are three of the main headings under which the new art is discussed and interpreted by British art criticism that deals with the two post-impressionist exhibitions: I do not mean critics such as Walter Sickert or D. S. MacColl, who had a vast knowledge of modern French art and had already formed a well structured opinion about it, but those who had scarce or no acquaintance with it. From the critical response to the first post-impressionist exhibition (between the end of 1910 and the beginning of 1911), the expressive quality of art becomes a critical category of prime importance when defining the aims of Post-Impressionism, in order to introduce it to a vast audience. In at least one instance an explicit reference to Fry in this regard was made even before the opening of the first post-impressionist exhibition: introducing a show of modern French artists held in Brighton in June 1910, Robert Dell quotes a passage from Fry's introduction to Maurice Denis' obituary of Cézanne that Fry had translated and introduced for the January and February 1910 issues of *The Burlington Magazine*. In the words quoted by Dell, Fry talks about the "direct expression in painting of imagined states of consciousness which has for long been relegated to music and poetry" (qtd. in Dell 85).

Also Robert Ross speaks of the work of art as an expression of emotions in his (unfavourable) review of the first post-impressionist exhibition, where this quality is associated with psychiatric pathology (Ross 101).[3] The theme is also central in the (half-hearted) review of the exhibition written by the painter Spencer F. Gore, president of the Camden Town Group, who was

[3] Under this respect the most ludicrous contribution is by Hyslop.

very close to Sickert; Gore quotes some words from MacCarthy/Fry's introduction to the show, maintaining that "'the emotional significance that lies in things'" should be "expressed in painting […] through the outward character of the object painted" (141). A similar view was held in Holbrook Jackson's review.[4]

In his review, published in *The Burlington Magazine*, Arthur Clutton-Brock insists on the connection between form and emotion in post-impressionist art (196), and similar opinions are expressed in Charles Lewis Hind's *The Post-Impressionists*, one of the two books written as an immediate reaction to the first post-impressionist exhibition (the other was *Notes on the Post-Impressionist Painters* by Charles Holmes, co-founder of *The Burlington Magazine* and close to Fry, although Fry never missed a chance to mistreat him). In his *Notes* Holmes stresses the importance of decorative unity in post-impressionist works (8 and *passim*) on show at the Grafton Galleries rather than the importance of the expression of emotions, while the point at issue in Hind's longer 1911 study is, in fact, the expression of emotions: "Expression, not beauty, is the aim of art. Beauty occurs. Expression happens—must happen. Art is not beauty. It is expression; it is always decorative and emotional" (2).[5] The influence of Fry in Hind's book is pervasive, to the point that, in a dialogue between an "Ordinary Painter" and an "Imaginative Painter," Hind makes the same distinction made by Fry in the "Essay in Aesthetics" in order to differentiate the emotions of "actual life" from those of the "imaginative life" (59-64).

In the two years between the first and the second post-impressionist exhibition, British criticism gradually became more prepared and ready to answer the questions raised by the new art. Fry's theoretical and critical framework is however still important: for example in 1912 when O. Raymond Drey, reviewing the Parisian Salon d'Automne of that year for *Rhythm*, with reference to Cézanne's influence states that "a man is a great art-

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4 "The post-impressionist paints what he feels about the thing seen" (Jackson 146).

5 Hind's book was published in the United States in 1912, and it was one of the main vehicles for the diffusion of Fry's ideas about Post-Impressionism in the USA (Nathanson 5).

ist when he has something to express" (345). And critics such as Desmond MacCarthy, or the poet Rupert Brooke, who were personally close to Fry, draw direct inspiration from his thought. For instance, Brooke, reviewing the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, talks about the work of art "as the expression of an emotion of the artist, and *not*, as most people have been supposing, his impression of something he sees" (404). At the beginning of 1913 the display of the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* was modified, because some of the works on show were needed for the Armory Show in New York, and about thirty watercolours by Cézanne were added: at that moment two reviews were published, respectively in *The Times* and in *The Observer*, the first not signed (attributed to Robert Ross by J. B. Bullen [410]), the other by P. G. Konody. In both papers an idea of plasticity that seems to be close to Fry's is very important: Konody (414) and Ross consider a non-illusionistic three dimensional movement of the pictorial surface as being fundamental: Ross defined it as "a new music of masses" ("Cézanne and the Post-Impressionists" 411), typical of Cézanne's painting.

When, at the end of 1912 the Americans Walter Pach, Walt Kuhn and Arthur B. Davies came to Europe in order to choose the works for the Armory Show, they visited the "Sonderbund" in Cologne, and the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*. In both shows they selected an important group of works (that is why the display of the show at the Grafton Galleries had to be modified); hence there is a direct link between the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* and the Armory Show, and not only in terms of selection of the works, but also in terms of critical framework into which modern art was presented to the audience.[6] At the opening of the Armory Show in New York, February 1913, very few people in the USA possessed the critical tools necessary to understand modern art. When the young critic Carl Zigrosser, who was then 22 years old, stood before Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, no. 2*,

[6] For an account of the American response to the *First Post-Impressionist Exhibition* see Nathanson. Nathanson notes that Fry was a friend of Davies (6) and that Pach acknowledges Fry's influence on the structure of the Armory Show (7).

for example, he scribbled on his copy of the catalogue "shingle artist" (Duchamp's painting had been nicknamed by the press "Explosion in a Shingle Factory" [Brown 137]). Fifty years later Zigrosser commented: "It must be remembered that at that time there was practically no interpretative literature on modern art. We Americans were confronted with odd and bizarre works without having any clue as to how to look or what to see" (45-46). Meyer Schapiro makes, more broadly, the same point when he states:

> Friendly critics praised the courage and vitality and integrity of the modern artist […] without venturing to analyze the new styles. The hostile criticism—narrow and shortsighted as it was—in denouncing the deviations from the past art, pointed more directly to the essential novelty: the image was distorted or has disappeared altogether; colors and forms were unbearably intense; and the execution was so free as to seem completely artless. (141)[7]

The organizers of the Armory Show were themselves struggling with problems of definition of the new art (e. g. Davies 150) while the art critics reviewing the exhibition had to introduce modern European art to an audience that was barely aware of its existence: this is why Fry's notion of the work of art as expression of emotions was particularly effective in justifying works of art that were not meant to be a sheer representation of the external world. Also other facets of the wide and complex critical response to the Armory Show may be connected to the ideas expressed by Fry in his writings between 1910 and 1912, for example that the works of modern art displayed both classicist or primitivist aspects; that these works of art were the expression of the "thing in itself;" or, that once the reference to the external world had been completely abandoned, art had become a kind of visual music. The notion of a work of art as expression of the aesthetic emotion, however, was put forward much more consistently and had been much better articulated theoretically by Fry, becoming a sort of a trademark of his criticism. In February 1913, when the Armory Show opened, Fry's

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[7] For an account of the critical reactions to the Armory Show, see Brown and Mancini.

thought was actually well-known in New York: until recently he had been an expert of the Old Masters' painting at the Metropolitan Museum (Nathanson 4).[8] Moreover, some of his ideas were indebted to those of American proto-formalist theorists, such as, for example, Denman Waldo Ross (Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics" 22; Stankiewicz 81, 84, 90-93 and Frank 80), and this provided a background for the American reception of his thought. Furthermore, he of course wrote in English and his writings were published in periodicals easily available to the American audience (excerpts from his introduction to the "French Group" at the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* and passages of his writings were quoted, reprinted or abridged in the U.S. press), and, last but non least, the turmoil caused by the two post-impressionist exhibitions had made him famous: right before the opening of the Armory Show, in January 1913, paragraphs from Fry's text for the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* were quoted in the catalogue of an Alfred Maurer exhibition at the New York Folsom Gallery (Zilczer 12), and in the same January 1913, Royal Cortissoz, the arch-conservative critic of *The New York Tribune*, defined Fry as a "hyerophant of Post-Impressionism" (qtd. in Olsen 34) and then cited his name in his review of the Armory Show (Cortissoz 807).

Also Walter Pach, one of the minds behind the organization of the Armory Show, in an article written about one year after the exhibition, returns on the topics that are dear to Fry, such as the importance of Cézanne for the new movement in art, the classicism of the new school, Cubism as "an expression in painting without representation" (863).

If Pach was conversant with what was happening in recent European art, and consistent in his opinions, many other critics who wrote about the Armory Show, friends or foes of modern art, between 1913 and 1915 repeatedly referred to modern art as the expression of an emotion. It is this notion, more than any other, that helped to define the new art. To bring only a few examples Ernest Blumenschein, in *The Century Magazine* of April 1914, defined Cubism as an art "of the decorative and emotional sort"

[8] For Fry's importance in the critical reception of Cézanne's art in the USA see Rewald 132-139 and *passim*.

(848). (It must be remembered how much the idea of a "decorative" art, meant as an art that relies only on its formal economy, is central to Fry's thought). The sculptor Jo Davidson, speaking in defence of the Cubists, states: "They are not painting what they see, but what they feel" ("The Extremists" 170). And the critic John Nielsen Laurvik, after having discussed at length Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, no. 2* (one of the works that caused more stir at the Armory Show, and that Laurvick didn't like) wrote:

> This movement has gained its impetus largely from a very general revolt against materialism that is substituting a new individualism for the old realism and I have no doubts that these men are sincerely and earnestly trying to discover a new form that shall express with greater intensity the new feelings and emotions aroused in men by all objects of the natural world. (19)

Laurvik was friends with Marius de Zayas, an artist, photographer and art critic close to Alfred Stieglitz (one of the few people in New York to have carried out, before the Armory Show, with his gallery and his review, *Camera Work*, a pioneering job in supporting modern art). Writing an article about Picasso from Paris for *Camera Work* in 1911, de Zayas talked about a picture that "should be the pictorial equivalent of the emotions produced by nature" ("Pablo Picasso" 66). The idea of a painting being the equivalent of an emotion resembles Maurice Denis' theory of "plastic equivalents," though in de Zayas it has such an emotional inflection that it is also close to the theories Fry was developing in those months.[9] Fry is explicitly quoted in *Cubists and Post-Impressionism*, by Arthur Jerome Eddy, of 1914, one of the two major texts devoted to modern art published by American authors in the wake of the Armory Show (the other is Willard

[9] Mecklenburg insists on the similarity between de Zayas' and W. H. Wright's opinions, on the one side, and Fry's and Bell's theories, on the other, but she thinks that this is due to the fact that "the four drew from similar sources" (119). De Zayas, introducing an excerpt from his article on Picasso in his *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York* states that he was only quoting "a few ideas Picasso had on painting at that time" (23).

Huntington Wright's *Modern Painting. Its Tendency and Meaning*, published in 1915). "After the painting of *things* [Realism] and *light* [Impressionism]—Eddy writes—one would say the art of painting had touched its limits, that there was nothing more to do. But, no, there is the painting of *neither* things nor light—the painting of *emotions*—the painting of pure line and color compositions for the sake of the pleasure such harmonies afford—*the expression of one's inner self*" (11).

Also in Wright's *Modern Painting. Its Tendency and Meaning* one can find ideas close to the ones expressed by Fry, and at this point also by Bell. For instance, Wright states:

> Modern painting strives toward the heightening of emotional ecstasy; and my *esthétique* is intended to pave the way for an appreciation of art which will make possible the reception of that ecstasy. With this object ever in view I have weighed the painting of the last century, and have judged it solely by its ability or inability to call forth a profound aesthetic emotion. Almost any art can arouse pleasing sentiments. Only great art can give us intellectual rapture. (10)

In another passage of his book, Wright maintains that "significant form must move in depth—backward and forward, as well as form side to side" (93).

Art as an expression of emotions, plasticity, significant form, are all notions drawn from Bloomsbury art criticism: another evidence of the fact that, in the years between 1910 and 1914, Roger Fry's theories in English speaking countries on both sides of the Atlantic seemed apt to provide a safe guidance for those artists and critics who wanted to make sense of the shocking novelties proposed by modern art.

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Todd Avery

A Mandarin for the Masses
Lytton Strachey's Jesus Complex

One evening early in 1927, a cold rain fell on London and glazed the iron railings of Gordon Square with a hint of danger. Wrapped in a long wool muffler and a beautifully tailored herringbone overcoat that hung to his feet, a tall, thin, bearded, bespectacled, forty-six-year-old nocturne in brown slipped out of his rooms and onto the sidewalks of Bloomsbury. Lytton Strachey was on a most *alluring* adventure. His destination: Brunswick Square, and a rendezvous with a handsome, young, wavy-haired *littérateur* named Roger Senhouse, the Dearest Snake with the melting smile and dark grey eyes (Lytton Strachey letter to Roger Senhouse, November 6, 1926, Berg Coll.; Holroyd 546).

Strachey, a member of England's intellectual aristocracy, was the improbable scion of a respected nineteenth-century imperialist family and claimed a distant entitlement to the Scottish throne. Tonight, uninterested in such profane puissance, he would gift his lover's ears with gilded jewels and, in Voltaire's phrase, kiss the tips of his wings (Lytton Strachey letter to Roger Senhouse, January 20, 1926, Berg Coll.). Strachey's privileged Victorian background had provoked, in the form of increasingly "sophisticated deviations" (Holroyd 581), his vigorous reaction against the social respectability and moral conventionality of his class. Ever since discovering Gibbon, Voltaire, and Plato as an adolescent, he had been theatrically flouting established authority, while wielding his own with sardonic glee. At turn-of-the-century Cambridge University, he had exerted a legendary influence on intellectual life from a high perch within the élite Cambridge Conversazione Society. There, among his fellow Apostles, he had celebrated anarchic freedom from moral restraint; under the philosophical influence of G. E. Moore's celebration of beauty

and friendship, he had promoted the democracy of ethical judgment and earned thereby a sinister sort of prestige. Even now, twenty years on, the more artistic students there continued to pay homage to this otherworldly figure, imitating his famous shriek, the Strachey voice, and affecting his notorious languor. He was an aesthete and a dandy, a renowned practitioner of a Mandarin literary style, a revolutionary biographer, a conscientious objector and active anti-conscriptionist during the First World War. He had fashioned himself into a relentless scourge of those calcified Victorian values which stubbornly *would* linger into the new century, retarding the advent of a New Age—an age of Paganism, wit, and flesh, of the abolition of prudery and the very idea of "unnatural" human desires (Strachey, *Letters* 22, 44). His friend John Maynard Keynes had likened him to Mephistophiles; his foe D. H. Lawrence found him nauseating; Beatrice Webb thought him and his friends in the Bloomsbury Group quite wicked (Holroyd 126, 333, 92).

Tonight he felt delightfully and devilishly wicked indeed—and a little bit queasy, too. As the rain prickled the skin of his face, his hands trembled moist in their gloves, his chest tightened, and his quickening breath puffed little clouds that misted his thick lenses in their small tortoise-shell frames. He crossed Russell Square, which sparkled like some enchanted forest, and looped up around Tavistock Place towards his destination. Over the past year he had playfully addressed many letters there:

> Deliver this to SENHOUSE (Roger)
> I prithee postman debonair!
> He is the handsome upstairs lodger
> At number 14 BRUNSWICK SQUARE. (Holroyd 578)

He climbed the steps to the front door, removed the precious key from his coat pocket, and let himself in to this Paradise. He paused for a moment; a question from Shakespeare rose to his mind: "How many actions most ridiculous hast thou been drawn to by thy fantasy?" (*As You Like It* 2.4.30-1). As he pushed the heavy door shut behind him, he turned and saw the first flakes of snow falling on an unusually cold and wet February evening.

But if it was chilly outside, things indoors were about to heat up. The day before, writing one of those letters from his home in rural Wiltshire, Strachey had announced his simple intention to arrive tonight at seven o'clock. It is hard to think of a tamer announcement than that. But it is difficult to imagine a less ordinary promise than the one that followed, to this Providential creature with the melting smile and dark grey eyes. "If I find," he had written, "a guillotine set up on the top landing—or a pillory with nails and knife complete—I shall bow to my fate" (February 2, 1927, Berg Coll.).

What Lytton Strachey found on the upstairs landing outside Roger Senhouse's door that cold February evening in Brunswick Square, we will never know. Strachey and Senhouse—who would become a well-respected publisher and translator—inhabited, like their friend Virginia Woolf, a highly literate, communicative, articulate, letter-writing world (Woolf, "Sketch" 65). But even in such a world, time, with its natural power of selection, has a way of concealing even the most sensational facts. However, time occasionally parts its curtain. Often it reveals happenings that, suggesting nothing beyond themselves, remain dead facts. But sometimes it offers tantalizing glimpses of obscure privacies. And occasionally these privacies transcend their intimate origins and speak down the years with a symbolic voice. This evening constitutes one of those rare events. It was followed by others like it. And it marked a turning point in a process that would culminate, three and a half years later, in a decadent, perverse, suggestive, and very naughty act. In the summer of 1930, Lytton Strachey had himself crucified. And loved it.

This climax in Strachey's comedy begs for interpretation. So too does the entire adult life leading up to it. It is far beyond the limitations of word-count to tell here the whole story of Lytton Strachey's development as an ethical thinker as it relates to his perennial interest in and engagement with religious discourse—an aspect of his thinking that has never really been noticed, let alone explored in any detail. What I would like to do is to sketch the rough contours of a new way of thinking about Lytton Strachey as an ethical and social thinker who found a

highly unusual type of performance through which to express some fundamental moral and political convictions.

We do not know, and maybe we should never know—that is a genuine question of the ethics of life-writing—exactly what the famous middle-aged author and the young literary man got up to behind closed doors on a cold Wednesday night in February ninety years ago in the Bloomsbury district of central London. Whatever happened, happened in a building that no longer exists, on a city block that was demolished by Marchmont Properties and Sir Robert McAlpine to make way for a complex of reinforced concrete flats, restaurants, and shops. To none of these would one address an envelope as delightfully as Lytton Strachey addressed his to Roger Senhouse. Whatever happened, happened, too, under oppressive and threatening social and legal conditions that have in many ways faded more thoroughly than the black ink that still shines brightly with human passions and energies and puzzlements from the carefully catalogued pages of note paper placed in acid-free heavy cardboard folders and secreted away at the end of the day in the vaults of archives in London and New York regulated precisely for temperature, humidity, and light.

Some things we can know as confidently as anything. It is almost entirely certain that Roger Senhouse neither beheaded Lytton Strachey that night, nor subjected him to the humiliation of cropping—an auricular insult that thrilled the Elizabethans and, given his fetish for ears—he regularly sends kisses to Senhouse's lollipops or "lolls"[1]—drew Strachey's fascinated attention. Photographs, and a single twelve-second film clip, taken at various times over the next five years, until his death in early 1932, provide abundant evidence of his continuing to live, with his head very definitely attached to his body, and his unscarred ears firmly affixed to the sides of his head.

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[1] On occasion, Strachey would include abbreviated closing salutations, whose words may be inferred contextually: "A[ll] m[y] l[ove] t[o] m[y] A[ngel] a[nd] m[y] k[isses] t[o] t[he] l[ollipops] (February 17, 1929, Berg Coll.); "A h[undred] k[isses] t[o] t[he] l[olls], a[nd] t[o] t[he] b[alls], a[nd] a[ll] m[y] l[ove] t[o] m[y] b[lessed] a[ngel]" (August 24, 1930, Berg Coll.).

But if the exact "what happened" remains elusive, the accident of archival discovery gives us some clues by making us privy to at least some of the written conversation that passed between Strachey and Senhouse over the ensuing days and weeks. Letters, never published, in the Strachey and Senhouse papers in the Berg Collection of English and American Literature at the New York Public Library, show that two days after their encounter, Strachey told Senhouse, rather cryptically, "I am still far from normal in every region. Certain sensations distinctly remain, which I find fascinating. […] Really, an experience I wouldn't have missed!" (February 4, 1927). A few days later, he reveals more. He is glad to know that Senhouse has "been feeling well," and reassures him, "As for my health, it's astonishing—But […] certain marks are still visible!" (February 9, 1927). Senhouse replies by telling Strachey he is "glad you are so well," and playfully asks, "what if your cheeks are still engraved when you die, will any one guess?" (February 10, 1927). On February 25, Strachey begs Senhouse's forgiveness for having failed to ask permission to attend a party at the home of a mutual friend, and suggests that his deserved "mental chastisement might be transferred to one of a more fundamental nature—which would be, in more ways than one, a score for me all around." A week later, on March 1, Strachey celebrates his forty-seventh birthday; on the fourth of the month he writes to thank Senhouse "for my lovely treat. […] I don't remember ever having had a better birthday.—I am still something of a Bengal tiger in certain regions! Hum, hum!"

It seems clear from these letters that the "highest spirits" that animate Strachey's letters to Senhouse and made him hum during this period resulted from an emotionally and sexually stimulating experiment in flagellation—and probably in caning. If there remained any doubt, then Strachey's letter of April 3 puts it to rest. During a party the previous night at Ham Spray House, Strachey's Wiltshire home, one of his guests approached him directly on arrival and suggestively asked, "A propos of pain and pleasure making a difference to one's sense of time, 'The intervals between the strokes when one's being beaten—I don't know whether you've ever been beaten […]' I vaguely smiled, & the conversation passed on." Strachey closes this coy smile of a let-

ter with "[s]ome piercing darts of love from your faithful Zebra." These letters, and others in the Berg Collection, record more than an isolated encounter or two. They record two men's reflections on the earliest in a series of encounters that mark a burgeoning commitment to SM fantasy and role-play. They also record the beginnings of a process of shared sexual exploration that would culminate three and a half years later in an event that Strachey would experience as a richly symbolic moment of ecstatic self-transcendence. This is how he thanked Senhouse for their evening together:

> Such a very extraordinary night! The physical symptoms quite outweighed the mental and spiritual ones. […] First there was the clearly defined pain of the cut […] and then the much vaguer after-pangs of crucifixion—curious stiffnesses moving about over my arms and torso—very odd—and at the same time so warm and comfortable—the circulation […] fairly humming—and vitality bulking large […] where it usually does—all through the night, so it seemed. But now these excitements have calmed down—the cut has quite healed up and only hurts when touched, and some faint numbnesses occasionally flit through my hands—voila tout, just bringing to the memory some supreme high-lights of sensation. […] What blessedness!
>
> You were a perfect angel last night. (Strachey, *Letters* 625).

The crucifixion of Lytton Strachey by Roger Senhouse in the cool, dull, thunderstormy summer of 1930, together with these early flagellations and further experiments in sexual role-play over the intervening years, helps us better to understand Lytton Strachey's life. I do not mean by this something so simply vulgar as that the previously unpublished Strachey-Senhouse correspondence offers us unprecedentedly detailed access to Strachey's (and Senhouse's, and Bloomsbury's) sexual and emotional life. The value of this correspondence hardly consists in the mere revelation of unorthodox intimacies. However, just as, in the life of Jesus, the crucifixion occupies only a brief narrative space but carries immense symbolic significance, so too the crucifixion of Lytton Strachey occupies but a moment in a life and yet resonates with symbolic value. Moreover, there is good reason to assume that neither Strachey nor Senhouse would balk at the prospect of the interpretation of their intimacies. Neither Strachey nor

his brother and literary executor James nor Senhouse destroyed these letters. Indeed, Senhouse himself sold them to the New York Public Library. And Strachey more than once expressed, in his letters, the desire that his entire correspondence with all its sensational revelations be read in a more tolerant future. These facts suggest their tacit permission publicly to reveal and, more importantly, to make meaning of intimate practices that, at the time, few would have wished known (but that in a world of often exhibitionistic electronic social media will no doubt seem much less shocking). When examined using interpretive frameworks that have been developed over the almost fifty years since Michael Holroyd published his unsurpassably detailed record of Strachey's life, the letters between Strachey and Senhouse, as well as other recent (and much less intimate, but equally interesting) archival discoveries among Strachey's previously unpublished writings, reveal the contents and contours—the social, political, ideological, ethical, and spiritual contents, and the aesthetic texture—of his radically non-normal, intensely queer life.

What exactly do these writings reveal? Why do they matter? In brief, they matter precisely because they illuminate a process of ethical development—an ethical journey and a commitment to the good—that formed the core concern of Lytton Strachey's life and writings. In a variety of social settings and historical and cultural contexts, and with a vigorous and persistent ethical commitment, Lytton Strachey devoted his life to the cause of civilization, as he and many of his friends in and around the Bloomsbury Group understood that term—friends like E. M. Forster, Roger Fry, David Garnett, Duncan Grant, John Maynard Keynes, and Leonard and Virginia Woolf. Central to this cause was Bloomsbury's embrace of sexual unorthodoxy, and, just as importantly, their commitment to freedom of speech, in private and in public. Strachey was a catalyst to its development in the years that Virginia Woolf called Old Bloomsbury, in a single moment that, whether it actually happened or not, has acquired mythical status in histories of the Group. In this moment, Strachey established not sexual freedom as such but freedom of sexual speech as a core element of the Bloomsbury ethos. One spring day in 1907 or thereabouts he stood in the doorway of the sitting room at 46

Gordon Square. Pointing to a stain on Virginia's sister Vanessa Stephen's dress, he shrieked the one-word question that toppled any lingering Victorian reticence in matters of sexuality among the original Bloomsburyans: "Semen?" (Woolf, "Old Bloomsbury" 195).

In Virginia Woolf's opinion, Strachey's doorway interrogation was so important to the development of Bloomsbury because of the link it established between speech and action. To be able to talk freely about formerly taboo subjects encouraged the imaginative appreciation of new, fresh, alternative ways of living in the real world. Moreover, it encouraged the living of these ways. After Strachey asked his question, Woolf recalled, "there was nothing that one could not say, nothing that one could not do, at 46 Gordon Square. It was, I think, a great advance in civilization." She goes on to speak specifically of "the loves of buggers" as a favored topic of conversation among her queer young male friends and the Stephen sisters who together composed the nucleus of Bloomsbury. But what she says on this topic applies equally well to a great many kinds of intimate practices. "The fact," she writes, "that they can be mentioned openly leads to the fact that no one minds if they are practiced privately. Thus many customs and beliefs were revised" (196).

In his life and in his writings, Lytton Strachey was a determined reviser. Around this same time, in a paper he delivered at Cambridge to an exclusive discussion society and suggestively titled, "Will it come right in the end?" Strachey pushes Woolf's point further. Although Woolf would help to transform feminist thinking in the early twentieth century by detailing many of the complex and mutually constitutive relations between public and private life—she is often, and rightly, regarded as a writer who popularized the idea that "the personal is the political"—her understanding here of practice remains private: "no one minds if they are practiced privately"—"at 46 Gordon Square." Strachey, by contrast, vigorously encouraged the public practice of conventionally frowned-upon activities. In "Will it come right in the end?" Strachey takes this encouragement to an extreme limit, and states one of his fundamental ethical convictions, linking freedom of speech and of sexual practice to the advancement

of civilization. A healthy society, Strachey believed, required total freedom of speech in literature, and broad freedom of choice and action in sexual matters; such freedoms, he thought, composed the *sine qua non* of civilization. And so, he thought, "the only hope of our ever getting a really beautiful and vigorous and charming civilization is to allow the whole world to fuck and bugger and abuse themselves in public, and generally misbehave to their hearts' content" (80).

Strachey's formulation is provocative. It was intended to be shocking to his fellow Apostles, all-male members of an élite, long-standing, illustrious, and secret intellectual society over which he had established in recent years a preponderant influence. His statement is also, of course, hyperbolic. Lytton Strachey neither fucked nor buggered nor masturbated nor flogged nor had himself pilloried or crucified in public any more than most of us. For the most part, like Woolf, he kept his privates private. There were good practical and self-preserving reasons for his doing so. In the 1920s, the threat of punishment for buggery, or for what English law called "gross indecency"—the law that had sentenced Oscar Wilde to two years of hard labor three decades earlier—remained a potent threat to English homosexuals, even if its actual application was rare. It would remain such a threat until the late 1960s. Moreover, as Strachey surely understood, while any civilization worthy of the name requires a great deal of public and private freedom, it is questionable whether an unchecked public licentiousness necessarily serves the cause of civilization. The extremity of his formulation suggests as much. It is perhaps a fine line that separates civilized bawdiness from flagrant vulgarity, but it is a line nevertheless. Would Lytton Strachey have twerked? If we could reconstitute his ashes and bring him back to life, one imagines him looking around and, with T. S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock, exclaiming, "'That is not it at all, that is not what I meant at all,' when I spoke of genuine beauty, vigor, and charm in public life."

In his very next sentence, after encouraging misbehavior, Strachey admits that he is simplifying, to produce an effect. However, he also goes on to say he is "pretty sure that the main outlines are correct," and that a healthier, saner, more beautiful and vigorous

civilization does not require "an entire change in the nature of man; all he needs is honesty, wisdom, courage, and good taste, in order to put the whole business on a satisfactory basis. But when he has done that, the world will be singularly changed" (81). It is not a stretch to believe that Strachey might well harbor various misgivings about the crudities of much mass culture today—which has never been especially guilty of "good taste"—just as he to all intents and purposes ignored it during his lifetime, preferring James Boswell to the BBC, Lodowick Muggleton to music halls, Madame de Lieven to the movies. (The exception that proves the rule: he was entranced by Sarah Bernhardt. But who wasn't?) If we could somehow revivify him today, though, his urgent insistence on freedom for all, in speech and in sexuality, as the basis for a more decent and just society would certainly speak loudly and sound familiar to anyone struggling to achieve public approval and legal sanction for "alternative" or non-"normal" intimate activities. If by democracy we understand broad and equal participation in matters that concern citizenship, then to conceive of fucking and buggering and joyously misbehaving as indispensable prerequisites of civilization, and to extend the privilege of sharing in that civilization to "the whole world," is to think in radically democratic terms. It is to imagine, in a way that remains eminently relevant today, the simultaneously personal and political, biological and cultural arena of sexuality, with its blurry lines and perforated walls, as a workshop of democratic civilization.

Lytton Strachey was a provocative and polarizing celebrity in his time who continues to speak to ethical, aesthetic, social, cultural, and political issues that occupy our own. Strachey was an ethical aesthete, and by that phrase I mean that he was a lover of beauty and of artistic craft who derided art's moral presumptions but used art, and celebrated its capacity, to encourage the pursuit of good lives outside of conventional or rigid moral norms—outside, in fact, the very idea of normalcy. In other words, contradiction and opposition were at the heart of his writing and of his way of being in the world. Paul Levy, in his introduction to Strachey's letters, portrays him as an irreconcilably contradictious figure. Strachey was, Levy writes, a bundle of oppositions and sometimes irreducible tensions:

> He was a political radical who was born into the ruling class, a member of the intellectual aristocracy who cherished his contacts with the aristocracy of blood, a democrat who did not always trust the people, and one of the original champagne socialists. He was a cynic capable of sentimentality, a sceptic who believed in love. He thought war was the greatest evil, closely followed by religion. He was an open homosexual whose affair with a woman painter was one of the most poignant love stories of the twentieth century. (ix)

In addition, despite Strachey's lifelong struggles with ill-health and

> his unrelenting care for his own comfort, he played the victim in a sado-masochistic relationship with his last male lover. His sex life appeared to friends largely to be fantasy, but he bore scars that proved otherwise. Though physically unprepossessing, etiolated and always too thin, he was a dominating figure, capable of manipulating strong and fit men and women to get his way. But he got his deepest joy from being the passive recipient of pain. (ix)

How might it be possible to reconcile, or at least to account for and to respect, these many contradictions, without presuming to reduce them to a single, inflexible cause? "Human beings, no doubt," Strachey writes in *Elizabeth and Essex: A Tragic History* (1928), "would cease to be human beings unless they were inconsistent" (9). Moreover, what relationship obtains between Strachey's scars, the tiger marks and zebra stripes inflicted by Senhouse on his hands and buttocks, on the one hand—and, on the other hand, his deeply spiritual disdain for religion, his democratic highbrowism, his belief in the ethical value, and even obligation, of art, and his conviction that he was putting his artistic talents to use for noble ethical and political ends? To put it more directly, what is the link between Strachey's sexuality and his politics?

The answer to this question is to be found in Strachey's perennial concern with fundamental questions of ethics, together with his equally steady if more ambivalent interest in and use of religious discourse as a language in which to express his ethical ideals. In the state of sexual anarchy that he calls up, however playfully, as a condition of civilization, he insists that "the world will be singularly changed" ("Will" 81). What exactly might one discover in this unknown land? Imaginatively, Strachey "seem[s]

to dwell" there "among new braveries and absurdities and fascinations, to come smiling into surprising paradises, and to experience serenely God knows how many extraordinary loves" (81). For Strachey, the experiencing of such loves amounts to the highest type of spiritual experience and constitutes the very nature and purpose of civilization.

This paradise does not, of course, exist on any map. Rather, it exists in the minds of individuals and in the shared consciousness of communities, and it occupies "some curious unrecognized tract of territory somewhere between morals and aesthetics, where the values depend on a queer intermixture of both—on such things as good taste and a kind of intellectual elegance and vigour on one side and vulgarity and a sort of silliness and insignificance on the other" (79). This formulation echoes and resonates with fundamental ethical and aesthetic claims of Strachey's late-Victorian predecessors in the art for art's sake movement, and specifically those of Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater. It restates, for example, Wilde's understanding of the occasional congruity between crime and culture. For Strachey, there is no intrinsic incongruity between libertinage and civilization. For to be a libertine, to embrace a type of anarchy in sexual ethics, is finally, he writes in "Will it come right in the end?" to "give […] copulation a fair chance." How to give that chance? "To do that," he says in language at once ethical, aesthetic, sexual, and religious, "one must conjure up a whole world of strange excitements, gradually beginning and mysteriously deepening, one must imagine the shock and the pressure of bodies, and realize the revelation of an alien mind, one must find oneself familiar with miracles and, assuming an amazing triumph, swim in glory through a palpitating universe of heavenly and unimaginable lust" (79-80). The goal of this conjuring is to release, celebrate, justify, and, above all, to consecrate and, by consecrating, to redeem "an immense number of lascivious wholes which are really valuable in themselves" but "which have been crushed out of existence" (80).

In addition to his echo of Wilde, Strachey's appeal to the "queer intermixture" to be found in his utopian *terra incognita* also depends upon an ideological and ethical contrariness that he shares even more strongly with Pater, who located the spirit of the Re-

naissance in its "antinomianism." "One of the strongest characteristics," Pater writes in his study of Aucassin and Nicolette:

> [...] of that outbreak of the reason and the imagination, of that assertion of the liberty of the heart in the middle age, which I have termed a mediaeval Renaissance, was its antinomianism, its spirit of rebellion and revolt against the moral and religious ideas of the age. In their search after the pleasures of the senses and the imagination, in their care for beauty, in their worship of the body, people were impelled beyond the bounds of the primitive Christian ideal; and their love became a strange idolatry, a strange rival religion. […] of a spirit of freedom, in which law has passed away. (16-17)

The only real difference between Strachey's overt formulation of a new ethical and social ideal in "Will it come right in the end?" and elsewhere, and Pater's tacit formulation in *The Renaissance*, is one not of substance but of degree: Strachey is markedly more explicit in his description of "the pleasures of the senses." But the spirit is fundamentally the same. Pater, Wilde, and Strachey all distrusted ideas, theories, and systems that demanded the sacrifice of experience to abstract moral codes or conventions; they all, also, understood ethics in spiritual, if not conventionally religious, terms. Wilde's deeply ethical fairy tales, for example, vibrate with religious impulse and spiritual purpose, as do his reflections on Jesus and Saint Francis of Assisi in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" and *De Profundis*, his long prison-letter written in chains.

Pater, too, in the very moment of his art for art's sake manifesto, the conclusion to *The Renaissance*, where he most stridently asserts art's independence from moral or other philosophical systems and habits of thought, refuses finally to disregard "religious […] ideas," inasmuch as they can be useful as spurs to observation and thought, "as points of view, instruments of criticism, [which] may help us to gather up what may otherwise pass unregarded by us" (120). So, too, Lytton Strachey, strident anti-evangelical, Mephistophilean modernist, scourge of Christianity in the line of Voltaire, assumed the mantle of rival evangel for a freer type of spirituality, a healthier, saner, and aesthetically more pleasing, and above all a more decent civilization than that which characterized his "barbarian age." He was also writing,

he thought, at a historical moment of great possibility for sexual liberty and its attendant spiritual rewards. "The mists were lifting" in the early twentieth century, he thought, and, as he told Carrington, "It's queer how morality is breaking up in every direction" (*Letters* 303).

As a young man, Strachey already saw himself as a sort of priest, a prophet of a rather queer type. He told his "immoralist" friend John Maynard Keynes of his intention "to go into the wilderness, or the world, and preach an infinitude of sermons on one text—Embrace one another! It seems to me the grand solution" (*Letters* 74). The last few years of Strachey's life included a brief period when he entertained the idea of writing a biography of Jesus. By this time, given his decades-long hostility to organized religion in general and Christianity in particular, he had formed an improbable identification with the messianic preacher of the beatitudes and the enemy of scribes and Pharisees. This feeling of shared purpose, notwithstanding his categorical atheism and even despite his dubiousness about the quality of Jesus' ethical ideas, led Strachey to submit to an unusual, deeply loving embrace which resulted in his suffering visible stigmata in his hands and side and, more importantly, enjoying a feeling of ecstatic communion with his lover.[2]

Lytton Strachey's identification with Jesus—it would be too much, but it is certainly suggestive, to say his Jesus Complex—represents an opportunity to explore, with the help of new evidence and fresh eyes for the old, the centrality of religiously inflected ethical discourse not only to his own sense of creative and critical purpose, but also to the shaping of early twentieth-century life-writing and other aspects of modernist literature. It offers the chance to "go Strachey on Strachey"—to reconsider the shape of Strachey's life from a specific point of view, and to craft that life in a shape that it and his works invite. It also tacitly extends an invitation to think about the quality and continuing relevance of ethical ideas and ideals forged over the course of an adult life a century ago by a writer who was hypersensitive to the power of social, cultural, legal, aesthetic, moral, and religious

[2] For a fuller discussion of Lytton Strachey and Roger Senhouse's S/M crucifixion activities, see Avery.

conventions to deform vital impulses, disrupt intimacy, demolish democracy, and destroy lives in the name of a spurious normalcy.

Does such an effort as I am describing imply a return to the hagiographic impulse which characterized the early history of biography, which flared again in the nineteenth century, and which Strachey utterly discredited in his own full-length lives and miniature portraits? Not by any means. Lytton Strachey identified with Jesus, but he was no saint, and his ethical engagements were sometimes less democratic in impulse than one might wish. However, he was perennially interested in ethical questions, and this interest—and why it matters—can be understood better by examining a series of symbolic moments from his life and writings, each of them engaging with religious discourse. The effort to trace the development of a life in ethics through a series of such moments requires a fresh and largely sympathetic look with new eyes. On our own part it requires, to borrow a key term from the influential twentieth-century philosopher Emmanuel Levinas—whose own thinking provocatively marries passionate religiosity to a deconstructive impulse—an ethically invested critical effort to see Lytton Strachey's face—the face that wrapped itself in a muffler against the rain and sleet on its way to that propitious rendezvous with Roger Senhouse and his cane in Brunswick Square one evening in February in the long, cold winter of 1927.

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Marina Lops

"England belonged to them" Edward Carpenter and Forster's "Utopia" of Masculine Love in *Maurice*

A visit to Carpenter

In the "Terminal Note" to *Maurice,* Forster provides a surprising account of the genesis of the novel, published posthumously in 1971, but composed in a few months between 1913 and 1914:

> [The novel] was the direct result of a visit to Edward Carpenter at Milthorpe. […] It must have been on my second or third visit to the shrine that the spark was kindled and he and his comrade George Merrill combined to make a profound impression on me and to touch a creative spring. George Merrill also touched my backside—gently and just above the buttocks. […] The sensation was unusual and I still remember it […]. It was as much psychological as physical. It seemed to go straight through the small of my back into my ideas, without involving my thoughts. If it really did this, it would have acted in strict accordance with Carpenter's yogified mysticism, and would prove that at that precise moment I had conceived. (*Maurice* 219)

The novel's conception is evoked here in terms that, as John Fletcher rightly observes in one of the most insightful analyses of the text, confront us with a revised version of the Freudian primal scene, where the triangular relationship between mother, father and infantile voyeur is "replaced by a primal scene of masculine love in which by a strange displacement the male partners combine to touch and to inseminate the watching third" (68). The long period of sterility that had followed the great success of *Howards End* (1910) is finally interrupted by a sudden outburst of creative energy and, once back home in Harrogate, Forster sets out to write the first version of a text which over the years would undergo a painstaking labour of revision and rewriting, culmi-

nating in the drafting of the "Terminal Note" in 1960, where the writer reconstructs the circumstances that made the novel possible and pays his tribute to the man that had inspired it.

A pioneer sex reformer and radical thinker—whose utopian socialist idealism laid the basis of social and political change in a radical transformation of everyday life and behaviour, and in a redefinition of personal and sexual relationships—Carpenter was an extremely popular figure in late Victorian and Edwardian radical circles. Forster first met him in 1912, through the office of their common friend Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, but his knowledge of Carpenter's thought certainly dates from some years earlier. Joseph Bristow suggests that it was in the pages of the *Independent Review*, the journal founded by the Cambridge Apostles which ran from 1903 to 1907, that Forster first read some of his writings (117). What is certain is that Carpenter's name figures in a list of authors Forster annotated in the margin of a diary entry for New Year's Eve, 1907.[1] It appears again in the final, grateful invocation that concludes the entry of 31 December 1913 ("Edward Carpenter! Edward Carpenter! Edward Carpenter!", qtd. in Gardner x).With time, Forster would reassess his views on his old friend and his enthusiasm would gradually wane,[2] but the awareness of his debt towards Carpenter for his role in shaping his own homosexual conscience

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1 This list, including highly canonical authors like Shakespeare, Symonds and Butler and reprinted in a footnote of Furbank's biography (159n1), has been interpreted as the expression of Forster's need to come to terms with his own homosexuality through the discovery of a homosexual literary tradition. Moreover, the names of A. E. W. Clarke, Desmond Coke, H. M. Dickinson, Howard Sturgis, added on the same page of the diary (see Martin 39n8), testify to Forster's knowledge of the so-called schoolboy novels whose plots of doomed, platonic relationships between two undergraduates or schoolboys provide a narrative pattern that *Maurice* sets to reverse.

2 The diary entry of 31 December 1914 reads: "E. C. He too is less important. What I owe to him, though!" (qtd. in Gardner xiv). Forster provides a comprehensive portrait in the two BBC talks he broadcast on the occasion of the centenary of Carpenter's birth. Out of these two talks (delivered on 29 August and 25 September 1944) grew the essay on Carpenter that he included in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1950). Despite some differences in content, both talks and essay share a com-

is reaffirmed in 1960: "For a short time he seemed to hold the key to every trouble. I approached him […] as one approaches a saviour" (219).

A largely negative reception greeted *Maurice* at its publication. The main charge was that of didacticism and lack of formal qualities: the text was considered "simple" and dated in its treatment of homosexuality, or, alternatively, poorly written just because of its theme.[3] Robert K. Martin's path-breaking study "Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of *Maurice*" (1983) marked a turning point in the critical history of the novel. Setting the text in the cultural context of its first drafting and privileging the Carpenter-Forster connection as a key to the understanding of the formal organization of the narrative, Martin reoriented the critical discourse on the novel and paved the way to more articulated and persuasive readings that have challenged the initial view of *Maurice* as a straightforward and unsophisticated piece of fiction. This has led to a reconsideration of its position in the Forsterian canon. Moving from this perspective, this essay aims at exploring the ways in which Forster's tale of homosexual self-discovery draws on Carpenter's evolutionary progressivism and plays with different narrative models and generic conventions in order to produce its own problematic reworking of Carpenter's utopian vision.

Forster's homosexual Bildungsroman

In his influential account of the novel, Martin detects a "double structure" as the organizing principle of the narrative, with Part I and II centred on Maurice's Platonic relationship with the aristocratic Clive Durham and Part III and IV on the emotion-

mon stance in which a sympathetic tone mingles with subtle ironic detachment. For more on this see Rahman 53-54.

[3] Philip Toynbee's review for *The Observer* provided a significant example of this critical attitude. Toybee judges the novel ill-written and argues that "[Forster] should *not* express his homosexual feelings directly" (qtd. Booth 173). In his view the force and value of Forster's other narratives derive from his channeling his energies through the exclusion of homosexuality.

ally and sexually fulfilling encounter with Alec Scudder, Clive's gamekeeper. The structural opposition between the two sections reflects the oppositions between two kinds of homosexuality, the first "dominated by Plato and, indirectly, by John Addington Symonds and the apologists of 'Greek love';" the second "by Edward Carpenter and his translation of the ideas of Walt Whitman" (30). Later critics, while acknowledging the hermeneutic force of this reading, have partially revised it. John Fletcher sees it as over-polarizing both the novel and its genealogy, and questions the historical correctness of Martin's interpretation of Symonds's view of Greek love arguing that "Symonds as much as Carpenter is concerned to defend the physical expression of homosexual love" (66).[4] Analogously, Howard J. Booth claims that the later Symonds "was much more relaxed about homosexual sex" and observes that Martin "gives a sense of the novel that is too static" (177). Moving along the lines of Martin's analysis, these readings do not impinge on its substantial validity, rather they develop its assumptions and widen its scope, opening up the space for a further investigation of the connection between the formal strategies the novel adopts and its ideological stance.

Maurice displays a peculiar generic hybridism resulting from Forster's skilful and deft adaptation of different modes and con-

[4] Discussing Symonds's conception of "Greek Love" as it emerges from the pages of his *A Problem of Greek Ethics* (1883), Fletcher underlines how Symonds identifies two different models of homosexual relationship in ancient Greece. The first and older one was represented by the non-sexual heroic friendship that united Achilles and Patroclus in *The Iliad,* the second and historically later one coincided with the practice of *paiderastia*, "the love of a man and an adolescent youth, which [Symonds] divides into the noble and the base varieties" (66-67). What Symonds celebrates as the ideal of "Greek Love" is a term of mediation between these opposites, a "mixed form of *paiderastia* which combines the manly ideals of heroic friendship with a cross-generational passion of an older man for a youth, but which 'exhibited a sensuality unknown to Homer'" (67). Moreover, Fletcher recalls Symonds's role as Whitman's main apologist in England and remembers how, in his twenty-year correspondence with the American poet, Symonds tried to "win from him an explicit recognition and acceptance of the sexual feeling between men implied and tacitly imagined in Whitman's poetic celebration of 'the love of the comrades'" (67).

ventions to his narrative project. In its unfolding, the novel's plot mirrors that of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, as it focuses on the process of growth and maturation of its eponymous character from boyhood to adult age. Again, as typical of the traditional *Buildungsroman*, the topographic arrangement of the story is functional to its development, with different places and settings reflecting the different stages of the hero's journey of self-discovery. By inflecting this paradigm to his ends, though, Forster alters it significantly. In narrating Maurice's progress towards homosexual self-awareness, he does not only expand the boundaries of this narrative genre, writing the first and only homosexual *Buildungsroman* produced by a canonical author up to that time. He also makes those boundaries shifting and problematic as becomes evident in the much discussed and controversial "happy" ending of the novel, where the final union of Maurice and Alec can only take place at the expense of their self-exclusion from society, a self-imposed retreat to the "greenwood" that projects the novel's conclusion into the realm of the pastoral idyll and in so doing determines a generic turn charged with significant implications. First and foremost, as we shall see, that of radically questioning the very possibility for the homosexual subject of a concrete and successful integration into the collective social body.

If the *Bildungsroman* provides the basic model of the text, its finely woven imagery and the set of mutually related and recurrent motifs and situations that punctuate the narrative give it its peculiar compactness and contributes to the "particular blend of realism and fantasy" (Grant 193) that characterizes its style and tone from the very first chapters, in which the figure of Maurice is introduced.

Portrayed as "a plump, pretty lad, not in any way remarkable" (*Maurice* 6), Maurice distinguishes himself for his lack of outstanding qualities:

> He was not good at work, though better than he pretended, nor colossally good at games. If people noticed him they liked him, for he had a bright friendly face and responded to attention; but there were so many boys of his type—they formed the backbone of the school and we cannot notice each vertebra. He did the usual things […]. In a word, he was a mediocre member of a mediocre school, and left a faint and favourable impression behind. (15)

The emphasis on averageness as the main attribute of the novel's protagonist should not be a surprise. Maurice's commonness, his uncritical identification with the values of his family, his class and gender contribute to foreground his "emergent homosexual difference" (Fletcher 75) and to call attention to the possibility that homosexuality may provide growth for even the most conventional. By making Maurice and not the aristocratic, intellectual Clive the protagonist of his novel, Forster avoids "the more obvious pitfalls of a simply idealising narrative […] a portrait of the artist as a young invert" (Fletcher 75) and in so doing skillfully exploits and effectively adapts to his own purpose the narrative logic inherent in the *Buildungsroman* as a literary genre, with its capacity to produce "a phenomenology that makes normality interesting and meaningful *as* normality" (Moretti 11).

A seemingly "insipid" hero, Maurice is a typical product of suburban, middle-class Edwardian England and its values—"Maurice is Suburbia" Forster comments in his "Terminal Note" (220). The resemblance to his dead father, of whom he bears the name, acts as a leitmotif of his characterization so that his ordinariness appears as the inevitable outcome of the combined action of biological and social influences. The injuction of his schoolmaster, Mr Abrahams, to "copy" his father (7) finds an echo in his mother's words justifying her choice to send him to Sunnington, his father's old public school, "'in order that [he] may grow up like [his] dear father in every way'" (12). Under the pressure of familiar and social ties, Maurice seems destined to follow a similar path ("[Mr Hall] had passed in the procession twenty-five years before, vanished into a public school, married, begotten a son and two daughters, and recently died of pneumonia. [He] had been a good citizen, but lethargic" [7]) and be submitted to the same range of social duties and obligations. However, right from the start the text confronts us with a dissonant element in his personality, the presence of an emotional surplus that manifests itself in his sudden, boyish fits of tears, what Forster describes as "an ingredient that puzzles him, wakes him up, torments him and finally saves him" (220) and which takes the shape of a dim and perplexing bundle of

indefinite emotions he will gradually learn to know and discern. In the opening chapters of the novel such emotional turmoil finds its emblematic expression in two codified narrative situations centred on the motif of the double. In the first, the boy's night terrors are evoked in a scene that has an antecedent in the Red Room chapter in *Jane Eyre*:

> When Maurice did go to bed, it was reluctantly. That room always frightened him. He had been such a man all the evening, but the old feeling came over him as soon as his mother had kissed him good night. The trouble was the looking-glass. He did not mind seeing his face in it, nor casting a shadow on the ceiling, but he did mind seeing his shadow on the ceiling reflected in the glass. He would arrange the candle so as to avoid the combination, and then dare himself to put it back and be gripped with fear. […] In the end he would dash out the candle and leap into bed. Total darkness he could bear, but this room had the further defect of being opposite a street lamp. On good nights the light would penetrate the curtains unalarmingly, but sometimes blots like skulls fell over the furniture. His heart beat violently, and he lay in terror, with all his household close at hand. (13-14)

The boy's inarticulate perception of his confused desires finds its objective correlative in the nightmarish images produced by the nocturnal lights. Replicating the doubling effect, the spectral reflection of his shadow in the looking glass is frightening, in so much as it seems to assume an autonomous existence and therefore to confirm his precarious sense of identity. Such an uncanny feeling, reinforced by the enigmatic skull-like blots projected over the furniture by the streetlamp, is finally dispelled by the thought of George, the garden boy Maurice had vainly looked for on his return home after the school term, only to find out that he had left the household in search for a better job. His unexpected departure had caused Maurice an inexplicable "great mass of sorrow" (13) but in the nocturnal scene the renewal of that painful sensation has a paradoxically comforting power:

> [H]e remembered George. Something stirred in the unfathomable depths of his heart. He whispered, 'George, George.' Who was George? Nobody—just a common servant. Mother and Ada and Kitty were far more important. But he was too little to argue thus. He did

> not even know that when he yielded to this sorrow he overcame the spectral and fell asleep. (14)

George is dimly perceived by the young boy as alternative and incompatible to the social norm embodied in the world of familiar affections that his mother and sisters represent. In a narrative organized around a carefully woven pattern of symmetries and correspondences, George, the "servant boy," acts as a prefiguration of Alec Scudder and allows the narrator to introduce the theme of cross-class homosexual relationship that the novel will develop. As the first object of Maurice's boyish attachment, George will significantly reappear in one of the two dreams in which Maurice's early fantasies of homosexual desire crystallize in the form of elusive and enigmatic figures:

> In the first dream he felt very cross. He was playing football against a nondescript whose existence he resented. He made an effort and the nondescript turned into George, that garden boy. But he had to be careful or it would reappear. George headed down the field towards him, naked and jumping over the woodstacks. 'I shall go mad if he turns wrong now,' said Maurice, and just as they collared this happened, and a brutal disappointment woke him up. […]
>
> The second dream is more difficult to convey. Nothing happened. He scarcely saw a face, scarcely heard a voice say, 'That is your friend,' and then it was over, having filled him with beauty and taught him tenderness. He could die for such a friend, […] they would make any sacrifice for each other […] neither death nor distance nor crossness could part them, because 'this is my friend.' (16)

In their juxtaposition the two dreams function as a key to the understanding of Maurice and foreshadow the two different trajectories along which his emotional and affective development will take place. If Alec is in the heritage of the naked boy, the second dream becomes a recurrent point of reference throughout the narrative as it condenses and knots together his different experiences: "it bears especially closely, as the support of an idealising function, on his love for Clive, while the fantasy of a mutually self-sacrificing pair of friends against the world is affirmed again with Alec" (Fletcher 84-85).

Different places, different masculinities

In his 1926 essay "Notes on the English Character" Forster's critique of English masculinity is closely connected with his critique of English educational institutions. He diagnoses "the difficulties of the Englishmen abroad" as stemming from the public school system, which sends forth its products "with well-developed bodies, fairly developed minds, and undeveloped hearts" (4-5). Almost two decades earlier Edward Carpenter had developed a similar argument in the chapter "Man, the Ungrown" of his *Love's Coming of Age* (1896). Carpenter's sexual politics was part of a wider political agenda in which the redefinition of personal and gender relations was inscribed within a more comprehensive project of radical transformation of society. His romantic and ethical socialism, based on an original synthesis of Eastern mystic thought, anarchism, Marxism, and 19th century radical thinking, promoted and practiced new and alternative ways of life as essential to the material and spiritual regeneration of society. Within this context must be read his criticism on the models of conventional Victorian masculinity embodied by "the men of the English-speaking well-to-do class" ("Love's Coming of Age" 110). Their qualities and shortcomings are the result of the education received in the public schools, where they learn to get "a tolerably firm and reliable grip on the practical and material side of life—qualities which are of first-rate importance, and which give the English ruling classes a similar mission in the world to the Romans of the early empire" (110). Sports and fresh air shape their bodies, but leave their souls undeveloped: "So it comes about that the men who have the sway of world today are in the most important matters quite ungrown" (111). Such an analysis resonates in Forster's statements of 1926 but, more significantly, bears upon his characterization of Clive and, to a certain extent, of Maurice, and upon the way specific cultural and educational models shape and mould their personalities.

Thus, in the opening chapter of the novel, Maurice's conversation on sexual matters with his schoolteacher, Mr Ducie, foregrounds the latter's hypocrisy in dealing with the subject.

Instead of illustrating his words, the diagrams he traces in the sand appear obscure and incomprehensible to the boy; moreover, Mr Ducie's embarrassment at the thought that someone might find them contrasts with his asserted pedagogical intentions and makes Maurice judge him a liar and a coward. A similar episode occurs in Cambridge, when Clive condemns the Dean's hypocrisy for having omitted a passage containing "a reference to the unspeakable vice of the Greeks" (*Maurice* 42) during his translation class.

Maurice's suburban household in London, the Sunnington public school and old Cambridge university build up the social spaces that dominate the first half of the novel and are the background of the experiences that accompany his passage from adolescence to manhood. Conveyed through the recurrent image of his gradual ascending the "Deep Valley of Shadow"—a leitmotif permeating the whole section—, this process of maturation also coincides with the character's progressive alienation from the set of moral and social standards those spaces represent. The first stage of his development is marked by his transition from his middle-class family to the intellectual milieu of Cambridge. Maurice's perceived antagonism between these two worlds is registered in the opening section of chapter 9 when, once back in Cambridge after having spent the Eastern vacation at home, he remembers this period as a time of mental and spiritual regression under the influence of his family: "Three weeks in their company left him untidy, sloppy, victorious in every item, yet defeated on the whole. He came back thinking, and even speaking, like his mother or Ada" (46). Here and in similar passages, his misogynous attitude to his mother and sisters conflates with his rejection of suburban normality and its falsifying expectations. To the female, suburban universe of his family the novel opposes the intellectual, homosocial space of Cambridge and its values with which Maurice temporarily identifies through his relationship with Clive.

If "Maurice is Suburbia, Clive is Cambridge" (220): his small figure, blonde and delicate, contrasts with Maurice's dark and vigorous beauty so as his "tranquil and orderly" (30) mind is the specular double of Maurice's "torpid brain" (9). In defining him

a "blend of lawyer and squire" (221), Forster makes his intellectuality part of his class identity and represents the relationship between the two young men as the gradual awakening of the mentally torpid bourgeois by the aristocratic intellectual. Thus, Clive's courtship of Maurice in chapter 7 takes the shape of a theological dispute played out on the model of a Socratic dialogue in which he displays all his dialectical ability in order to trigger the maieutic process by which Maurice finally comes to admit the sham of his religious faith. Significantly, the chapter ends with Clive suggesting that Maurice read *The Symposium*, a gesture that inscribes their relationship within the boundaries of a specific discourse and sets the pattern of its unfolding. Shifting the narrative focus on Clive in the long flashback of chapter 12, the narrator recapitulates his process of self-discovery as culminating in the final recognition of Platonic love as an authoritative historical antecedent for legitimizing his own homoerotic desire as an idealising passion that excludes any physical expression. As a consequence, his love for Maurice will be articulated in the language of Platonism:

> The love that Socrates bore Phaedo now lay within his reach, love passionate but temperate, such as only finer natures can understand, and he found in Maurice a nature that was not indeed fine, but charmingly willing. […] He educated Maurice, or rather his spirit educated Maurice's spirit, for they themselves became equal. (85)

Such a language permeates the Clive-Maurice section of the novel, it defines their love as a sexless union of souls and in so doing posits the basis for its final failure. Illuminating in this respect is Forster's use of Platonic images to report Clive's recollection of a side-car ride with Maurice as the climactic moment of their love experience: "Bound in a single motion, they seemed there closer to one another than elsewhere; the machine took on a life of its own, in which they met and realized the unity preached by Plato" (69). The narrator's irony, as Martin acutely observes, lies in "[t]he absurdity of the motorcycle and its side-car as image of the Platonic egg," and "warns us of the inadequacies of this kind of 'poeticizing' idealism as a guide to behavior" (34).

An analogous ironic reversal underscores Forster's account of Clive's journey to Greece as a site of his final "conversion" to heterosexuality. Bareness and sterility characterize the landscape he contemplates while, sitting in the theatre of Dionysus, he writes to Maurice informing him that he has finally "become normal" (101). The negatively connoted images project a dim and sombre light on this conversion and act as a foreshadowing of his future marriage with Anne Woods, the society woman he, ironically again, meets in Greece. His social equal in class terms, she shares the same prudishness about sex so that, as husband and wife "[h]e never saw her naked, nor she him. They ignored the reproductive and digestive functions" because "the actual deed of sex seemed to him unimaginative, and best veiled in night" (144).Within this perspective, as Debra Raschke has pointed out, Clive's marriage "rather than a confirmation of his heterosexuality, seems more an extension of his Platonism" (160), or, we might add, of his interpretation of Platonism, based on the absolute repression of the body and its desires.

Writing on Hellenism as a key theme in Forster's fiction, Ann Ardis argues that, as a major cultural trend in Victorian and Edwardian England, it "served as a crucial means of […] establishing the basis of a homosexual 'counterdiscourse' that was able to justify homosociality in ideal terms during the great age of English university reform in the mid-Victorian period" (64). While consenting with the common critical view of Forster as one of the main representatives of this cultural tradition, she underlines how Forster's narrative, and *Maurice* in particular, is also sharply critical of Hellenism when it becomes "an arid, deadening intellectualism," a form of intellectual inquiry "de-coupled from sensual and emotional experiences," where "a classical Platonic modelling of a continuum between physical and intellectual stimulation is abandoned in favour of the crassest kind of homophobic attachment to class privilege, masked as idealised, disembodied intellectual inquiry" (65). This trajectory is exemplified by Clive, the perfect embodiment of Carpenter's "ungrown" type, and by his interpretation of Platonism.

Roaming the greenwood

Whereas in the first two parts of the novel, Maurice's distancing from social and familiar constraints and from the philistinism of suburban, middle class life is mediated by Clive and Cambridge and homosexuality is experienced as a form of idealised friendship devoid of physical expression, in the second half of the text the encounter with Alec coincides with the protagonist's growing awareness and final acceptance of the social and political consequences of homosexuality.

In the section entitled "Notes on the Three Men" of the "Terminal Note" Forster's statement that "Alec starts as an emanation from Milthorpe, he is the touch on the backside" (221) highlights the direct correlation between the novel and the scene of its genesis. Carpenter's influence, however, goes far beyond this single episode since the Maurice-Alec relationship can be viewed as a narrative transposition of Carpenter's own celebration of cross-class homosexual love as a powerful agent of social and political transformation as articulated in *The Intermediate Sex* (1908):

> Eros is a great leveller. Perhaps the true Democracy rests, more firmly than anywhere else, on a sentiment which easily passes the bounds of class and caste, and unites in the closest affection the most estranged ranks of society. It is noticeable how often Uranians of good position and breeding are drawn to rougher types, as of manual workers, and frequently very permanent alliances grow up in this way, which although not publicly acknowledged have a decided influence on social institutions, customs and political tendencies—and which would have a good deal more influence could they be given a little more scope and recognition. (237)

Thus, the emotional crisis that follows Maurice's separation from Clive prompts him to question his role and place in society—"[w]hat was the use of money-grubbing, eating and playing games? That was all he did or had ever done" (119)—and to perceive himself as "an outlaw in disguise," wondering whether "among those who took to the greenwood in old time there had been two men like himself—two. At times he entertained the dream. Two men can defy the world" (118-19). The closing chapters of the novel are concerned with the final realization of this

dream in the "happy ending" Forster deemed "imperative" (220), but which has been frequently dismissed as an escapist flight into the idealised space of rural England.

If Cambridge is the background of the Maurice-Clive relation, Penge, Clive's family estate, is the site of his encounter with Alec, the gamekeeper, one of Forster's typical rough young men whose characterization has much in common with that of the young working-class men Carpenter sings in his poem *Towards Democracy*[5].

Opposite and contrasting sets of values converge in the representation of Penge and connote it as an ambivalent social space. On Maurice's first visit there, during the time of his liaison with Clive, the house and the estate appear as "marked, not indeed with decay, but with the immobility that precedes it" (74). Maurice's sense of social deference towards his hosts, members of the landed gentry, is expressed in his consideration that: "It was a suburban evening; but with a difference; these people had the air of settling something: they either just had arranged or soon would rearrange England" (77). However, the conditions of the house, ("the gateposts, the roads […] were in bad repair, […] the windows stuck, the boards creaked" [77]) and the visual impressions he gets create a sharp contrast with his naïve faith in the legitimacy of social hierarchies and in the capacity of the social élite to rule the country.

In the Alec section of the novel, the motif of Penge's decay overlaps with Maurice's growing disgust towards its inhabitants ("each human being seemed new, and terrified him: he spoke to a race whose nature and numbers were unknown, and whose very food tasted poisonous" [177]) and becomes a direct objective correlative of their moral and social decadence.

However, Penge, with its park and the surrounding woods, is also part of the English landscape, and the theatre of Maurice's meeting with Alec, the "untamed son of the wood" (195). On the evening of their first love making, the scent of the evening primroses—the flowers Clive had first shown him "but had never told

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[5] Grave and strong and untamed./This is the clear-browed unconstrained tender face, with full lips and bearded/ chin, this is the regardless defiant face I love and trust (44).

him they smelt" (163)—calls Maurice outside, in the park, where he accidentally bumps into Alec. The flowers are the mute sign of the unstated sexual currents between them and a symbol of the Dionysian spirit pervading the whole scene, so that, when Maurice re-enters, Mrs Durham, watching his pollen-covered head, finds him "quite bacchanalian" (166). Maurice's new sense of panic union with nature preludes to the scene of their first love-making in chapter 37—"[…] Penge, instead of numbing, seemed more stimulating than most places. How vivid, if complex, were its impressions, how the tangle of flowers and fruit wreathed his brain!" (169)—and marks the beginning of a new phase in his life.

Mythic overtones echo throughout the conclusive section of the novel in a move characteristic of Forster's fiction and of Modernism, where "the complex present is explored by reference to underlying structures believed to be revealed in ancient myth" (Booth 176), and connote the idealised representation of rural England that provides the background of Maurice and Alec's final union:

> [H]e […] then turned to England. His journey was nearly over. He was bound for his new home. He had brought out the man in Alec, and now it was Alec's turn to bring out the hero in him. […] They must live outside class, without relations or money; they must work and stick to each other till death. But England belonged to them. That, besides companionship, was their reward. Her air and sky were theirs, not the timorous millions' who own stuffy little boxes, but never their own souls. (212)

This generic turn from realism to pastoral fantasy is the necessary premise of the happy ending of the story. A happy ending that Forster considered "imperative," the very reason, deep and non-negotiable, for the writing of the novel. Since, at least in the fictional space of narratable stories, a love between two men had to be conceivable, a love that could clearly last "for the ever and ever that fiction allows" (220).

However, that ending already contained its own negation at multiple levels. First, the assertion of happiness outside the traditional patterns and the absence of a poetic justice able to punish the "sinner" determined the effect—which was anything but "unexpected," if examined carefully—of making the story harder

to be published. When the "freedom" of the narrative was denied the opportunity to translate itself into a printed page—readable for many, reproducible and therefore transmissible—it lost its ideal and imaginative motivation, condemned, as it was for a long time, to the closed, claustrophobic space of the private manuscript.

Even if it was freedom, it looked like exile. The same exile that Maurice and Alec experienced in their rural retreat. Within this perspective, the greenwood of Forster has little or nothing of the "historical" English countryside, nothing of the literary and cultural space described in Austen's novels: the pulsing heart of Britishness, tradition, perfectly codified manners in compliance with a strict division of class, role and gender.

The greenwood of Forster has to do a lot more with the Sherwood Forest, the refuge of outlaws with some stains and many fears, or with the woods close to the property of Chatterley, which seduce with a reminder of wild naturalness. Above all, in my opinion, it has to do with the green world of Arden, although poorer, because it lacks the sharp but concrete spirit of Touchstone, as well as the figurative, melancholy of Jacques.

The greenwood of Forster is *oú-topos*, a non-place: an instance of freedom from conventions, from the constraints imposed by a morality, still Victorian in spirit, to the force of instincts and desires. However, and for this very reason, more than an area of freedom, the greenwood of Forster is an enclosure where there is an amassing of outlaws and outcasts; a Savage Reservation as in *Brave New World*. In the happiness of that "free" ending, a dull and persistent note resonates in which a condemnation is inscribed without appeals, a condemnation that unites the modernity of the metropolis and the staid cadences of the rural province. Whether consciously or not, as implied criticism, the disenchanted and funereal cadence of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* still resonates.

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Benedetta Guerrini degl'Innocenti

"A house full with unrelated passions"
Bloomsbury and Psychoanalysis

Despite the fact that their life and work were connected by an invisible web of links, Virginia Woolf and Sigmund Freud met only once. My essay grew out of my curiosity for that one meeting. But let us proceed with order.

The most obvious connection between the Woolfs (or "the Wolves," as Leonard and Virginia were called by their group of friends) and psychoanalysis was established in 1917. One day, as Nadia Fusini tells us in her biography of Virginia Woolf, Leonard and Virginia, who lived at Hogarth House in Richmond, passed by a shop window where a small hand press was proudly showcased. Virginia was just recovering from one of the darkest phases of her illness and her structural vulnerability to the judgment of others had dramatically increased. Perhaps Leonard thought, and rightly so, that Virginia would have doubly benefited from the opportunity to print her own work: first of all, she would have been spared the pain of submitting her work to the judgment of others for publication (a practice that always reduced her to a state of pitiful helplessness); secondly, Leonard hoped that by engaging in some manual work Virginia would have gained some peace of mind. Thus the Hogarth Press was born, and it was the first English publisher to print Freud's works.

The first book by Freud that Leonard read was *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. He was impressed, among other things, by Freud's literary skills. In his opinion, anyone wishing to have a first contact with psychoanalysis should have started with this work. Leonard wrote: "Whether one believes in his theories or not, one is forced to admit that he writes with great subtlety of mind, a broad and sweeping imagination more characteristic of the poet than the scientist" (qtd. in Orr 12).

The characterization of psychoanalysis as a literary rather than a scientific discourse became a leitmotif in England. The humanistic aspect of psychoanalysis was strongly emphasized within the psychoanalytic community. "Psychoanalysis is both art and science" (qtd. in Abel 16), wrote Ella Freeman Sharpe, a member of the British Psychoanalytic Society, a former English teacher and analyst of Virginia's brother from 1926 to 1927.

Here is another connection: Adrian Stephen, the last of Leslie's and Julia's four children, who was also affected by some structural fragility, left his studies of medieval history at Cambridge to become a BPS psychoanalyst. The same happened to his wife Karin, who came from studies in philosophy. James Strachey and his wife Alix had the same humanistic background. Indeed, we find here a web of tangled threads since Strachey, who was to be the English translator and editor of the complete works of Freud published by the Hogarth Press (the famous Standard Edition), was also the brother of Lytton Strachey, the Bloomsbury "mandarin" whom Todd Avery has described in another chapter of this book.

I said that the humanistic angle of English psychoanalysis was often stressed. In fact, as opposed to most other psychoanalytic societies, especially the soon-to-be-born American Society, the British Society had the largest number of non-medical analysts (an estimated 40% in the late Twenties) and represented a powerful source of attraction for a significant group of British members of the intelligentsia with a broad liberal arts education.

The humanistic angle of British psychoanalysis, visible in the essays of applied psychoanalysis published in those years by Ernest Jones (which included anthropology, literature, folklore and painting), turned the psychoanalytic discourse into a particularly appealing and accessible cultural idiom. In 1928, following the publication of Jones' book *The Talking Cure*, the *Daily Herald* wrote: "It is a splendid example of just how such a book should be written to make a scientific subject 'come alive' to a working man or woman of only average education" (qtd. in Pick).

This same feature was instead a negative one for Bronisław Malinowski who, in his anthropological critique of psychoanalysis, labelled it as "the popular craze of the day." Moreover, psychoanalytic

ideas were beginning to exert a direct influence also on the work of some of the Bloomsburies such as Keynes, Strachey and Woolf, but Virginia remained skeptical for a long time, if not, at times, decidedly hostile.

In one of her reviews, entitled "Freudian Fiction" (1920), Virginia argued that fiction appeared to her as a victim rather than as an attribute of psychoanalytic discourse: "The triumphs of science" Virginia wrote, "are beautifully positive. But for novelists, the matter is much more complex. […] Yes, says the scientific side of the brain, that is interesting; that explains a great deal. No, says the artistic side of the brain, that is dull" (*Essays* 3: 196-97).

Woolf insisted that it was not her intention to challenge, say, the psychoanalytic interpretation of infantile experience. What she rejected was a certain colonization of the literary field that transformed characters into clinical cases by applying a dogmatic key that simplified things instead of complicating them. Personally, I cannot really blame her.

To this I would add that since art was for Woolf (as for Joyce) transcendent and impersonal, but autobiographical in its genesis, the integrity of the artist could not help but feel threatened by psychoanalysis. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the "talking cure" was not taken into account as a possible treatment of Virginia's severe mental suffering.

A much more understandable reason for not having done so is that, at the beginning, psychoanalysis consisted mostly in a cognitive exploration of the unconscious aspects of mental neurotic functioning. As such, it was far from being a proper therapeutic resource for the treatment of serious disorders such as the one probably afflicting Virginia. Besides, I believe that a person like Virginia could not accept the idea of relying on someone who would put himself in the position of a "subject supposed to know" and could reduce her to a psychopathological stereotype. In her precious little essay "On Being Ill" (1926), Virginia made this poetically clear:

> We do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others. Human beings do not go hand in hand the whole stretch of the way. There is a virgin forest in each; a snowfield where even the print of birds' feet is unknown. Here we go alone, and like it better so. Always to have sympathy, always to be accompanied, always to be understood would be intolerable. (104)

As for modern literature, I am not aware of a description of the narcissistic retreat of the self as an extreme defence against the impact of illness or death that is both as lucid and poetic as this one.

Virginia always maintained that her knowledge of psychoanalysis derived from superficial conversations and not from study; for most of her life, she remained seemingly uninterested in psychoanalysis as a discourse. At times, she showed hostility and even scorn: "All the psycho-analytic books have been dumped in a fortress the size of Windsor castle in ruins upon the floor." (Woolf, *Letters* 3: 119)

Despite this, and despite her claims to have read Freud only in her late years (according to the diaries, she started in December 1939, after the death of Freud), the most magnificent depictions of family life in *To the Lighthouse* as well as the representations of the nature of memory and its elusive workings are undeniably modelled on Freud's insights. What Woolf and Freud had in common was a deeply-rooted and passionate interest in the workings of the human mind: Freud expressed it through the analytical practice, Virginia through the flights of the mind and the act of imagination and re-creation.

An example of this can be found in two passages from *To the Lighthouse*, where the potent and burning Oedipal rivalry experienced by James, the youngest son of Ramsay, is first described in real time and, a hundred pages later, admirably filtered and evoked through the traces left in the sensory memory:

> But his son hated him. He hated him for coming up to them, for stopping and looking down on them; he hated him for interrupting them; he hated him for the exaltation and sublimity of his gestures; for the magnificence of his head; for his exactingness and egotism (for there he stood, commanding them to attend to him); but most of all he hated the twang and twitter of his father's emotion which, vibrating round them, disturbed the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relations with his mother. (42)

> She'll give way, James thought, as he watched a look come upon her face, a look he remembered. They look down, he thought, at their knitting or something. Then suddenly they look up. There was a flash of blue, he remembered, and then somebody sitting with him laughed, surrendered, and he was very angry. It must have been his mother, he thought, sitting on a low chair, with his father standing over her. He began to search among the infinite series of impressions which time had laid down, leaf

> upon leaf, fold upon fold softly, incessantly upon his brain; among scents, sounds; voices, harsh, hollow, sweet; and lights passing, and brooms tapping; and the wash and hush of the sea, how a man had marched up and down and stopped dead, upright, over them. (183-84)

In case any doubt remains about Virginia's awareness of psychoanalysis, here are the words that she wrote in her unfinished memoir, "A Sketch of the Past:"

> It is perfectly true that she [my mother] obsessed me, in spite of the fact that she died when I was thirteen, until I was forty-four. […] But I wrote the book [*To the Lighthouse*] very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her. I suppose that I did for myself what psycho-analysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and laid it to rest. (81)

In fact, Freud himself wrote that it was poets and philosophers who first discovered the unconscious; what he discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious could be studied.

If we want to find a metaphor that holds together psychoanalysis and this special group of young men and women who in the early-twentieth-century London turned their life into a cultural movement, I think the phrase I chose for the title of my essay may be a suitable one. Above all, what this group of young people shared was—in the words of Virginia—"a house full with unrelated passions." As Vanessa Bell wrote in "Notes on Bloomsbury:"

> What did we talk about? The only true answer can be anything that came into our heads. […] There was nothing unusual about it perhaps, except that for some reason we seemed to be a company of the young, all free, all beginning life in new surroundings, without elders to whom we had to account in any way for our doing or behaviour, and this was not then common in a mixed company of our class: for classes still existed. (106)

And as Virginia wrote in "Old Bloomsbury:"

> It was a spring evening. Vanessa and I were sitting in the drawing room. […] Suddenly the door opened and the long and sinister figure of Mr. Lytton Strachey stood on the threshold. He pointed a finger at a stain on Vanessa's white dress. "Semen?" he said. Can one really say it? I thought

> and we burst out laughing. With that one word all barriers of reticence and reserve went down. A flood of the sacred fluid seemed to overwhelm us. Sex permeated our conversation. The word bugger was never far from our lips. We discussed copulation with the same excitement and openness that we had discussed the nature of good. It is strange to think how reticent, how reserved we had been and for how long. (195-96)

In other words, I think I could say that the psychoanalytic movement and the Bloomsbury Group shared the credit for an extraordinarily provocative scope, a rupture of that conformity of thought which is easily activated *vis-à-vis* the need to face phenomena that are more and more complex and unpredictable. Both shared a completely new view of the individual and his/her internal dynamics, paving the way to his/her enfranchisement from pre-established social and family roles, once again questioning the sharp, static distinction between sexes, giving voice to the personal sense of each person's life course, by re-considering and working through one's own infantile experiences.

At this point, to conclude, we must go back to the starting point. As I said, Virginia and Freud met only once, on January 28, 1939. Life was coming to an end for both of them: Freud died on September 23 of a cancer that had tormented him for the past ten years; Virginia died two years later, by her own hand, due to another type of cancer, more subtle, but no less deadly and unforgiving. We know little of that one meeting. All we have is a few words Virginia wrote in her diary, recording the impression Freud had made on her: "A screwed up shrunk very old man: […] inarticulate: but alert. […] Immense potential, I mean an old fire now flickering" (*Diary* 5: 202).

We also have a brief description provided by Leonard Woolf in his memoirs:

> Nearly all famous men are disappointing or bores, or both. Freud was neither; he had an aura, not of fame, but of greatness. […] He was extraordinarily courteous in a formal, old-fashioned way—for instance, almost ceremoniously he presented Virginia with a flower. There was something about him as of a half-extinct volcano, something sombre, suppressed, reserved. He gave me the feeling which only a very few people whom I have met gave me, a feeling of great gentleness, but behind the gentleness, great strength. […] A formidable man. (168-69)

The flower Freud gave to Virginia was a narcissus.

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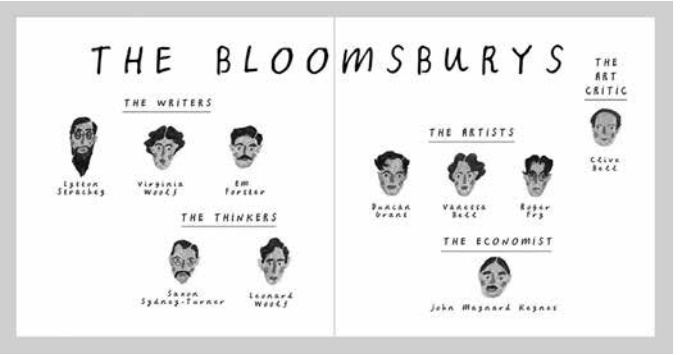


Nina Cosford, *Bloomsbury*, 2015.

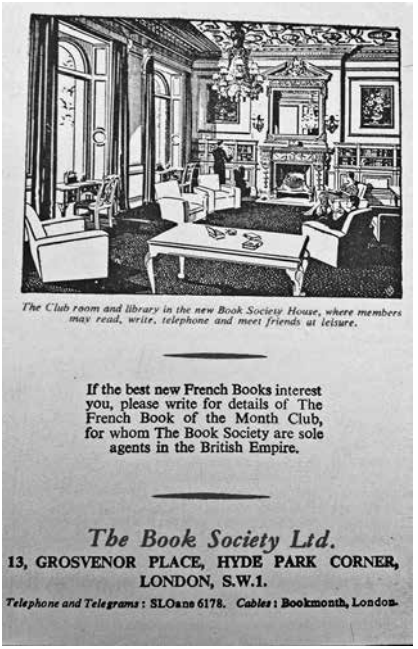
"Mr and Mrs Laughton's Cook",
Daily Mail, 21 February 1936.

Double Oven Leamington, 19th century.

Vanessa Bell, *The Memoir Club*, c. 1943,
London, National Portrait Gallery.

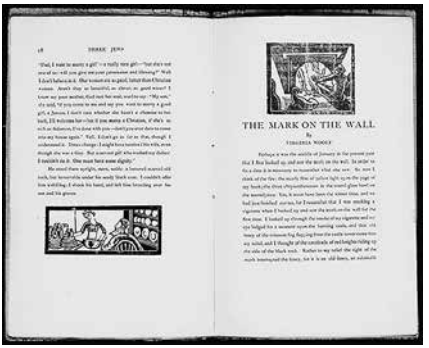
Exhibition Catalogue *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, London, Grafton Galleries 1912.

Roger Fry, *The Matisse Room at the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, 1912, Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

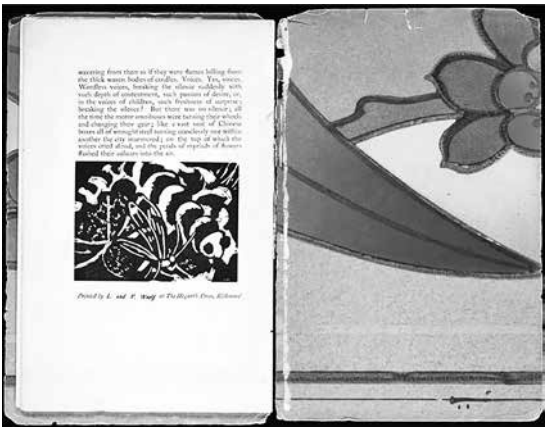


An artist's impression of the Book Society's new clubroom at 13 Grosvenor Place, SW1. Open to visiting members daily up to 6pm. Members could discuss books with staff or use amenities like those of a West End club.

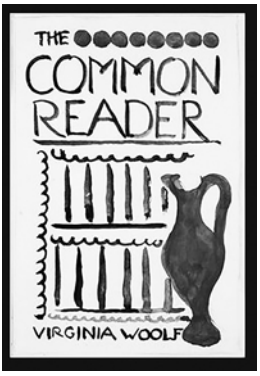
Omega design letterhead.



Virginia and Leonard Woolf, *Two Stories*, The Hogarth Press, 1917.



Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell, *Kew Gardens*,
The Hogarth Press, 1919, inside back cover.



Vanessa Bell, cover design for
The Common Reader, 1925.

The cast of "Life in Squares", BBC Two, 2015.

Nicola Wilson

Bloomsbury, the Hogarth Press, and the Book Society Limited

Reflecting upon the origins of what became known as the Bloomsbury Group in a series of memoirs to friends between 1920 and 1922, Virginia Woolf describes leaving behind the "rich red gloom of Hyde Park Gate" and "the old ladies of Kensington and Belgravia" ("Old Bloomsbury" 187; "22 Hyde Park Gate" 180). Detailing how, after the death of her father Leslie Stephen in 1904 and the break-up of what had been a large extended family, her elder sister Vanessa had "wound up Hyde Park Gate once and for all," Woolf notes:

> The four of us were therefore left alone. And Vanessa—looking at a map of London and seeing how far apart they were—had decided that we should leave Kensington and start life afresh in Bloomsbury. ("Old Bloomsbury" 187)

Just over three miles apart, the apparent disjunction between Kensington and Bloomsbury, the fashionable, ostentatious West End and the more aesthetic, intellectual North, proved to be an important rhetorical and cultural rupture for the younger Stephens. To Virginia the move seemingly enabled new temperaments and a new way of living marked by increased light, air and space, "the roar of traffic" as opposed to "muffled silence," and "experiments and reforms" across a whole raft of domestic arrangements ("Old Bloomsbury 187-88). As she writes: "So there was now nothing that one could not say, nothing that one could not do, at 46 Gordon Square. It was, I think, a great advance in civilisation" ("Old Bloomsbury" 201).

Deeply appealing in its eschewal of stuffiness and convention, this is the idea of Bloomsbury that continues to resonate. When in October 1916, Virginia wrote of her and her husband Leonard's

intention of "starting a printing press, for all our friends stories," their publishing house, the Hogarth Press, was indelibly linked to this atmosphere of change and modernist experimentation (*Letters* 2: 120). Though it began life on the dining room table in Hogarth House, Richmond (southwest London) and was not physically located in Bloomsbury until March 1924 when the Woolfs moved to 52 Tavistock Square (north-west Bloomsbury, just east of Gordon Square), from its beginnings the Hogarth Press took inspiration from the atmosphere and reputation of Bloomsbury. It is still well-known as the publishers of many Bloomsbury writers including Clive Bell, Roger Fry, David Garnett—as well as the work of Leonard and Virginia Woolf—and was the first port-of-call for others with innovative texts that were likely to eschew the tastes of more commercially-minded publishers (notoriously, the Woolfs were compelled to reject James Joyce's *Ulysses*). As the South African novelist William Plomer was to write in a letter of introduction to the Woolfs in 1924:

> From a distance I have followed your activities with interest and sympathy, because I suspect that you are nearer the heart of things than any other publisher in London. […] If, when the time comes, you find yourselves unable to print my work, it is probable that it will remain in manuscript. I have no intention of throwing myself like a piece of meat to what is called the Public (15 June 1924, Hogarth Press Archive [hereafter HPA]).

Questioning this compelling narrative, this chapter explores how the Woolfs and the Hogarth Press also sought to work beyond such cultural and geographical confines. From its early days, the Woolfs worked with large commercial printers to increase the scale and reach of their production and despite their reputation for the avant-garde they also published many works that were to become "bestsellers." If not quite prepared, in Plomer's terms, to throw themselves "like a piece of meat to what is called the Public," they also worked hard to engage with a wider section of readers through their support for the Book Society Limited, the first mail-order book club in Britain. Engaging with Melba Cuddy-Keane's useful theorisation of a "democratic highbrow," this chapter examines what this might mean in terms of the Woolfs' own Hogarth Press publications and explores how

the fashionable worlds of Kensington and Belgravia would continue to impact upon the Woolfs' personal and professional lives through the sale of books.

Betwixt Bloomsbury and Belgravia

The British Book Society Ltd, in operation from April 1929, was modelled on the American Book-of-the-Month Club which had been established by the American publisher Harry Scherman in 1926 to increase the sale of books to a wider number of people.[1] Premised upon the possibility of keeping its readers "permanently in touch with all that is finest in modern literature" (qtd. in Leavis 34), the Book Society had a "distinguished" selection committee who nominated one book each month from the new works it received from publishers as a Book Society "Choice" to be mailed out to its members. Subscribers, who could pay monthly, quarterly or annually upfront, could either keep that month's book choice or return it in exchange for one of the Book Society's other recommended titles. This process is amusingly described in E. M. Delafield's *Diary of a Provincial Lady* (1930), itself a Book Society Choice for December 1930:

> Arrival of Book of the Month choice, and am disappointed. History of a place I am not interested in, by an author I do not like. Put it back into its wrapper again, and make fresh choice from Recommended List. Find, on reading small literary bulletin enclosed with book, that exactly this course of procedure has been anticipated, and that it is described as being "the mistake of a lifetime." Am much annoyed, although not so much at having made (possibly) mistake of a lifetime, as at depressing thought of our all being so much alike that intelligent writers can apparently predict our behaviour with perfect accuracy. (6)

As in the States, the Book Society's model of carefully guided taste-forming and collecting in book buying was highly successful and by 1930 it had over 13,000 members living in more than 30 countries. There was a limited market for the sale of new,

[1] On the origins of the American Book-of-the-Month Club see Radway 154-86.

full-price books in this period, when the circulating (fee-paying) libraries represented the mainstay for publishers in terms of book sales and were well supported by affluent readers. A Book Society nomination thus had a large impact on a text's sale figures, potentially catapulting an author's first edition sales from the typical three to 5000 copies normally sold in hardback to libraries and bookshops, into the tens of thousands. Book Society Choices were closely followed by the trade and with guaranteed sales of over 7000 copies, the society demanded the attention of authors and publishers. As Boots Book-lovers' Library—one of the largest circulating libraries in the country—noted in its advice to librarians:

> Their choice has become a standard of literary advice very well respected throughout the country. Even people who do not belong to the Book Society are prepared to order these volumes through libraries, so that most publishers are exceedingly pleased to have one of their titles chosen. (4)

As this brief account of its operations will no doubt suggest, the model and aims of the Book Society were apparently at odds with the cultural and aesthetic ideals of Bloomsbury and of the Woolfs' Hogarth Press. The idea that newly published books could be chosen by a selection committee for members to buy was met, as the socialist writer Margaret Cole noted in 1938, with "outraged clamour" by the book world as a "crime"—"and thereby—it was assumed—giving undeserved boosts to inferior literature and causing better authors to languish in penury" (5). This is the thrust of Cambridge academic Queenie D. Leavis's now notorious critique of the Book Society: "first, that by conferring authority on a taste for the second-rate (to the Book Society the publication of *A Modern Comedy* is 'a real event in the story of modern English literature') a middlebrow standard of values has been set up; second, that middlebrow taste has thus been organized" (34). Virginia Woolf was of course highly critical of the "middlebrow" in her (unsent) letter to the editor of the *New Statesman and Nation* in October 1932 and, as Melba Cuddy-Keane has written, she "opposed the increasing standardization or 'massification' of the reading public implicit in the processes of mass production

and distribution" (2). The large sales generated by a Book Society nomination sit rather uncomfortably with more romantic ideas of the handprinted books of the Hogarth Press.

In geographical terms the location of the Book Society was also a long way—at least symbolically—from that of Bloomsbury and of the Hogarth Press. Originally located at 10 Buckingham Palace Gardens (SW1), in 1937 the Society moved its headquarters round the corner to a "large and dignified building" in 13 Grosvenor Place, Belgravia (SW1). This location near Hyde Park corner, facing Buckingham Palace Gardens and just off Constitution Hill, was at the heart of royalist London and its powerful symbols of ceremony and Empire. The grand Wellington Arch, built in 1825-27 to celebrate Wellington's defeat of Napoleon, was clearly visible from the new clubroom's balcony, as were the outlines of Buckingham Palace through the gardens across the road. The September 1937 issue of the *Book Society News*—the monthly journal delivered to members—showed an enticing artist's impression of this new clubroom, where subscribers were invited to use the facilities and to read and exchange their books whenever they were visiting London.

Subscribers were no doubt attracted by the careful branding, model of taste and cultural distinction that membership of the Book Society offered and enjoyed the invitation to share in this atmosphere of wealth, symbolic power, and prestige. The affluence and fashionable, esteemed taste on offer here in the Belgravia premises of the Book Society was a long way from the modernist interiors and experimental modes of living further north in Bloomsbury, WC1. This was the area from which the Stephen children had so eagerly removed themselves in 1904 and was also now, in Virginia Woolf's imagination, the home of the so-called "middlebrow." In response to the debate between J. B. Priestley (a member of the Book Society selection committee) and Harold Nicolson on "the brows" on BBC radio in October 1932, Virginia Woolf wrote of the middlebrows that "[t]hey do not live in Bloomsbury which is on high ground; nor in Chelsea which is on low ground. Since they must live somewhere presumably, they live perhaps in South Kensington, which is betwixt and between" ("Middlebrow" 198-99).

For their part, the Book Society and its Selection Committee were equally keen to disassociate themselves from the perceived insularity and cliquishness of the Bloomsbury set. Responding to the initial suggestion in May 1928 that he might chair a British equivalent to the American Book-of-the-Month Club, the popular novelist Hugh Walpole wrote to A. S. Frere, one of the directors at the publishers William Heinemann, that:

> I think the Book of the Month Club suggestion is most interesting and I would of course love to have a finger in it if it comes to anything; also I am proud to be asked to be chairman […] I hope though that you will get names on the committee that will reassure the public, people who are not cranks nor like to drive always in the direction of a special clique. (Qtd. in Hart-Davis 299)

Walpole's concern that the Selection Committee for the Book Society "reassure the public" and avoid "cranks" or those in a "special clique" can be read as a sideswipe at the coterie reviewing and literary culture popularly associated with "Bloomsbury." The cliquishness of Bloomsbury and what Pierre Bourdieu would have described as its powers of "cultural consecration" were often invoked by those contemporaries, like Walpole, not privy to its inner workings (3). Though Walpole became close friends with the Woolfs over the course of the 1930s, his relationship with Virginia was always fraught. His remarks here echo his well-known views on the form of the novel and the reasons why "the novel of the new school in England has not all the readers that it ought to have" (*Letter to a Modern Novelist* 14). For Walpole, the invention of character and "the genius for story-telling" (*Letter to a Modern Novelist* 18) were the hallmarks of good and readable literature, shared in his view by writers from Homer to Shakespeare to Trollope but not, importantly, by Joyce. This was why Walpole was perceived by the trade as an important spokesman for the ordinary or common reader. For the "battle of the brows" of course worked both ways. Clemence Dane (Winifred Ashton), also to become one of the Book Society selection committee, described the preface to Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) as "an unpardonable piece of snobbery" and an example of "the central heating of Bloomsbury" (qtd. in *Letters of Leonard Woolf* 543).

The Book Society selection committee and the democratic highbrow

In his establishment of a "distinguished" selection committee for the Book Society, Walpole was careful to avoid this kind of heating and assembled a group of well-known, non-partisan writers and critics broadly designed to "reassure the public." The first members of the selection committee in 1929 were the essayist and novelist J. B. Priestley, playwright and scriptwriter Clemence Dane, Professor George Gordon, president of Magdalen College Oxford, and the writer Sylvia Lynd. In the 1930s these were replaced at various points by philosopher and populariser of science Julian Huxley (elder brother of Aldous Huxley), bestselling novelist Margaret Kennedy, First World War poet and lecturer Edmund Blunden, and the '30s "Auden gang" poet Cecil Day Lewis. By the 1940s Daniel George, literary critic V. S. Pritchett, and novelist Compton Mackenzie were also on the bill. Hugh Walpole acted as chairman and honorary chairman throughout the 1930s, returning to the Book Society after his forays into Hollywood acting and scriptwriting in 1934 and 1935.

The names of these individuals were intended to signify good taste, success, and cultural standing. All had complex, nuanced relationships with establishment literary culture. Apart from Priestley—"a North Country, no-nonsense-about-me, I-know-my-mind kind of little man" as Walpole described him in his diaries (Hart-Davis 265)—the members of the selection committee were largely upper class, and part of what you might call the intellectual aristocracy. Several were educated at Oxford (Julian Huxley, George Gordon, Margaret Kennedy, Edmund Blunden, Cecil Day Lewis; Walpole was at Cambridge)—Huxley, Gordon, Blunden, and Day Lewis also taught there. Clemence Dane and Sylvia Lynd trained at the Slade School of Fine Art in London (Lynd went on to study at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art as well). Walpole and Cecil Day Lewis were sons of clergymen. All were a part of London literary culture, with various connections in publishing, reviewing, and intellectual life of the time through editorial work and writing for periodicals like the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *New Statesman and Nation*. They were also all concerned in vari-

ous ways with popularising or democratising literary and intellectual culture. George Gordon, "most unprofessorial of professors" (Hart-Davis 285), shook up the intake of Magdalen undergraduates at Oxford (trying to move away from "princes, archdukes and the like"); Julian Huxley gave up his academic post to concentrate on writing popular science; Cecil Day Lewis wrote detective novels under the pseudonym Nicholas Blake; Margaret Kennedy had a world-wide bestseller with *The Constant Nymph* (1924) and was much in demand as a judge of literary prizes.

So despite easy dismissals from Cambridge academics like Q. D. Leavis, what the selection committee offered to their readers through their Book Society Choices was a complex mixture of these different impulses. Operating with "no arrogant claim that the books chosen were the best of anything" (Bott 50), Book Society Choices reveal a broad and complex understanding of what we might mean by the "brows" in this period and something approaching a more complex cultural category like what Melba Cuddy-Keane has described as the "democratic highbrow." As Cuddy-Keane writes: "can highbrowism be considered democratic, even if it is not popular in the sense of attracting large numbers, as long as it is open and available to any self-identified individual?" (15). This gives us another way of reading the workings and meaning of the Book Society, one that questions Q. D. Leavis's early response to it as embodiment of the "literary middleman," responsible for the standardising and organising of middlebrow culture. In her study of *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual and the Public Sphere*, Cuddy-Keane invokes the "democratic highbrow" to ask "how could an intellectual culture, largely created by an educationally and economically privileged few, be passed on to a new audience consisting of the many?" (52). Cuddy-Keane is not discussing the Book Society nor the members of its selection committee in this context, but the question is an apt description of much of what the Book Society and its leading figures were about.

This different reading of the Book Society is revealed once we start to look at its monthly selections in more detail. Though the books chosen by the Book Society were intended to be "worthwhile" reads and not too complex for the average reader—these

were the kind of rhetorical gambits it was fond of offering to critics, and designed no doubt to assuage the tastes of its readers—its choices and recommendations belie a complex relationship with and an investment in intellectual culture which it desired to make more widely available and accessible. There is an important caveat to be made here of course. The benefits of membership and actually purchasing twelve books a year at the publisher's trade price would never have been possible for the genuinely "many." To think about a typical member of the Book Society we should remember E. M. Delafield's provincial lady (fairly affluent, able to keep servants and governesses) and the colonial officials in Her Majesty's embassies posted overseas who were keen to keep up with the best of new literature sent out from London and who might conceivably have visited the Book Society's clubrooms when back home. But the idea that highbrow, intellectual culture—the artistic products of the educationally and economically privileged few—could be made more widely available through educated advice and new, more democratic distributive channels, correlates closely with the aims and goals of Walpole's Book Society.

The Book Society's first Choice in April 1929 was Helen Beauclerk's *The Love of the Foolish Angel*, an esoteric love story which was finely produced and decorated in collaboration with the illustrator Edmund Dulac, Beauclerk's lover (interestingly for a title once mediated by a book club, this work has not been republished and now retails at a high rare book price). Edmund Dulac, well-known as a fine artist and book illustrator, also designed the first cover of the *Book Society News* in April 1929. As with the society's Belgravia clubrooms, the visual markers here signified taste and distinction. Other early Book Society Choices, some now better known than others, include Francis Hackett's *Henry the Eighth* (1929), Compton Mackenzie's *Gallipoli Memories* (1929), *Whiteoaks* (1929) by Mazo de la Roche, and *A Note in Music* (1930) by Rosamund Lehmann. Though historical fiction regularly topped the lists of the *Book Society News* and the novels of C. S. Forester (with their still popular protagonist Captain Hornblower) were a regular feature of its monthly choices, it also experimented with avant-garde and more clearly modernist works. As Hugh Walpole commented in an appraisal

in April 1939, looking back on the first ten years of the Book Society, "[w]e did not set out to be 'highbrow,' but we have chosen and recommended books by Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, Aldous Huxley, Elizabeth Bowen, Auden, Louis MacNiece" ("Our First Ten Years" 48). Popular choices for the book club who were closely associated with both Bloomsbury and with the Hogarth Press include Rosamund Lehmann (*Weather in the Streets* [1936] and *The Echoing Grove* [1953] were both Choices in addition to *A Note in Music*), Vita Sackville-West, William Plomer, Winifred Holtby, and Virginia Woolf herself.

The Woolfs and the Book Society

It is largely in the business archive of the Hogarth Press, rather than what were to become the Woolfs' published letters or diaries, that we can trace the tangible connections between the Hogarth Press and the Book Society, or, to go back to our initial equation, between Bloomsbury and Belgravia. Letters in the Hogarth Press archive clearly show that, despite contemporary misgivings about the role and possible effects of the new book club, Leonard and Virginia Woolf were, in common with other publishers of the time, keen to work with the Book Society selection committee. As day-to-day manager, Leonard submitted many Hogarth Press manuscripts to the Book Society in proof form for consideration throughout the 1930s, including C. H. Kitchin's *The Sensitive One* (1931), *Saturday Night at the Greyhound* (1931) by John Hampson, and Vita Sackville-West's *All Passion Spent* (1931). These titles were all rejected but other Hogarth works fared better: recommended Hogarth Press titles (alternatives that members could choose to request if they didn't like the committee's chosen book for that month) include Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), *The Waves* (1931) and *The Years* (1937), Christopher Isherwood's *Sally Bowles* (1937) and *Lions and Shadows* (1938), and Edward Upward's *Journey to the Border* (1938). Three Hogarth Press novels were also selected as Book Society Choices. One was the bestselling historical novel *The Edwardians* (1930) by Vita Sackville-West, second was the murder story *The Case is*

Altered (1932) by South African writer William Plomer, and third was Virginia Woolf's own *Flush* (1933), her mock "biography" of the Victorian writers Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning, written from the perspective of their cocker spaniel.

These three texts are interesting examples of what we might understand and what the Book Society selection committee might have taken as examples of the "democratic highbrow." Vita Sackville-West was an aristocrat—*The Edwardians* is an elegy to her family home of Knowle in Kent—and her witty, self-reflexive historical novel involves the reader on a glamorous romp through the decadence and ultimate futility of high-society Edwardian life. The Woolfs immediately recognised the popular potential of the story—historical novels were one of most popular categories of Book Society Choices—and Leonard wrote to Vita that Virginia had "pounced" on the manuscript and "approves so violently" that he would send it off to the printer and read it in proof form to save time (9 March 1930, HPA). The Woolfs sent the second manuscript immediately to the Book Society who, once they had agreed upon it as a Choice, duly confirmed a minimum order of 9000 copies in April. Hugh Walpole's review of *The Edwardians* in the *Book Society News* makes interesting reading: offering a defence of the genre of historical fiction, Walpole praises the narrative, characterisation, social history and poetry of the book. What is more, he is keen to point out its utility, relevance and accessibility to a wider audience, as well as making important intertextual and "highbrow" references to guide and reassure the society's subscribers:

> [T]he book's great charm to myself is the poetry of its background. The author has created Chevron with only a few touches here and there. But how the building lives! Indeed, it finally saves the book from any casual change of triviality or snobbish preoccupation with the upper classes. […] Rather they will be reminded, although in no way by imitation, of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. You may say that the pathos and beauty of England's old houses have been given two superb greetings in these two books! ("The Book Selected for May" 2)

Orlando, Virginia Woolf's first bestseller, was published before the Book Society had been established, but it is not hard to imagine its having been voted as a Choice were that to have been possible.

William Plomer was a product of British colonial civil service and rule—moved between South Africa and English boarding schools for much of his early life—and was welcomed into Bloomsbury and its literary and intellectual life by the Woolfs when he moved back to England in 1929. He was, as he had first introduced himself to Virginia and Leonard and as he would later write in his autobiography, culturally attuned to the highbrow: "Literature has its battery hens […] I was a wilder fowl" (*The Autobiography of William Plomer* 354). Yet unlike some of his other work, *The Case is Altered* had clear popular appeal. A detailed, psychologically-driven character study of the disparate inhabitants of an interwar boarding house, the book is based on the sensational real-life murder of Plomer's landlady, Sybil da Costa, in November 1929 (Plomer was fortunately away when the murder took place, his unwitting return to what had become "the murder house" was similar to the experience of the character Eric Alston in the novel) (Alexander 162). There are many interesting elements to *The Case is Altered*—the attraction of violence, an engagement with the new films of fascist and Nazi ideology, communist philosophy, homosexuality, shifts in domestic service, and the changing distinctions of social class in English life as seen in the story of the downwardly mobile Miss Brixworth. But what is most powerful is the sense of doom and inevitable violence inherent in the disturbing, damaged relationship of the landlady and her husband which leads to an obscene crime of passion that would have resonated with contemporary readers familiar with the real-life murder on which the book was based. As Leonard wrote to Plomer: "In parts it seems to me brilliant, particularly the character sketching and the magnificent way in which you have done the actual murder" (8 February 1932, HPA). There is an oblique, mocking reference in the novel to the average reader's investment in gore and violence when Miss Brixworth drops her Boots Book-lovers' Library book into the bath and red pigment in the hardboard covers leaks into the water: "the bath was full of blood!" (147). When we read the story now it seems clear that *The Case is Altered* is the least "Bloomsbury-ish" of all of Plomer's fictional and poetic output.

I have written elsewhere of the lengths to which the Hogarth Press were willing to go in order to secure a Choice nomination from the Book Society.[2] This included rushing proofs and normal production processes, extracting promises from printers, binders and paper-makers to accelerate timescales and increase supplies, and many long hours for Leonard as he disclosed to Plomer when working on *The Case is Altered* in May 1932: "the Press is in rather a chaotic state and I shall be tied to it hand and foot for the next weeks […] If you were anywhere in this neighbourhood on Wednesday or Thursday afternoon and looked in, you would find me on my stool" (22 May 1932, HPA). In the case of Virginia Woolf's *Flush*, written as she wrote to Walpole "by way of a lark when I had finished The Waves" (15 April 1933, *Letters* 5: 177), the Woolfs went further, changing all of their original publication plans (regarding price, size of the book, type of paper etc), commissioning Vanessa Bell to re-draw her illustrations and adding extra images to increase the size and cost of the book so as to bring it into line with the normal retail price that Book Society members would expect to pay.[3]

The Book Society had a real interest in Woolf's work. On a personal level, there were various links between members of the selection committee and Virginia and Leonard: Hugh Walpole and Edmund Blunden were close friends with the Woolfs; the Hogarth Press had published the work of Walpole, Blunden and Day Lewis. More importantly, in spite of their desire to achieve a broad, international appeal through their Choices and to avoid being associated with any narrow literary "clique," Virginia Woolf was clearly an important and increasingly popular author in the late 1920s and '30s whom it would have been incumbent upon the selection committee as authoritative taste-makers and literary guides to enable their readers to get to know. The writer Sylvia Lynd appears to have been a particular supporter of Woolf and of her contemporary modernist, Dorothy Richardson. In a review of the latter's collected *Pilgrimage* novels, the innovative style of which she compares favourably to that of James Joyce,

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2 See Wilson.

3 For the details of this pre-publication history, documented in archival materials, see Wilson 251-56.

Lynd writes that though Richardson "[h]as never had a popular reputation, […] she has always been regarded by readers who are conscious of literature as well as of books as a pioneer in her generation" ("Pilgrimage Collected Novels" 17). The being "conscious of literature" is a key to understanding the Book Society's recommendations here and comes up again in Lynd's reviews and recommendations of titles by Woolf. Signed reviews appear from Lynd in the *Book Society News* for Woolf's *The Waves* and the more obviously political works *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. In a sensitive review of *The Years* Lynd attempts to describe the readerly pleasure in reading Woolf's fiction despite its eschewal of major incidence in terms of plot or public events. She writes: "In a picture gallery we do not demand a point, we ask for the pleasure that comes with looking. It is just this pleasure that we get from Mrs Woolf" ("The Years" 6). *Flush*, a short and entertaining work with a fast-moving plotline, was in this sense not typical of Woolf's style and it is not hard to see why the selection committee would have been keen to announce it as a Book Society Choice. Such an announcement confirmed authority and esteem onto both the Book Society and its selection committee as tastemakers, as well as onto readers and subscribing members, encouraged and emboldened thereby to read the "highbrow" along with the best of them.

There are many questions as to why the Hogarth Press, so central to the cultural cache of Bloomsbury and apparently at odds to the Book Society in its aesthetic model and geographical operation, were so keen to work with the selection committee and to have titles chosen. Partly it may have been to do with money—the Hogarth Press, as much as other publishers, needed the occasional bestseller to help carry its lists and the Woolfs were not impartial to either the material rewards of successful book publishing nor the symbolic achievement of being able to "manage a best seller as well as Heinemann, and with far greater distinction" (Virginia Woolf to Molly MacCarthy, 8 June 1930, *Letters* 4: 177). Virginia Woolf's belief in the democratisation of reading and her championing of what she dubbed the "common reader"—the reader who reads "for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others" ("The

Common Reader" 1)—may also help us to understand some of the links between the Hogarth Press and the Book Society. In "Are Too Many Books Written and Published?" the BBC radio broadcast that she recorded with Leonard in July 1927 (shortly before the formation of the Book Society), Virginia argued that "[a]bove all things the reader wants variety; he wants books written by all sorts of people; by tramps and du[ch]esses; by plumbers and Prime Ministers. The reader's appetite is insatiable" (241). This was something akin to what the Book Society, with its eclectic list of choices and recommendations, clearly offered. Though we should remember that Virginia's dialogue here is meant to be polemical, constructed in opposition to that of Leonard, she also offers an uncanny precursor of what the Book Society would offer: "As people read more books they will read better books; they will also realize the pleasure of owning the books they read instead of borrowing them from a library" (243). This had long been a call of authors and publishers and for those who subscribed, this is what the Book Society made possible. As one satisfied member wrote in from Robin Hood's Bay in 1939: "I look ahead, say in five years time. I shall have sixty or more books, keenly chosen, approved by myself. Each book will have coloured a month in a member's life. I wonder how many of us could show a like record from any five years of our own haphazard reading" (Walpole, "Our First Ten Years" 52).

What is particularly interesting to me in considering the relationship between the Hogarth Press and the Book Society is the relative absence of this relationship in terms of the documented public record. There is no mention of the Book Society in Leonard Woolf's published volumes of autobiographies: not even when he describes in great detail the bestselling success of *The Edwardians* which was clearly helped, though of course not solely enabled by, having been a Book Society Choice. There are many reasons, no doubt, that Leonard would want to disassociate the Hogarth Press from the kind of cultural critique often levelled at the Book Society with its whiff of the "literary middlemen" and Virginia's own despised "middlebrow." Book clubs today in their modern manifestations—despite, or perhaps because of, their huge popularity—continue to face a bad press. There is

more work to be done on the literary and cultural impact of the Book Society as the first mail-order book club in Britain. Here I hope to have suggested some of the impact on Bloomsbury of the powerful new networks of distribution in the interwar period and the influence of common readers, new book-buyers and literary taste formers in creating a potentially more democratic way-in to book selling, literary distribution and the consumption and pleasures of literary culture.

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Ilaria Andreoli

Bloomsbury in Print
Book Illustrations from the Omega Workshops and the Hogarth Press

The Omega Workshops between word and image

Among the numerous partnerships developed within the Bloomsbury Group, that between authors and artists, between word and image, was one of the most significant. Observing Bloomsbury through the prism of book illustration reveals its nature as a tightly knit artistic community and helps to understand both the insularity of the Group and its involvement in the twentieth-century culture at large.

In a 1926 article about Edward McKnight Kauffer's illustrations to Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, published by Nonesuch Press in 1925, Fry provocatively describes book illustration as combat, acknowledging that its purpose is not to repeat visually what the author has to say, but rather to engage him in one fashion or another. Fry concedes that illustrations for a scientific treatise "can clearly be perfect" but he insists that "where the writer is an artist and the illustrator an artist there must be divergence"(211). He distinguishes between decoration ("initials, borders, *cul de lampe*") and artist's forms that have their own "further significance" (212), which suggests ideas or feelings by what they represent or by symbolical or expressionist methods. If he offered warm praise for Kauffer's illustrations he reserved his admiration for a greater example of modern book illustration—the woodcuts of Derain for Guillaume Apollinaire's *L'enchanteur pourrissant*, published by the art dealer Kahnweiler in 1909. Fry drew attention to Derain's woodcuts with their massive blacks and pure whites and their innovative freedom of handling:

> […] instead of taking the pen drawing as the point of departure, […] he has regarded the gouge as the essential instrument of expression. He shows, I think, a wonderful instinct for conceiving forms directly in terms of the gouge-stroke on the wood block, with the result that his sensibility comes through to us unchecked. It is like having an original poem instead of a translation. (226)

What Fry writes here about Derain can be applied to his own work in the field and it best approximates the work of all Bloomsbury artists. Derain was not the only French artist to be commissioned by Kahnweiler to produce woodcuts for books; Raoul Dufy was another. Both were inspired by Gauguin's vigorous and primitive woodcuts shown in Paris in 1906 in his posthumous retrospective exhibition. Dufy made woodcuts between 1907 and 1911, and like Gauguin and Derain cut across the grain of the block with gouge and penknife. Just as the French artists made much play of the rich and decorative vegetation that they included in their composition, mixing short lines, arabesques, squiggles and other graphic variations, Fry's woodcuts display equal interest in creating space by an interplay of intense blacks and luminous whites. He and other Bloomsbury artists such as Bell, Carrington and Grant were much closer to the French mood of "*luxe, calme et volupté*" than to the urban angst of their contemporaries in Germany, such as Kandinsky and Marc and the *Die Brücke*'s artists.

Prior to his Omega years Fry had participated in a variety of experiments in book illustration, beginning his illustrative career with a cover for the undergraduate magazine *The Cambridge Fortnightly* in January 1888, followed in 1892 by illustrations for *From Whitechapel to Camelot* by his fellow student at Cambridge, and energetic contributor to the Arts and Crafts Movement, C. R. Ashbee. In 1901 and 1908 he designed title pages for books of poems by another friend, the poet Robert Trevelyan (Greenwood 60, fig. 7). He may also have gained inspiration for his publishing projects from the Parisian dealer Ambroise Vollard, who had lent several paintings to the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* in 1912 and who frequently encouraged artists to illustrate texts with lithographs, etchings and woodcuts.

The first mention of woodcuts in Fry's letters occurs in 1912, in an undated love letter to Vanessa Bell. The letter included a drawing of Bell's naked torso and Fry wrote:

> That's the shape of your breast when you're lying down. I send it because it's one of the things you can only enjoy through me. I see that Greek mythology has made one bad mistake. It never made a story about a female Narcissus. I s'pose women weren't artists enough or hadn't enough energy and independence then. Well, I shall have to write the story and then we'll do woodcuts to illustrate it. Of course it's rather late to do a story like that—Oscar Wilde would have done it to perfection. (*Letters* 1: 358)

By 1912 Fry had not yet nudged Vanessa Bell into woodcutting, nor had he cut wood himself, but after having commissioned one from Eric Gill in 1910, he had drawn the following year a Christmas card that Winifred M. Gill—no relation of Eric—actually cut, as we learn from a letter that Fry sent to his mother along with the card. Winifred M. Gill cut another drawing by Fry in 1911, an ambitious composition for the endpaper of E. M. Forster's *The Celestial Omnibus and Other Stories*. For Christmas 1913 Fry produced an Omega Workshops woodcut card that looks at first as though it could be the Virgin and the Child accompanied by the infant St. John, but the source is instead a secular and very intimate one, being based on a photograph of Vanessa Bell kneeling on the grass and embracing her two sons, Julian and Quentin. Fry made drawings from this photograph and rather surprisingly carved a small wooden sculpture that was displayed in the Omega Workshops sitting room at the *Ideal Home Exhibition* in October 1913 (Greenwood 61; Shone).

It is likely that Roger Fry had envisaged the production of illustrated books as one of the Omega Workshops activities from its outset; but it was not until 1915, when paper shortages occasioned much less propitious circumstances, that he began to make plans for an Omega imprint. The first indication that the Omega Workshops was to harbour a publishing venture is in a letter from Fry to an old Cambridge friend, Nathaniel Wedd, at the end of July: "We're nearly finished producing Clutton-Brock's poem on Hell. It'll be the best thing I think done in the

way of books for ages. […] It seems an odd time to do this sort of thing, but I think it's as necessary as ever to keep certain thing going" (*Letters* 2: 388).

The "poem of Hell" was *Simpson's Choice*: *An Essay on the Future Life*, a satirical text, by Arthur Clutton-Brock, art critic of *The Times* and Fry's friend and neighbour in Guildford.

The book was reviewed in *The Observer* on 6 February 1916: "Mr Clutton-Brock's satire is a trifle over-facile, but his notion of the real hideousness of Hell is impressive. The apparently excessive price of the book (a slim quarto of sixteen pages), is justified by its beauty of production. The woodcuts of Mr R. K[ristian] are amusing and the fine large page and handsome type are a great pleasure to the eye" (qtd. in Greenwood 15).

The same year Fry published another slight volume also illustrated by the Norwegian painter Roald Kristian (Greenwood 109-21), *Men of Europe*, his own translation of *Vous êtes hommes*, a collection of poems on the horrors of the war, written in 1914-15 by the young French writer Pierre-Jean Jouve, a close friend of Charles Vildrac, Fry's contact in the contemporary French literary world.

The third book was *Lucretius on Death*, Robert Trevelyan's translation of some verses from book three of *De rerum natura*, for which Fry and Carrington collaborated on a woodcut for the title page (44-45). Fry seems to have been pleased with this book, and when it was published in September 1917 he placed a full-page advertisement for it in *The Burlington Magazine*.

The last book, *Original Woodcuts by Various Artists*, published in 1919, is the only publication by the Omega not to combine text and illustrations. The suggestion for a folio of woodcuts came originally from Virginia Woolf in the summer on 1917. She and Leonard Woolf had just begun handprinting their own stories for sale by subscription and were considering buying a press which would also reproduce illustrations. Vanessa Bell—now living with Duncan Grant at Charleston in Sussex and divorced from the day-to-day business of the Omega—responded eagerly to this casual invitation from her sister, and made plans to involve other artists in the project. But in September the idea was discarded because Vanessa's determination to have final artistic control was

met by Leonard's uncompromising insistence that he and nobody else should make the ultimate decisions. The following year Fry asked some friends to join him in contributing woodcuts to the Omega imprint (22-23, 36, 63-67, 103-05, 138-39; *Conversation anglaise* 228-31, no. 144). He cut the Omega device for the title-page (two figures holding an Omega symbol) and four other blocks (*Still Life*; *Harliquinade* [sic], from a drawing by Mark Gertler; *The Cup* and *The Stocking*); the remaining ten cuts were by Vanessa Bell (*Dahlias* and *Nude*), Simon Bussy (*Black Cat*), Duncan Grant (*The Hat Shop* and *The Tub*), Edward Mc Knight Kauffer (*Study*), Edward Wolfe (*Ballet* and *Group*). Fry also retrieved two unused prints by Kristian (*Animals*). The print run was of 75 copies; there is no record of its price, but it must have been more expensive than the 12s.6d asked for *Simpson's Choice* because Virginia thought the book was "very magnificent but fearfully expensive" (*Letters* 2: 296-97).

The Bloomsbury artists had almost no practical experience of printmaking. Fry though, unrelenting as ever, immersed himself in the technical processes of printing: he took advice from John Henry Mason, super-intendent of the printing school at the Central School of Arts and Crafts and employed Richard Madley, a professional printer whose premises were nearby, in Whitfield Street, to produce his books. "Roger I hear is cutting wood all over the carpets of Gordon Square," Carrington wrote to Virginia Woolf in autumn 1918 (106). Fry's five woodcuts relate in their subject matter to his contemporary still life and figure paintings, while stylistically they make much use of the strong tonal contrasts afforded by the medium. Probably the other artists were making woodcuts for the first time. Vanessa Bell had produced one or two shaky silver point etchings in 1905, but nothing since; Duncan Grant had drawn a poster for the suffragettes and taken a hand in designing invitation cards for the Omega (Greenwood 99, 102). Perhaps unsure of their competence in woodcutting, they both based prints on existing paintings. Vanessa Bell's *Dahlias* relied on a 1914 painting, while *Nude* was made while she was working on a large decoration, *The Tub*, for which Mary Hutchinson has posed beside a tin bath (1917, London, Tate. See *Conversation anglaise* 172-73, no. 50). Reducing the scale by at least

ten times for the woodcut enabled her to alter the proportions of the composition, resolving the awkward spatial relationship between the figure and the tub in the painted version and emphasising the prominence of the nude. In both cases, Bell simplified the composition when cutting the woodblock. Her paintings at that time were strong, simple and bold in composition, and she carried these qualities over into her woodcuts, exploiting the dramatic and luminous contrast between the black and white areas of mass. She makes little use of line, preferring instead to juxtapose blocks of form, the edges of which she leaves uneven and jagged. The mark of the gouge, which cuts away the white areas, is a distinctive feature at the edges of black. Likewise, Grant's woodcut of *The Tub* was copied directly from a painting of the same title and his *Hat Shop* was a witty reference to his own designs for hats to be sold at the Omega (1913, London, Tate. See *Conversation anglaise*, 172, no. 49). Both artists' prints drew extravagant acclaim from Fry. Grant's he thought "typical of what's best and most characteristic in him" in its fusion of formal coherence and delicate fantasy; and he told Bell: "Your woodcut is simply lovely. I don't think I've ever admired you enough. I like personally almost more than D's Hat Shop. It's really a big thing. You *are* an artist" (*Letters* 2: 439). The woodcuts in the Omega book are unrefined but effective, remarkably fresh and lively compared with the elaborate designs of many conventional printmakers: the artists "shy away from ostentation of whatever skill they possessed" (Collins 164). Their definitive influence was from France, and particularly from Matisse—the pose of the nude in Bell's *The Tub* was taken straight from his *Le Luxe I*—and Derain, and their concern was similarly with surface sensibility. But set against the prints made by some of the Vorticists, and particularly by Edward Wadsworth, for whom the woodcut was a primary means of expression at this time, their form and structure is tame indeed.

Original Woodcuts by Various Artists was the Omega's last communal endeavour. Financial failure and the strains of running the business almost single-handedly had worn Fry down. In June 1918 he announced a clearance sale, and then closed the shop.

After the demise of the Omega, Bell and Grant only experimented sparingly with woodcuts but Carrington, who

had not been included in the Omega portfolio, found that the medium suited her well. She printed a self-portrait in 1916, and in the next few years designed bookplates for Lytton Strachey and several of his friends. Unlike the Omega artists, Carrington did not rely on the obvious contrast of black and white for her effects, but was fascinated instead by the subtle interplay of light and dark in three tones, which she realised through an arrangement of finely-graded lines. Her subjects were often derived from an earlier, pastoral, arcadian tradition (Greenwood 19-20, 39, 42-43, 46-51 and 54). Carrington used earlier woodcuts for inspiration, from Chinese books shown to her by her friend Arthur Waley, assistant keeper of Oriental prints and drawings, and particularly from 15th century Italian books and from the magnificent collection of early German woodcuts given to the British Museum in 1895 and catalogued in 1903 by Campbell Dodgson. At the turn of the 20th century, the momentous encounter between the artistic avant-garde and the "primitive woodcut" closely coincided with collection patterns in museums and the scholarly interpretation of these works. Dodgson was aware that the British Museum did not collect contemporary prints and he bought them himself for presentation to his department.

By 1919, however, she was beginning to think that woodcuts were "too limited in their technique, & that certain elements, as colour, will never be able to be shown" (qtd. in Hill 45). One of her last woodcut was the one, printed in red, for the cover of Leonard's first monograph, *Stories of the East*, drawn on his experiences living in Ceylon and published in 1921.

Fry also continued to make woodcuts, and he too produced a self-portrait, as well as still-lifes and interiors in which he explored the formal possibilities of the medium (Greenwood 68). In 1921 the Hogarth Press published a dozen of his new prints. 150 copies of *Twelve Original Woodcuts* were handprinted by the Woolfs in November (68-78). They sold out within two days, and in the next year two further impressions were issued to meet the unexpected demand: "Roger's woodcuts, 150 copies" Virginia wrote in her diary "have been gulped down in 2 days. I have just finished stitching the last copies—all but six" (2: 144).

Despite the very considerable commercial success of Fry's book, woodcuts were never again to feature in any way with the Hogarth Press. In hindsight this appears strange but it seems that the limited interest Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell had in this technique had evaporated, while Fry, the main protagonist of the woodcut, had also characteristically moved on to other challenges. He published seven titles with the Hogarth Press, all of them art-related, indicating his formative influence on the press's perspective on art and design.

Roger Fry made the Omega Workshops a direct antithesis to Morris' Kelmscott Press, yet both men attempted to create objects that were more meaningful than those produced by the impersonal methods of the Industrial Revolution.[1] If Fry felt the need to create more meaningful items too, he believed that objects would take on the joy of their creation, expressing the pleasure an artist feels when he has satisfactorily fulfilled a creative impulse through his product, be it a chair, a pot or a textile. Meaning for him was not dependent on technique but on the opportunity to create. He laughed at the affectations of craft in the Movement: he wanted to introduce spontaneity into the work of the Omega as well as the sense of formal design that Post-impressionism had emphasised. It is within this aesthetics that the Woolfs' attitude toward printing and its end result must be considered.

Woodcuts and the Hogarth Press

The Hogarth Press was born on the dining-table of Hogarth House, the Woolfs' home in Richmond, in April 1917, following the impulsive purchase of a small handpress, an instruction booklet that promised to teach them how to print, and some Caslon Old Face type noticed in a shop window while walking on London's Farringdon Street.[2] It started as a hobby, but what had been

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1 See Stansky, *William Morris and Bloomsbury*; Spalding, *Roger Fry* 178.

2 Woolf, *Beginning Again* 234. See Woolmer; Rhein; Willis; Rosenbaum; Porter; Fewster; Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing*; Bradshaw, "Virginia Woolf and Book Design"; Southworth; Svendsen.

intended as a therapeutic, manual occupation for Virginia Woolf soon mushroomed into a consuming and flourishing operation—an autonomous, undemanding publisher of Woolf's own work and then a fully-fledged press whose eminence was widely acknowledged. The Hogarth Press emerges from the Woolfs' writings as a mixed blessing, one that developed a will of its own, and, on occasion, caused them enormous frustration. It proved itself, however, to be an appropriate venture for two writers as it happily joined a shared hobby, printing, with the ideal publishing situation for an author: to find a means for fulfilling their individual creative needs without the restraints and confines of the commercial publishing world. As Virginia loved to affirm, she was "the only woman in England free to write what I like" (*Diary* 3:43): the Hogarth provided her "a press of her own."

Even if it is remembered today for publishing Katherine Mansfield and T. S. Eliot, for the impressive list of other writers who appeared under its banner and for its twenty-nine translations, from Russian, German and Italian, between the two wars, the Woolfs chose mostly essays and works of poetry and fiction, written by themselves or friends and acquaintances, that might not have been published otherwise. Throughout the history of the Hogarth Press they did not see themselves as professional publishers, as Leonard stresses in his autobiography: "The organisation and machinery of the Press were amateurish; it was, so far as Virginia and I were concerned, a hobby which we carried on in afternoons, when we were not writing books and articles or editing papers" (*Downhill All the Way* 78). Between the years 1917-1932 Leonard and Virginia handprinted 18 books and published in total 34 titles (18 others were printed by professional printers) out of a total of 315, 11 of which were illustrated.

Unlike many private presses founded in the slipstream of the pervasive Arts and Crafts movement, the Hogarth Press was not concerned with *editions de luxe*, not in the least interested in producing fine books as such, and it showed no interest in new experiments with typography. Their intentions were more cerebral and their concern was with the text above all. Leonard Woolf restated (234) that publishing rather than printing was the primary reason for continuing the Press each time they were

ready to give up, and stressed their purpose not to make the Hogarth Press into the kind of private press that published finely printed books "meant not to be read but to be looked at" (80). He recalled that one of the major reasons for beginning the Hogarth Press was to publish small books that would otherwise have little chance of being printed by established publishing companies and that they wanted their books to "look nice," having their own views of what nice looks in a book would be, but neither of them were interested in fine printing and fine binding. Nonetheless they took some pleasure in the appearance of their books and care in the choice of artists they asked to decorate them.

Even before artists were asked to design dust jackets, the earliest productions of the Hogarth Press were distinguished by their unusual covers, carefully chosen and brightly coloured. The Woolfs begun to use marble paper provided by Fry in 1919, for Eliot's *Poems*.

Fry had his own methods of marbling or colouring papers: rather than using the traditional method of suspending colour on water and floating it onto the paper, he took discarded wallpaper which was far too heavy and poor in quality for the purpose he intended, and simply flung colours on it in random patterns, alternating large and small splashes until he had filled an area to his satisfaction. Unfortunately, the flat paint soon dulled with dirt. Virginia's active involvement in finding and even making coloured papers with which to bind that first book clearly foreshadows their subsequent interest in using a book's cover to enhance its impact (Isaac). Virginia Woolf, who took lessons in bookbinding when she was only nineteen, bound her own books and made coloured papers "with wild success," as she wrote in a letter to Vanessa (*Letters* 2: 544). Another common practice was to use a variety of covers within the same edition: of the 34 handprinted books, close to half appear in at least two different covers, and quite a few of the early, commercially printed books show similar variations. The reasons for this habit are not actually known but it is possible that the Woolfs simply used what was handy and bought more as they went along (Stansky, "Leonard Woolf's Journey" 118; Spater and Parson 175). This creates multiplicity within one edition,

a term which usually indicates conformity, for the torment of bibliographers and the delight of bibliophiles.

The Press's very first publication by the Woolfs themselves, as it proudly says on the title page, is *Two Stories*, published in 1917 and sold by subscription, for which Virginia set the type, Leonard machined the paper over the inked type and Virginia sewed the thirty-two pages and cover together in the dining room of Hogarth House. It contained four small woodcut illustrations by Carrington—a frontispiece and tailpiece for each story: "Three Jews" by Leonard and "The Mark on the Wall" by Virginia—and had a cover of at least three different types of Japanese paper within its run of just 150 copies (Rhein 10-14). The book incorporates several elements of book design which the Woolfs continued to favour in their succeeding productions, and also has some features that were dropped from subsequent handprinted books. One of the most obvious characteristics is their use of capital letters on the cover and the title page for author, title, publisher and place of publication. This format is often used for one and sometimes, as here, for both components. A generous use of space in margins and between lines is typical. The Woolfs favoured a white page rather than the black page of dark ink, close lines and closely spaced type popularized by William Morris. Their use of space becomes a practical advantage when the reader is faced with poor inking and grey type, less admirable qualities also typical of Hogarth Press handprinted books.

There is indeed a general tendency in the early books toward sloppiness in printing, with messy corrections littered through the text in ink or with cancel slips pasted in the back or front, all of which certainly indicates a lack of care or concern for the books' neat and tidy appearance. Oddly enough, though both were avid readers, neither of the Woolfs seems to have been affected by what for most people would have been an offensive barrier to enjoying the content of their books.

Two Stories' illustrations elicited praise from Lytton Strachey and aroused the immediate interest of Vanessa Bell. Despite eventually abandoning woodcuts in books, she was quick to volunteer a frontispiece illustration for Virginia Woolf's story *Kew Gardens* in the summer of 1918. There are two woodcuts, one

in the front and one in the back of the book, but they exist in three states; some are printed on the page, others on a separate paper and pasted onto the page, and still others are printed on a separate page and pasted over those printed on the text page (Greenwood 24-27; Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 39, no. 27). Again, Bell relied on an earlier painting for inspiration: *A Conversation* of 1913-1916 (London, The Courtauld Institute of Art), a portrait of three women gossiping at a window. However, when the story was published in 1919 she was furious at the uneven printing of her block, which had been terribly overinked in places. The printing of this book caused more entries in Virginia's letters and diaries than any other book handprinted by the Woolfs. Most of the serious conversations between the two sisters took place in person but they were all painful for Virginia, who was stung by the ferocity of the criticism.

The book's bold mingling of text, illustration, and book design—covers hand-painted by Roger Fry, with strokes and dabs of blue, green, and dusky rose on a black background, and the woodcuts by Bell that magically echo the story's interplay of animate nature with the flowers and plants of Kew Gardens—met with critical acclaim (a glowing review was published in the *Times Literary Supplement*) and sold well, requiring a commercial reprint, this time of 500 copies.

Vanessa made no secret of her opinion of Leonard's taste and skills in printing, so any project which involved both of them led to a great deal of trouble. The quarrel blew over, but might easily have erupted again when Bell's four woodcut illustrations to Virginia's collection of stories, *Monday or Tuesday* (1921), were similarly disfigured by a commercial printer who impressed her blocks heavily onto dreadfully poor paper: the result was ink smudges and paper flaking off on the blocks, not to talk about the number of spelling and punctuation errors (Greenwood 28-33; Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 21, no. 16).

Still, when the following year the Woolfs decided for the first time to produce a dust jacket, for *Jacob's Room*—the first of Virginia novels to be published by the Press in 1922—they turned confidently to Vanessa Bell for the design. It was in fact a collaborative effort: Vanessa made the drawing, Virginia chose the

terracotta colouring, and Leonard Woolf advised alterations to the lettering. It was the start, though not a very auspicious one, of an important, successful and long-lasting partnership—the longest in the Press's history. The post-impressionist cover of *Jacob's Room*, a characteristically suggestive assembly of simple shapes—a table, flowers and curtains—was ridiculed by booksellers and buyers alike. It was quite unlike the linear, illustrative decorations to which they were used.

Published by the Hogarth's in 1923 with a print run of 400 copies, *The Legend of Monte della Sibilla* or *Le Paradis de la Reine Sibille*, an hedonistic and witty poem by Clive Bell based on Antoine de la Sale's account of a voyage he made to the Monts de la Sibyle in 1420, is illustrated with a frontispiece and headpiece as well as a cover from original ink drawings by Vanessa Bell—whose initials are incorporated into her design—and Duncan Grant, whose contribution is unsigned. One of the most significant collaborations in the history of the Bloomsbury Group, it was the result of a three-way (or a five-way, if we include the Woolfs) collaboration, and one of the largest format books produced by the Press. With its generous margins and fairly dark type it is rather consistently well printed, a nice tribute to the combined skills in the decorative arts of Grant and Bell, who had by this time established an artistic and emotional partnership.

Apart from illustrations, the dust jackets and covers were two other ways in which the Woolfs richly fulfilled their intention to enhance their publications by visual means (Rhein 40-41). The Woolfs' special attention to covers occasioned a dispute with Katherine Mansfield over *Prelude* (1919). Mansfield wanted the cover to carry an illustration by her friend J. D. Fergusson; the Woolfs did not like it and ended up printing a few copies with the Fergusson's design for Mansfield and her close friends but replacing this cover with plain dark-blue wrappers on subsequent copies. *Prelude* was an ambitious second attempt by a couple of amateur printers: considering the conditions under which Leonard printed this book—carrying chases to the printer's shop after Virginia had set them in the dining room—it is amazing that the book can be read at all. In the midst of printing it, it had been pointed out that the running head was

given incorrectly as *The Prelude* rather than just *Prelude*. This was subsequently corrected, but only on pages not yet printed.

Travellers for the Hogarth Press grew accustomed to the sniggering of bookshop assistants when they unpacked their wares for inspection. Reviewers were equally critical: *The Star* remarked of Vanessa Bell's jacket for the first series of *The Common Reader* (1925), Woolf's first collection of essays, that "only a conscious artist could have done it so badly" (qtd. in Woolf, *Diary* 3: 16n4; Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 73, no. 55). But Virginia was to make light of this attack: "The Star has a whole column about your decorations of the Common R: and says I try to live up to them by being as revolutionary and nonsensical—a very good advertisement" (*Letters* 3: 182). She never abandoned the partnership with her sister and during the next two decades Vanessa produced dust jackets for each of her books, as well as designing the covers for the collections of Virginia's essays compiled by Leonard Woolf and published posthumously by the Hogarth Press and those used for the Uniform Editions of her novels in Britain and America (Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 72-86). Virginia's letters to Vanessa abound with enticements to illustrate her work, and with praise for her designs. "Your style is unique; because so truthful; and therefore it upsets one completely," she wrote after Vanessa sent her the jacket for *To the Lighthouse* (1927) (*Letters* 3: 391; Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 77, no. 57).

By that time Vanessa Bell's bold designs and lettering, usually in the lower case—showing the influence Omega's Workshops—had become a distinctive signature of Virginia Woof's works, they influenced the perception and reception of her writings and contributed to the definition of the "aesthetic" of the Press. Consistent in the use of black and white or one or two striking and contrasting colours, usually browns, greens, and blues, Vanessa Bell's book-jackets employ many of her favourite decorative motifs, familiar from her work in other media: "still life arrangements," flowers, curtains and circles and hoops, all images of plenitude and nourishment, merged into almost abstract patterns. Many of her designs are, at most, only allusive to the title of the book and rarely do they indicate its content. Once, when writing

to John Lehmann to thank him for sending a dummy of one of her sister's novels, she admitted: "I've not read a word of the book—I have only the vaguest description of it and what she wants to me to do from Virginia—but that has always been the case with the jackets I have done for her" (qtd. in Lehman 27). But this is not to suggest that they were necessarily produced on a whim: she filled a whole sketchbook with ideas for *A Room of One's Own* (1929) before settling on a simple design of a clock on a mantelpiece (Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 77-78, no. 58). Vanessa Bell's dust jackets ranged from the purely abstract—a typically geometric combination of cross-hatching, circles and lines for Virginia's limited edition essay *On Being Ill* (1930), the last book of Virginia's to be handprinted and one of the last books handprinted by the Woolfs—, to the delightfully decorative—two flowers drooping from a vase for the first series of *The Common Reader*, a bouquet for *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), a single rose for *The Years* (1937) (Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 75, no. 56 and 118 no. 87)—and the apparently descriptive—two ghostly figures on the shore, seen from a window ledge, for *The Waves* (Filby Gillespie 295; Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 79, no. 60), an emblematic lighthouse for *To the Lighthouse*, three bank notes, quill pen, and ink for *Three Guineas*, which Leonard Woolf considered the most beautiful of her designs (Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 85, no. 62). For *Walter Sickert: A Conversation* (1934) she provided a more elaborate set-piece drawing: a quite un-Sickertian still-life of fruit and drink on the table around which the conversationalists will dine (Bradshaw, *The Bloomsbury Artists* 69, no. 123). Virginia liked the cover so much she raised the price of her essay on the strength of it.

There is an attractive lightness of touch to all these; Vanessa provided indeed "a kind of 'visual underscoring' which gave the books a sympathetic atmosphere—feminine, imaginative, delicate, modern but domestic" but, as it has been suggested, in the late novels "as Virginia Woolf's writing developed, the decorativeness of the covers became, to an extent, misleading" (Lee 369) making these novels look less powerful and angry than they are.

However, more usually "the perfect sisterly accord of writer and artist sharing the same vision" (Lehman 26) was intuitively realised and this was exemplified in their most complete collaboration, the third edition of *Kew Gardens* published in 1927. This commercial reprint of 500 numbered copies is a different type of publication. In addition to being more expensive than most titles at the Press, there is an increased focus on creating a beautiful object, a collectible item, at least as much as a readable book. This edition uses expensive paper and is printed only on rectos, creating more white space and some copies are signed by the author and by the illustrator. Each of the 21 pages of Virginia's text is framed by the organic growth of Vanessa's designs, which allude to the light, shape and movement of the story, the spontaneity of the drawing echoing the flickering quality of the writing. Though the decorations shape the actual words of the story, they are imprecise enough not to overpower them. Yet they are so assured "as to make each page visually dramatic, text and image balancing each other as in Blake's illuminated books" (Spalding, *Vanessa Bell* 221).

Beyond the Hogarth Press

Vanessa Bell was the most prolific designer to work for the Hogarth Press, and she created what became almost its house style. With John Banting, she provided the designs for the various series of pamphlets issued by the Hogarth Press in the 1920s and 1930s, which greatly enhanced the Woolfs' list of authors and contributed to the Press's growing prestige (Bradshaw, *The Bloomsbury Artists* 66-77, no. 107-45). She also supplied the emblem of a wolf's head enclosed in a medallion used as the Press's colophon from 1925, apart from a brief period in the 1930s when it was supplanted by a more stylised and modern device by McKnight Kauffer.[3] Roger Fry produced a cover for William Plomer's *Paper Houses* and the Woolfs also published, in an edition of 550 numbered copies, his *Sampler of Castille*, Fry's record, in

[3] See Greenwood 103-08; About McKnight Kauffer, see Wilson Gordon, "On or About December."

words and pictures, of a journey through Spain in the summer of 1923 (Bradshaw, *The Bloomsbury Artists* 52-53, no. 47, 79, no. 149 and 151). Fry also designed the cover for his own *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (1927), and another for William Plomer's *Paper House* (1929). Duncan Grant drew relatively few dust jackets between the wars (the one for Fry's book about his own work for the *Living Painters* series in 1924, the first and only volume to appear in this series), though he decorated several covers for catalogues distributed by Francis Birrel's and David Garnett's bookshop in Bloomsbury. When Garnett invited him to design a cover for a new novel in 1931, Grant reminded him of the fate of his proposed jacket for Julian Bell's first volume of poems *Winter Movement* (1930): "Hatchard said that he would tear off the one I did for Julian from every copy that entered his shop" (qtd. in Spalding, *Duncan Grant* 316).[4] Perhaps it was a fear of further retaliation from booksellers that led him the next year to worry that his design for Julia Strachey's story *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding* (1932), a commission he inherited from Carrington after her suicide, was vulgarly put together (Bradshaw, *The Bloomsbury Artists* 80, no. 155);[5] it was, in fact, one of his most fluent. Grant's easy draughtsmanship was particularly suited to graphic arts: so, too, was his natural inventiveness. For Arthur Waley's translation of *Monkey* by the 16th century Chinese writer Wu Ch'êng-ên, published in 1942, he wound his drawing of a monkey around the entire book at the suggestion of the publisher David Unwin. All the title details were put on the back, in keeping with the reverse nature of Chinese literature (81, no. 161 and 164). In the last year of the war he made five vivid lithographic illustrations for a private edition of 700 copies of the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1945) published by Allen Lane, a little later dust jackets for Dorothy Bussy's anonymous, but thinly-disguised, autobiographical novel *Olivia* (1949) and for her translation of Paul Valery's *Dance and the Soul* (1951). Grant readily agreed to produce a cover and chapter headings for the first novel by his friend Paul Roche, *O Pale Galileian* (1954),

4 See Bradshaw, *The Bloomsbury Artists* 80-83, no. 154-173.

5 At the British Library there is a rough sketch by Carrington for the cover of this book.

and for his later books of poetry. In the last decades of his life, with his enthusiasm for new projects undimmed, he adapted designs for early publications by Richard Shone and made a drawing (erroneously printed upside-down) for *London Lickpenny*, a small selection of poems by Peter Ackroyd (1973).

In the torrent of books and essays on the Bloomsbury artists over the last thirty years or so, scant attention has been paid to their graphic work that constitutes, of course, only a fraction of their vast, and varied, output. Above all, it was ephemeral: Carrington's woodcuts were sometimes just slipped into an envelope with her letters; the volume of woodcuts printed at the Omega Workshops and the Hogarth Press were published in small editions and many have subsequently been divided up; Virginia Woolf's novels and essays were issued in far greater numbers, but only very few are found today with their jackets intact; widely regarded as just a fancy bit of advertising, dust-wrappers were often thrown away or they might be pasted to the inside covers. Even at Charleston, the house shared by Bell and Grant for fifty years, none survive; there they were quite as likely to become part of a still-life arrangement or, left lying around a studio, to be spattered with paint. Those that had not been vandalised in some way might be "rescued" by keen and light-fingered bibliophiles.

The Omega Workshops produced a range of products and only four books, while the Hogarth Press produced only books, yet they are tightly linked via shared personnel, as well as through a shared commitment to amateurism and experimentalism. But both the Omega and the Hogarth Press sought to forge a closer relationship of art and industry and similar to Fry's general mission at the Omega, the Woolfs had an open, pragmatic, even humoristic approach to book production; all they wanted was to produce book "to be read," not simply "to be looked at."

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Antonella Trotta

Why Do They Go to the Pictures? Clive Bell and the New "Home" Audience

Buy pictures and make money!

In 1930, Clive Bell published a short portrait of the British public in the May issue of *Les Arts à Paris*.

The magazine had been founded in 1918 by the prince of modern art merchants Paul Guillaume and was influenced by the personality of its co-founder, Guillaume Apollinaire, whose eclectic style, polemical fervour and propaganda strategy it had assimilated. The magazine was a diary of the heroic years of the *rive gauche*, an extraordinary tool for spreading the message of modern art: its features, news items, correspondence, articles and illustrations were organized in such a way as to map art criticism and the art market, with the Galerie Guillaume, at 108 Faubourg Saint-Honoré, as its driving force (Giraudon 19-30).

Willing to absorb all manner of novelties into its programme, by the mid-1920s *Les Arts à Paris* had gained an international dimension. In the midst of the economic crisis that had threatened many galleries on the left bank of the Seine, Guillaume had purchased modern paintings and *art nègre*, had moved to 59 Rue La Boétie and become the agent of Albert Barnes, the diabolical American collector "un peu médecin, un peu psychologue, un peu altruiste tendence paranoïque" (Franck 545). In 1923, after an interval of two years, the magazine had resumed publication to cover the "Barnes effect" among the artists and art dealers of Paris, his purchases for the Barnes museum in Merion, Pennsylvania, and the educational projects of the Barnes Foundation, inspired by John Dewey and by Roger Fry's *Vision and Design* (Greenfeld 103-11). From Fry and Clive Bell, Barnes had drawn the theoretical propositions for discussing paintings (Buermey-

er, "De quelques erreurs populaires en esthétique"; Buermeyer, "Pattern and Plastic") and not "archeology, literature, physics or the physiology of vision, or merely vague impressionistic reactions" (Krutch 259); the formulas for original aesthetic education programmes aimed at a broad audience; and the principles for displaying antique and modern works of art in wall compositions (de Mazia). Like the English industrialist and philanthropist Samuel Courtauld, Barnes had taken to heart the exhortation of Bloomsbury formalism to collect outstanding works, and not just those of the 20th century.

In 1929, *Les Arts à Paris* replaced the articles by Barnes and the members of his Foundation with letters from London, where the art market had been experiencing a boom for the past decade and which for less than a year had been home to the new Paul Guillaume Gallery (Giraudon 45).

From the mid-1920s until 1931, when the consequences of the Wall Street collapse were dramatically evident, London was the new centre of the art trade and Britain was "the best country for artists", as headlined an article by the painter Christopher Nevinson (Stephenson 32): alongside the experts and foreigners, especially Americans, who had long been active on the art market, a new middle class audience had emerged that invested its savings in cultural emancipation rather than in stocks and shares. The Old Masters continued to be auctioned at record prices, but the general public fed the demand for the prints, engravings, sculptures and paintings of British modern art, more accessible and "always nicer to live with meanwhile than a bond" (Stephenson 32). According to the commentators who discussed this development in specialist journals, newspapers and leisure magazines, this was an unprecedented boom, surpassing Paris and poised to increase in the future. The same optimism was shared by art dealers, who opened new spaces or organized exhibitions to accommodate the interests of this new "home" art audience. In 1927, for example, the Leicester Galleries began to exhibit large selections of works by contemporary British artists alongside the French artists of the 19th and 20th centuries, with the aim of legitimizing British art in the eyes of collectors already accustomed to modern art or usually inclined to buy Old Masters (Carvey and Griffiths 14-17).

In the autumn of 1929, R. H. Wilensky, a militant art critic and author of *The Modern Movement in Art* (1927), invited his readers "of moderate means" but "who want oil paintings that are cheap now and likely to increase in value" to adhere to the slogan: "BUY modern pictures and make MONEY" (Stephenson 31).

Wilensky was entrusted with the first "Letter from London" in the new series of *Les Arts à Paris*, devoted to an analysis of "the degree of appreciation of modern original work" in England. "The British nation as a whole derives no satisfaction from the formal content of works of art," it read, but is proud to know that there have been and are British artists, that the Royal Academy exists, that British collections and museums possess art works of enormous value. Since the 18th century, art patronage had been the privilege of a large leisured class, though the professional classes often had the most intelligent appreciation of art works and artists came from middle class families. And since everyone had been so influenced by the wealthier classes as to mimic their attitudes, in England art had always been identified with that "amenity in social life that created the English country house, English furniture and silver, English hospitality and English comfort." Now, however, thanks to the professionalism of a group of critics (a small fraction of the professional classes, of which Wilensky was the standard-bearer), artists could count on an audience of the "well-educated professional classes" and "middle class people of average education" not rich, but attentive. Once a trustworthy critic had pointed them out, this new audience was prepared to buy works of art costing up to £100 apiece (38).

But which artists did Wilensky support? At the end of the 1920s, the most up-to-date artists had begun to deliberately come to terms with the European Modernism of the pre-war years and to work in the belief that English art should participate directly in the modern movement. "Going modern" meant experimenting with new opportunities in the context of their own time, measuring themselves against the development of European art after the war, from Cubism to Surrealism, but without abandoning the quest for a specific identity. This was the aim, for exam-

ple, of the Seven & Five group, whose exhibitions, from 1920 to 1935, were followed attentively by a generation of young collectors and critics like Herbert Read, Adrian Stokes, Margaret Gardiner and R. H. Wilensky himself.

This new vanguard proposed an alternative solution to the variations on Post-Impressionism of the London Group, the avant-garde alliance established in 1913 around the Bloomsbury artists and art critics, who in the 1920s still had an important role in drawing attention to contemporary art. Although "apples have had their day" (Nash, "Giorgio di Chirico"), for much of the general public modern art was synonymous with Post-Impressionism.

However, the new larger professional and middle class audience had not been not won over: motivated by economic and commodity concerns and a conservative taste, they particularly appreciated oil paintings and the cheaper watercolours, frequently on English landscape subjects (Stephenson 32). Their sudden appearance on the market undermined the aesthetic values of art as defined by Bloomsbury, and, more generally, created a new relationship between the viewer and the artwork, as unstable and fluctuating as the spiralling boom market years of the Slump.

The Colonel's theory

To meet to the expectations of this broader public as well, the Paul Guillaume Gallery, at 73 Grosvenor Street, presented a careful selection of artists of the 19th and 20th centuries: in October 1928, for example, it opened a retrospective by Duncan Grant, accompanied by a selection of works by English artists. In April of 1929, the gallery inaugurated the Memorial Exhibition by Fred Mayor, a landscape painter and member of the NEAC, the group that had contributed to the development of modern art through "a gradual progress from moderate impressionism to moderate conservatism" (Harrison, *English Art and Modernism* 21-22). Belonging to the gallery's "estate" were works by Renoir, Douanier Rousseau, Sisley, Marie Laurencin, Modigliani, Paul Nash and Cézanne (Giraudon 45).

> Almost everyone thinks himself fit to lay down the law on art. Laying it down, after a full meal, to some hundreds of their fellow creatures appears to be one of the rare pleasures in the lives of princes, bishops, judges, ministers, and mayors. […] Amongst *ex-officio* aesthetes, royal, ecclesiastical, and judicial, I forgot to mention military; Count Tolstoy, besides being one of the greatest novelists that ever lived, was a retired colonel–or a lieutenant was it? (Bell, "The Colonel's Theory" 779)

Thus, in 1925, Clive Bell had written on *Tolstoy on Art,* the first edition of the complete collection of Lev Tolstoy's essays on art including *What Is Art?*, published in England in 1897 but at the time out of print. For Aylmer Maude, the work's editor, the essay represented the "most lucid statement of the nature of artistic activity and of its relation to the rest of life" (vii), but for most specialized readers the text was the most vigorous attack on formalism ever launched by a "simple-minded and reactionary writer" (Tomas vii), "barbarous" or better yet a "philistine" (Bell, "The Colonel's Theory" 779). The condemnation of the depreciation of subject matter and of the separation between art and life seemed incomprehensible and absurd to those who recognized in these trends the characteristics of the new art, but for "readers interested in the relation of art to life in general, and who wish to understand why art is of importance to mankind," and for whom the primacy of form was synonymous with unintelligibility and exclusivity, it was still an enlightening text (Maude vi).

Tolstoy, wrote Bell, had conceived of a theory of art with the same blind determination with which one might attempt to demonstrate that "the earth is flat," and without any love of art. His opinion was shared by millions of people, "born without the aesthetic sense" or, more accurately, "without eyes:" since in a work of art they seek above all the conformity of the subject depicted with what they have read in books or experienced in everyday life, these viewers can not appreciate its quality. Their lack of sensibility extends beyond modern art: "aesthetically blind," they run their fingers over a Raphael, lick a Giotto, smell a Piero della Francesca, only to conclude that there is "nothing to make a fuss about," and that those

who speak of them as masterpieces are "corrupt and decadent liars who should be exterminated."[1]

> Listen to them in a gallery before a primitive: "What a hideous picture!". They mean that if they met that Virgin at a tennis-party they would think her ugly, and they happen to have been born without the sense which carries one out of the world of values for life into that of aesthetic values. (Bell, "The Colonel's Theory" 779)

But why did this audience, generally educated, not rich but well-off, engaged in the professions or in the civil service, these disciples of the "Colonel," flock to exhibitions and museums? Why were they active on the art market?

This is the theme of the article that Bell, then an authoritative art critic, influential cultural figure, popular publicist and sought-after socialite, published in 1930 in the new series of *Les Arts à Paris*.

The occasion of the article—a brilliant and caustic, sometimes cruel text, in the aggressive and militant spirit of the magazine—was the outstanding success of the exhibition *Italian Art, 1200-1900*, opened in January of that year at the Royal Academy in London, and visited, in the two months for which it ran, by hundreds of thousands of people.

The political and cultural aims of the exhibition have been masterfully reconstructed by Francis Haskell; here suffice it to recall the personal involvement of Benito Mussolini in the success of the enterprise, the pressure he exerted on the Italian commissioner for the exhibition, Ettore Modigliani, to transfer to London works that should never have been allowed to travel, and the appalling catalogue, according to Kenneth Clark (its principal compiler) the worst catalogue of a great exhibition ever printed[2], which sold a hundred and fifty thousand copies (Haskell 107-27).

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1 As noted by Claudio Zambianchi in this volume, Roger Fry had already stated that Tolstoy was wrong in *An Essay in Aesthetics*, whilst appreciating the writer's attention to the emotion elicited by the work of art.

2 Fry was a member of the organizing committee, had favourably reviewed the exhibition in *The Burlington Magazine* and the BBC, had spoken for at least one of the guided tours for visitors to the

The exhibition presented six hundred works, displayed in a simplified way: the history and nature of Italian art, said the catalogue, deserved an organization by chronology and historical geography, in which the artists who were "greatest and best beloved" by the public could shine like apparitions from another world (Witt xii). But since such an arrangement would confuse the ordinary visitor, "in accordance with the tradition of the Royal Academy" Room III was "devoted to some supreme masterpieces," chosen among the most famous works of the masters of each school from the 15th to the 18th century. "If anything in the nature of a Tribuna is anywhere permissible," wrote Robert Witt, "surely it is in this stately and noble gallery" (xvi). In the same room the visitor could see *The Birth of Venus* by Botticelli, Raphael'*s Woman with a Veil*, Mantegna's *Dead Christ*, *The Tempest* by Giorgione, the *Portrait of Paul III* by Titian, the *Flagellation* by Piero della Francesca, Lorenzo Lotto, Correggio, Veronese and Tiepolo. Two rooms were dedicated to drawings, "vital" to the connoisseur's understanding of the history of Italian art and needed to make the exhibition tolerable to the ordinary viewer: after kilometres of the "familiar sequence" of High Renaissance paintings, the interruption was "both restful and stimulating" (Witt xiv).

Indeed, the visit required considerable effort: the concentration of the works and the overcrowding of the rooms forced visitors to walk at double speed and to entrust their aesthetic experience to photographs, the short illustrated guide, the catalogue or the colour prints offered for sale at reasonable prices in the exhibition rooms. Outside the Royal Academy, furthermore, the visitors queueing were so numerous and determined as to recall the indistinct crowd marching off "to enjoy themselves" at the Great Exhibition of 1851, whose misfortunes had been portrayed with irony in George Cruikshank's engravings. Inside the rooms, the impression of stuffiness could be compared without exaggeration to the images of thronging crowds, exhausted and bored, in Feliks Topolski's drawings, which in those years depicted the essential whatever-it-is of British cultural institutions.

But why was the exhibition such a success?

Royal Academy and had published a more correct *Commemorative Catalogue*.

Why do they go to the pictures?

It is clear, wrote Clive Bell, that the crowd of men, women, children who arrived at the Royal Academy by all means and from every corner of the United Kingdom "have not come because they like Italian pictures." If they had really wished to see them, they would have gone to the National Gallery, open every day of the year and almost always free of charge, without being disturbed by the bad lighting and the questionable colour of the walls of Burlington House.

Indeed, the National Gallery was never crowded: with the exception of the guards, some connoisseurs and tourists armed with Baedekers, the museum was one of the emptiest places in the world despite the high quality Italian Renaissance paintings in its collection, just as in the two months of the exhibition Burlington House was the most crowded. "And since the public does not go there for pleasure, for what does it go?"

The ordinary viewer, continued Bell, like Mr Jones (an honest linoleum manufacturer) and his family "go to see the Italian pictures because everyone goes; and Mr Jones (possibly accompanied by Mrs Jones) goes to the Derby for much the same reason" (Bell, "Why Do They Go to the Pictures?" 33). But since appreciating paintings, like predicting the victory of a thoroughbred race horse, requires "a rare native sensibility," the outcome of the visit (like that of betting on the Derby) is not always successful: "Meanwhile Jones traipses round the rooms of Burlington House, his wife reading from the catalogue, the children shuffling in the rear. He has been there only an hour and never in his life was more tired" (34).

So why did the public go to exhibitions? The most immediate answer is that the papers "tell him or her to go" (33). In the 1920s, newspapers had done much to attract the general public to the art world, encouraging the commercial marketing and advertising strategies that the art world had copied from the retail trade precisely to appeal to this new audience. The exhibition of Italian art in London, for example, was supported by an excellent press campaign, which also saw the participation of left-wing periodicals such as *The New Republic*. In May 1930, moreover,

the newspapers covered (and popularized) the exhibition by sculptors of the London Group held at Selfridges. Jacob Epstein and Barbara Hepworth had created small site-specific works for the ornamental garden on the rooftop of the department store, to which the press had devoted sensational titles, such as: "Pan–Not for Frying." Specialist journals like *The Architectural Review* had questioned its readers on the unpredictable consequences of "Giving the Public What It Wants" (Stephenson 40).

But "[w]hy does everyone tell everyone to go?" The fact is, Bell continued, that the battle of Post-Impressionism had shown that for some individuals, for artists and aesthetes, the experience of art could induce a happiness that was "manifestly real." Now a large group of educated people hoped to tap into this same state of mind, but the outcome was a distressing lack of comprehension (Bell, "Why Do They Go To The Pictures?" 33).

On the other hand, it had become clear in as early as 1913 that England was home to "two absolutely separate cultures," wholly indifferent to one another: one year after the second exhibition of Post-Impressionism and when the Armory show opened in New York, the Royal Academy hosted a retrospective of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema. The purpose of the exhibition was to set a standard for the nation's artistic values, to which the public could entrust their aesthetic education, endangered by the disorderly market, passionate about all things foreign, that the exhibitions of Post-Impressionists had helped to bolster. The Royal Academy, wrote Roger Fry at the time, tried to meet the expectations of the average visitor, who found in the paintings of Alma-Tadema the immediate satisfaction of a superficial archaeological curiosity: the artist represented drapes, furniture and clothing in the antique style made of "highly-scented soap" for viewers who were "accustomed to buy and sell" (Fry, "The Case of the Late Sir Alma-Tadema" 147).

In 1914, Clive Bell's *Art* had gained new viewers for the new art thanks to the formula of the *significant form*, the mysterious system of relationships between lines and colours that triggers the aesthetic emotion and explains Piero della Francesca, Cézanne, the mosaics of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and Persian bowls. This novelty had also affected traditional cultural institutions: the public had begun to pester the guards because

they wished to visit the most recondite rooms of the British Museum or the Victoria and Albert (Bell, "How England Met Modern Art" 27). The wave of internationalism had sparked debate on the future of the Tate Gallery, which was founded in the late 19th century to preserve and promote British art, and now intended to equip itself with new galleries for foreign art.

But the audience for modern art remained limited and still represented a vanguard of taste, whose social background was no different from the intellectual *haute bourgeoisie* that in 19th-century France had upheld the values of the new art (Harrison, "'Englishness' and 'Modernism' Revisited").

Between the wars, this social and cultural aristocracy (highbrow) was joined by a new middle class audience (middlebrow) that was opening up to the consumption of art and literature. At the end of the 19th century, Benjamin Disraeli had stated that in Britain there were "two nations," lacking any shared inclinations and completely incomprehensible to one another, but by the first half of the 20th century they had drawn closer thanks to the effects of a "bloodless revolution" (Huizinga 19). From the late 1920s and to an even greater extent in the '30s, when public despair went hand in hand with increasing wages, rapidly rising living standards and growing domestic consumption, the middle class used its free time to go to the cinema, the theatre and to exhibitions, and to follow the press, and shared with the minority the "confident belief that modernity had provided the tools with which to fashion a better future" (Gardiner 12). For this reason, the exhibition of Italian art was conceived as a constellation of free or cheap events—guided tours, lectures and radio broadcasts entrusted to historians and specialists, concerts—with which to occupy leisure time well beyond the duration of the visit.

The majority, however, did not share the values of Modernism: concrete and conformist, it judged the continental inclinations of modernist intellectuals to be deliberately elitist, avidly read popular novels and loved narrative painting. In honour of these new viewers, R. H. Wilensky published a highly favourable (and equally self-serving) review of the exhibition of Italian art in London, since the worsening of the economic crisis allowed the public to redefine the roles and prerogatives of the art system.

In *The Modern Movement in Art*, Wilensky had already expressed the conviction that art from Cézanne to Picasso was a natural development of the principles established by the artists of the Renaissance, according to which the "architectural" experience of form should be combined with the human experience of life. Now, after appreciating the accrochage of the great hall of the Royal Academy as "a sort of Salon Carré", he wrote that "le véritable centre d'attraction de la *Mostra*" was Vittore Carpaccio, the favourite painter of the proper Victorian critic John Ruskin. Furthermore, certain that he was addressing the "jeunes gens" who had also flocked to the recent exhibition of Russian icons at the Victoria and Albert Museum[3], Wilensky recommended an attentive visit to the two rooms of the Italian Primitives. These painters, indeed, demonstrated the flimsiness of the theoretical opposition between "un art ennemi de la nature et créateur de formes abstraites" and "un art sensible à la nature dont il reproduit les apparences réelles."

> [F]ormelles qu'une mosaïque byzantine, he wrote, tout en dégageant le caractère d'intimité des oeuvre du type Hollandais. Et ce qui par-dessus tout est exquis–inneffablement exquis–c'est leur couleur. ("Lettre d'Angleterre" 22)

For Wilensky the exhibition of Italian art was a triumph and augured well for the future, whilst for Bell the visitors to the Royal Academy were victims of a pathetic delusion, namely the belief that "the best things in life can be bought, if not for cash, at any rate for good will and courage" ("Why Do They Go to the Pictures?" 33). At the exhibition, Mr Jones is "performing an act of culture," the tribute that matter pays to the spirit "in the touching and ever disappointed hope of getting something for its pains." In exchange for his sacrifice, unfortunately, he will not enjoy aesthetic ecstasy, which is the prerogative of the fanatics who derive from art an experience so thrilling that the pleasures and activities of life become insignificant, but merely "the bad mouth," a severe headache and the perseverance of a cruel misunderstanding (34).

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[3] The exhibition *Masterpieces of Russian Painting* was inaugurated in the summer of 1929 and in six weeks had been visited by thirty thousand people. Roger Fry was the first to propose holding it (see Salmond 132).

> [T]he fantastic prices paid for old masters confirm his disquieting belief; for Jones cannot realise that millionaires covet Rembrandts, not for their artistic significance, but because they are rarest kind of postage-stamp on the market. (33)

At most, when he goes back out into the open air and is able to smoke or think about lunch, he will be grateful to the Italian paintings for leaving him free to enjoy the traffic of Piccadilly Circus (34).

Enjoying pictures

In 1930, a few months after the publication of the articles by Wilensky and Bell in *Les Arts à Paris*, the Paul Guillaume Gallery in London closed for business after the sudden death of the collector Brandon Davis, Guillaume's partner in the company (Giraudon 46). In 1934, Paul Guillaume died unexpectedly, leaving a large estate and a project to donate his extraordinary collection to the state. In 1935 *Les Arts à Paris* published its final issue.

In England in these same years the economic, social and political crisis worsened and the art market saw a marked contraction in transactions. The rich, wrote the critic P. G. Konody in a lucid summary, still buy Old Masters, but the modern art audience had shrunk to a small group of experts (Stephenson 39). By 1931, even the most financially solid galleries and auction houses were in serious trouble. In 1932 the devaluation of the pound and the effects of the stock market collapse had forced many artists working abroad to return and convert to creating conventional portraiture or landscapes, to working in commercial design, photo-advertising, advertising and interior decoration, for consumers able to invest in furnishing their homes in the London suburbs and purchasing original works instead of the copies on which they would have spent their money a few years earlier. Despite the crisis, in fact, the middle classes enjoyed a marked prosperity that enlarged the consumer market and stimulated the production and distribution of "standard commodities" that "led to a converging of interests among those concerned with style" (Harrison, *English Art and Modernism* 238).

In 1932, for Paul Nash "it might be possible to regard the artist in a new light, that of a member of the community or even what is called a useful member of society, wherein his potentialities rather than his present achievement may become a matter of general interest" ("The Artist and the Community" 68). In 1934, the press decreed the success of the first (and only) collective exhibition by Unit One at the Mayor Gallery, the space opened in 1925 by Fred Mayor, the son of the NEAC painter and the boldest art-dealer in London. The exhibition presented works by Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson, John Armstrong, John Bigge, Edward Burra and Edward Wadsworth, whose purpose was to express "a truly contemporary spirit, for that thing which is recognised as peculiarly of today" (Nash, "Unit One. A New Group of Artists"), starting from the relationships between art, design, architecture and industry. The catalogue, or more accurately the collection of photographs of works by the artists that accompanied the exhibition, was edited by Herbert Read.

The protagonists of the new modern movement reinterpreted the processes of artistic production, reformulated the terminology of criticism and the principles of art theory, and negotiated cultural values with the new audience, implicitly rejecting the "Bloomsbury-inspired interests which had prevailed during the twenties" (Harrison, *English Art and Modernism* 241).

> 'Post-Cézannism' and 'Derainism' have ceased to be of the first interest; they no longer hold our attention. A desire to find again some adventure in art seems more and more cogent to our sculptors and painters and, now, to our architects. This seems to suggest, as well as any explanation, the meaning of 'the contemporary spirit'. It is the adventure, the research, the pursuit in modern life. (Nash, "Unit One" 104)

So, in 1934, Clive Bell republished his tragicomic tale of the Jones family's visit to the exhibition of Italian art in a new book, *Enjoying Pictures*, but this time to offer a (disinterested) approach to the experience of art through a new critical method, descriptive rather than normative, hierarchical and non-exclusive, and a new and reassuring test case, Italian Renaissance painting.

To declare that a work of art is a work of art, he had already written in 1921, is useless and foolish; what is essential is "to show" the quality of the form. The critic must thus possess some uncommon qualities, like sincerity and persuasiveness, quick thinking, brilliant communication skills and a sense of humour. Criticism consists of devising relative judgments rooted in the individual response and, therefore, subject to revision: the pure aesthetic experience comes suddenly and bowls us over (Bell, "De Gustibus" 138), but most of our experience of art is halved, conditioned by the times, by our culture, by our predilections and prejudices, by our state of mind. The task of the critic is not to handle "a whole system of absolutes" (140) but consists of "pointing to what he likes and trying to explain why he likes it" (141).

Thus, this new book was the story of a happy visit to the National Gallery and elsewhere aimed at readers who could compare their experiences with his and "probably feel that theirs are different, richer, more intense, and more precious," but also with the "ninety-nine out of a hundred of their friends" for whom a visit to a museum or an exhibition is as frustrating as the misadventures of Mr Jones and his family (*Enjoying Pictures* 12). This is true of the globe-trotters, the Baedeker-bearers, and the retired Colonel, an educated reader of biographies, historical essays and erudite poetry, who "laugh heartily over Low's graphic journalism but get no good of Lorenzo Monaco" (20) and who are "bored to tears in a picture-gallery" (21).

So why did everyone insist on making this pointless sacrifice?

The truth is that the battle of Post-Impressionism had shown that for a group of fanatics the experience of art was one of true joy, set apart from the world of crude factuality as only the happiness of love or the heights of pure thought could be for all others. Now, right in the midst of the "battle of brows," a substantial group of "cultured" people (98) hoped to tap into the same state of mind and rise, at least for a moment, into that world of the spirit from which the lucky few sensitive to aesthetic experience "look down on the world of our sorrow" (93). Because "it is a question of values" (98), the result was a distressing failure to comprehend the art world and society: excluded from the world of the spirit because for them art is an accident to be measured

against life, cultured viewers—wrote Fry—are prepared to fake aesthetic emotion, to show off "what they know about the history of a work of art" and hide what they feel—or, rather, do not feel—in front of it ("Culture and Snobbism" 97-106)[4]. Conversely, artists and aesthetes are entirely uninterested in the values and the "variety of entertainments provided this side the barrier:" they do not thirst for power, they look with ironic detachment at political and economic life, and do not hesitate to pass the time in socially unacceptable entertainments that earn them the censure of right-thinking people (Bell, *Enjoying Pictures* 99).

But for Bell, despite this unbridgeable distance, all was not lost: he was now ready to say that "nevertheless, even from an impure interest in art something is gained" (98), but aimed to show it not to the "professional low-brow" who, with his obtuse certainties "makes an excellent butt, a chopping-block or laughing-stock" (4), but to "many an open-minded gentleman," to the prejudiced middlebrow scholar who looks at paintings as he reads a book (12), and therefore in an art gallery suffers from boredom, "which is one of the worst kinds of unhappiness" (4).

Recalling the pleasure and dismay with which he had followed Fry at a marching pace around museums and galleries ("The Critic as Guide" 149), Bell devoted to this ordinary visitor a guided tour and "a kind of criticism vastly different" (*Enjoying Pictures* 5), descriptive rather than normative, hierarchical and non-exclusive, which would guarantee at least a partial aesthetic experience.

Whilst Fry invited future art historians to work hard to increase their own sensitivity to the "specific idiom of pictorial design" as the only way of understanding painting (*Art History as an Academic Study* 44), Bell was willing to come to terms with "the Colonel" and to declare openly the role of non-aesthetic elements—the recollection of biographical and historical concepts, technical data and comparative studies—in his personal response to the work of art. Starting from "How I look at pictures," he thus offered an accessible definition of "How to look at pictures" (*Enjoying Pictures* 4). Now that his youthful dogmatic state-

[4] For Reed, however, Fry's target was not the ordinary member of the public, but the refined socialite, like Bell (Reed 121).

ments seemed "fabricated reactions of sensibility at the service of a theory" (55), he was ready to use as his test case the Italian Renaissance, which he had excluded from *Art* and which now came in handy precisely as a pleasure palace for the audience of the latest exhibitions.

Any painting that is a work of art, he wrote, possesses an *aesthetic quality* sufficient to induce in the viewer if not the *aesthetic thrill* of the masterpiece then at least a moderate *aesthetic emotion* and the resulting *aesthetic mood*, in other words the willing, receptive and enduring state of mind that characterizes the pleasure of painting. This state of mind is the place of *enthusiastic analysis*, in other words of critical discourse, and is supported by a mixture of ingredients, including historical curiosity, a limited exercise of connoisseurship and general knowledge. At the National Gallery, for example, *The Baptism of Christ* by Francesco Zaganelli is in no way thrilling, but catches the eye for the time needed for the critic to assess (and point out to the viewer) the differences in the composition and the figures compared to Raphael, Francia, Signorelli or Piero della Francesca; to appreciate the accuracy of the anatomical representation but be disappointed by the expression of the faces; to suspect an overly intrusive intervention on the part of the restorer and be amused by the caprices in the background (32-34). By contrast, before Romney's *The Beaumont Family* he will remain "cold and lonely as a stuffed fish" and walk straight on, unrestrained by the biographical notions and cultural considerations that the painting calls to mind through its subject (43).

But the most methodologically eloquent example is Raphael's frescoes in the Vatican. In 1920, Fry had based on the paintings of Raphael not only the discussion of the difference between what you know and what you feel in front of a painting, but also the question of the relationship between the reaction to the content and the response to an understanding of form in the appreciation of an artwork. However, he left the issue unresolved ("Retrospect" 188-99).

Bell, by contrast, wrote that in the Stanza della Segnatura, thanks to Raphael's ability to render human relations in perfect

visual relationships, it is almost impossible to determine if memory, historical erudition, "the kunstforsching daemon" or the aesthetic mood is activated first (*Enjoying Pictures* 62). And though, generally speaking, the impatience with which tourists wait for the guide to recite the names of all the characters in the *School of Athens* is blameworthy, there is no doubt that "to know that the head of a young man, dreamy and thoughtful, was ever reckoned a good likeness of Raphael himself" adds "a little adscititious thrill" (70). The "delight in the recognition, this pleasure of jumping from the shin-bone to the monster, is shared […], by all bright people be they colonels or aesthetes" (28).

It is necessary, then, to develop "a possible method of classification" (42) based on the quality and quantity of "food" provided for *enthusiastic analysis* (38) and attributing to content a role that is in no way marginal. In conclusion, whereas in *Art* the critic-aesthete had established an—albeit temporary—community of vision thanks to the circular notion of *significant form*, his task now was to suggest the possibility of a broader community of taste. "Good criticism," wrote Bell a few years earlier, transmits the special pleasure of the life of the spirit ("Criticism" 179), and he was now ready to assert that there is no reason why the average public should not enjoy art as "just good things amongst the other good things of life" (*Enjoying Pictures* 97), partly in response to their own preferences, idiosyncrasies, predilections, prejudices, literary and philosophical inclinations. For Bell and the sensitive and gifted minority, "art does work miracles" (106), but for others it is fair to assume that it gives a "fillip" to common experience (98). Entering the National Gallery, wrote Virginia Woolf, can be very disappointing: the paintings "are too still, too silent" to respond to "our loves, our desires, the moment's eagerness, the passing problem" and "to pass through a turnstile, and some days of a week, to part with a sixpenny bit" cannot fight off the urgency of "the pressure of humanity" ("Pictures and Portraits" 163). For Fry, many visitors would have gladly thrown themselves from the terrace of the museum to die in the traffic of Trafalgar Square when confronted with the fatal evidence of their "aesthetic inaptitude" (*Art History as an Academic Study* 24). But for Bell, a visit to the National Gallery or the exhibition of

Italian art at Burlington House could be, for everyone, a complex experience, briefly intense and as pleasurable as the happiness of lovers or "a successful 'weekend'" (Bell, *Enjoying Pictures* 8).

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Salvatore Bizzarro

The Meaning of Pictures
Roger Fry on the Radio

In the fall of 1929, Roger Fry held at BBC Radio a series of talks entitled *The Meaning of Pictures*. Aired weekly, in the evening, Fry's six radio broadcasts would accompany listeners through a more comprehensive understanding of some significant works of art. Specially selected as "case studies" by Fry, they were used to test the theoretical principles of his formalist doctrine.

It had been almost twenty years since Fry, the father of modern painting in England, as his dear friend Virginia Woolf defined him, had organized the much discussed Post-Impressionist Exhibitions in London. Nobody knows if the BBC's unwary listeners would have recognised in the warm and reassuring voice of Fry, the critic who was called a revolutionary, ready to undermine the establishment of the British art institutions of the early twentieth century.

On the radio Fry appeared to listeners like a teacher on the first day of school to his students. He clarifies his intentions, explains the educational aims of his course and warns against the pitfalls and difficulties that will appear. The six talks on the meaning of painting are, as already noted by Denys Sutton, a *summa* of Fry's last formalist thoughts on the subject, necessarily summarised and simplified in order to make it more accessible to an audience that was quite ignorant of philosophical and aesthetic doctrines on art.

With *The Meaning of Pictures*, Fry presented, as Sutton writes, "the complex ideas in his own comprehensive manner" and "the fact that the medium forced him to sharpen his arguments and relate them to specific examples gives them added cogency" (85-86). Fry's effort was very remarkable, especially considering

that, in the late Twenties, he tried to revise the very foundations of his "difficult and uncertain science," as the title of a recent study on the formalist aesthetics of Fry reminds us (Rubin). Ultimately, he succeeded in finding a glimmer of theoretical and methodological consistency in a much-needed reformulation of the relationship between form and content, with a view to their possible synthesis, although Fry continued to have doubts and reservations.

As noted by Deane W. Curtin in an insightful article that traces the thread of formalism from Kant to Greenberg, passing inevitably through Fry, "Fry found it necessary to moderate his formalism even further by allowing that very few artists, Giorgione and Rembrandt, for instance, had attained 'a complete fusion' of form and content." We can only admire, Curtin continues, "a man so tenaciously honest to his experience." As a critic he "always considered his theoretical writings tentative, empirical generalizations from his sensibility" (322).

To help Fry in his challenge, both the text read on the radio and the photographic reproductions of the works analysed in the talks were published in the magazine *The Listener*, a guide to BBC radio broadcasts.[1] In order to be even more effective in his intent, the reproductions of the works that would be discussed throughout the series were published in *The Listener* simultaneously with the broadcasts. In this way listeners could follow the radio lesson each week, having already before them the black and white photographs of the works that were explained. This was essential for Fry, given the constant references to the "forms" of the paintings that his listeners-spectators must necessarily always have on hand, to be able to follow and understand Fry's explanation.

In front of the microphone, Fry tries to establish an equal relationship with his audience. He is motivated by a desire to share his own experience of art with that of any other "common" spectator. Fry was well aware of the fact that the rigidity of a formalist doctrine that was dogmatically firm on positions of abstract theoreticism would not have been able to find favour with a broader and diverse audience. As already understood by Clive Bell, this

[1] On the history of the BBC Radio and its impact on British culture among the two wars, see Avery.

new public asked nothing more than having in its hands a practical and quick art history guide to bring comfortably to museums and galleries. "Let everyone make himself an amateur"—ruled Bell in his famous and successful *Art* of 1914—"and lose the notion that art is something that lives in the museums understood by the learned alone. By practicing an art it is possible that people will acquire sensibility" (291). Behind the apparent willingness to make art an enjoyable pastime for everyone, where increasingly more people could participate, Bell remained tied to his "'professional' journalistic approach to art." This was the reason why Fry reproached him for writing his articles only "for a 'fashionable' audience" (Stephenson 36), "with such an assurance that the world of snobs listen to him eagerly" (Fry, *Letters* 519-20).

On the other hand Fry, remaining halfway between the art historian and the *amateur*, hoped to stem the risk of making art as the object of desire of plutocrats without taste, interested in it exclusively "for its value as an indication of social status" ("Art and Socialism" 45).

As rightly pointed out by Frances Spalding, "when writing articles and reviews, which were addressed (even those for *The Burlington Magazine*) as much to the lay reader as to the specialist, Fry chose to pursue, for the most part, an appreciative rather than a historical line of enquiry" (490). Despite the complexity of some passages, which even Fry himself acknowledges several times, Fry tries to make sense with words of what is "perceived" by the vision of painting and his BBC talks are a clear example of the attempt to make his own discourse on art more accessible, formulated, first of all, from a level of visual perception and aesthetic appreciation.

The titles of the six radio lectures are all extremely significant: "Telling a Story," "Visible Melodies," "The Relations of Volume and Space," "Symphony of Line and Colour," "Rhythm and Harmony," "Truth and Nature in Art." Through the lectures, we can trace an explanatory circularity which develops from the first episode throughout the course of the series ending in the last lecture, when Fry calls into question some of the most burning issues of formalism, addressed at the beginning and left open until then. This does not mean that Fry is able to fully solve the "di-

lemma" of his formalism during these radio broadcasts (Lang). He makes it clear at the end of his last talk:

> Whatever value such principles or theories as I have suggested may have, lies not so much in their truth, for we are still at the very beginning of aesthetics, as in their power to stimulate latent sensibilities, in the assistance they may be to you in the art of being a spectator: for in that transmission from one spirit to another, which is the essence of art, the spectator is as essential as the artist (Fry, "Truth and Nature in Art" 618).

First of all, we should ask ourselves about the title of the series. Is it possible to find the meaning of painting only in the forms that make up the visual elements of a picture? Instinctively, we would be tempted to answer "no." It is on this "no," generated by an "instinctive reaction," that Fry builds his own reflection. He hopes that even the most distracted common spectator can take over those necessary tools of analysis for understanding a picture, and activate them in the presence of a work of art. No matter if it is a masterpiece or a work of secondary importance. It is relative and does not affect the evaluation of the formal force that the work is able to express. According to Fry, the formulation of an aesthetic judgment on a work of art must be preceded by the formal analysis. Instead, it is often ignored. This is the gap that Fry attempted to fill since the time of "An Essay in Aesthetics" (1909), which was reprinted in 1920, in the famous collection *Vision and Design* and always considered the founding text of his formalist theories. This is why Giotto's medieval painting, for example, will seem even rude and rough, to those who are not able to capture the so-called "emotional elements of design" (rhythm of the line, mass, space, light and shade, colour), if compared to that of an acclaimed painter of Victorian realism such as Luke Fildes.

We will focus on the singular comparison between these two artists that was developed in the first wireless lecture by Fry, "Telling a Story."

From the beginning, Fry recalls his assertions published in the "Essay in Aesthetics." After twenty years, his faith in the imaginative faculties of the artist's vision remains firm and unchanged. According to Fry, the "recognition of purpose" of the artist is "an

essential part of the proper aesthetic judgment" ("An Essay in Aesthetics" 20). The task of the artist is not the mere imitation of natural beauty, but the expression of the imaginative life that "is distinguished by the greater clearness of its perception, and the greater purity and freedom of its emotion" (16). The spectator should be able to perceive an "aesthetic feeling" aroused by the "order," the "variety" and the "unity" by which the artist has reformulated his or her own vision of objective reality, filtered through "the perceptive and the emotional aspects of the experience" (12). These qualities (order, variety, unity) are the ones that the spectator should look for in a work of art, because they are the only ones which can put him or her sympathetically in relation to the spirit that animated the artist as creator of a work of art, arousing the same imaginative emotions. "When these emotions are aroused—Fry writes—in a way that satisfies fully the needs of the imaginative life we approve and delight in the sensations through which we enjoy that heightened experience, because they possess purposeful order and variety in relation to those emotions" (20).

For this reason, the represented subject becomes marginal. In itself the figurative narration of a theme cannot awaken within us aesthetic emotion. In confirmation of his thesis, Fry cites both in "An Essay in Aesthetics" and in "Telling a Story" a quote by Rodin: "A woman, a mountain, a horse—they are all the same thing; they are made on the same principles." However, if in "An Essay in Aesthetics" citing Rodin functioned to explain to the reader that the "disinterested vision of the imaginative life" could produce similar emotional effects regardless of the subject painted (23), in "Telling a Story" Fry surrendered less easily to such transcendental observations that the listener probably would not have caught. Fry would not have been able to capture the listener's attention on the radio talking about a vague idea of aesthetic emotion. Rather than emotional effects of painting, Fry finds here the visual elements through which the spectator can enter "into intimate communion with the most sensitive, the most profound, the most passionately contemplative spirits of mankind" ("Telling a Story" 394), the true artists. What the great artists do is to search in the objects they look at "some pattern or

rhythm, some principle of harmony" (394), trying to find those secret relations to connect one to the other in a precise formal principle, invisible to the eye of the majority. It is only the artist's vision which is able to grasp these "special meanings" and provide others with the means for sharing that visual experience. Fry evokes arguments already used in "The Artist's Vision," an article published in the *Athenaeum* in 1919 and republished in *Vision and Design*. The artist plays an intermediary role in society. The artist raises the spirit of the spectator to a higher dimension where the sensitivity and faculty of perception of the ordinary man can be heightened and stimulated by the study of art. In the radio lecture of 1929, Fry explains that this communion between the artist and the spectator through the medium of the picture may happen because "the artist is as it were a transmitting station; we are the receivers when we look at his pictures. But the receivers must be attuned. The study of art is really the tuning of our own special receiving set, so that it can respond in turn to all the great transmitters of past and present times" ("Telling a Story" 394). One of the greatest transmitters of past times was definitely Giotto, an artist provided with the highest level of what Fry called "the creative vision:"

> It demands the most complete detachment from any of the meanings and implications of appearances. Almost any turn of the kaleidoscope of nature may set up in the artist this detached and impassioned vision, and, as he contemplates the particular field of vision, the (aesthetically) chaotic and accidental conjuction of forms and colours begins to crystallise into a harmony; and as this harmony becomes clear to the artist, his actual vision becomes distorted by the emphasis of the rhythm which has been set up within him. Certain relations of directions of line become for him full of meaning; he apprehends them no longer casually or merely curiously, but passionately, and these lines begin to be so stressed and stand out so clearly from the rest that he sees them far more distinctly than he did at first. Similarly colours, which in nature have almost always a certain vagueness and elusiveness, become so definite and clear to him, owing to their now necessary relation to other colours, that if he chooses to paint his vision he can state them positively and definitely. In such a creative vision the objects as such tend to disappear, to lose their separate unities, and to take their places as so many bits in the whole mosaic of vision. ("The Artist's Vision" 33-34)

We preferred to quote Fry's words which, in this passage of "The Artist's Vision," well summarize what he tried to explain throughout his radio series.

In demonstrating his ideas, Fry compares *Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene* by Giotto (Scrovegni Chapel, Padua) with a painting titled *The Doctor* by Luke Fildes, particularly well-known to the British public since its first exhibition in 1891. The analysis of these two paintings is the testing ground on which Fry tries to find a meeting point between form and content.

In 1901, Fry had dedicated a well structured essay to Giotto. When it was republished in *Vision and Design*, it was accompanied by a footnote in which Fry admitted to have changed his opinion from twenty years earlier. Above all, when in the article it was implied "not only that the dramatic idea may have inspired the artist to the creation of his form, but that the value of the form for us is bound up without recognition of the dramatic idea" (87). The end of the note, as rightly emphasized by Christopher Reed, represents "the apogee of Fry's formalism" (Reed 319). Fry concludes by saying that "it now seems to me possible by a more searching analysis of our experience in front of a work of art to disentangle our reaction to pure form from our reaction to its implied associated ideas" ("Giotto" 87).

In 1929, explaining the meaning of *Noli Me Tangere* by Giotto, Fry restores the narrative value of the image to its formal value, because the dramatic idea of the scene is expressed by a well-balanced combination of form and content that only the creative vision of an artist such as Giotto was able to accomplish. The same cannot be said for *The Doctor* by Fildes. The picture depicts the night vigil of a conscientious doctor called to treat an unfortunate sick child, probably in his last moments of life, cared by his disheartened parents. According to Fry, the painting of Fildes tells us everything about the event, maybe too much. There are a thousand of details that choke the clear narration of the story that ends up being reduced to a mere unnecessarily detailed description. Fry thinks that Fildes has lost the sight of what his task should be as a painter, sharing with the audience the pain of the parents, stressing forcibly the pietism of the scene, even in an annoying way. Fry does not exclude that the drama of the

subject can somehow affect our overall view of the painting, but it should never avoid the formal primary analysis that the painted subject requires. In practice, Fildes failed because his work is unbalanced in favour of the content. It is the feeling of pain that dominates and is conveyed to the spectator who is led to feel a similar sense of anguish and despair. It is the same feeling experienced by the doctor who could not do anything to save the child's life.

Giotto painted in a completely different way. We recognize immediately in his figures, says Fry, human beings even if "they lack all those minute convincing details which make us say 'How true!' to any stroke of The Doctor" ("Telling a Story" 397). It is sufficient to look at the reclined backward heads of the sleeping soldiers in front of the tomb of Christ to realise the effort made by Giotto in an attempt to render the idea of the relaxation of their bodies, while sleeping after the exhausting vigil. It is clear that Giotto did not succeed in a realistic way, but the effect remains extraordinary because he is able to express an idea and to communicate his message to us. In his own way, he is telling us a story. According to Fry, unlike Fildes, who could rely on a rather generic title in the hope that it was sufficient to evoke in the spectator a rough idea of the told event, Giotto knew that the majority of the people, who would see his frescoes, knew the Evangelical texts and the story of the Magdalene in front of the tomb. Contrary to Fildes, this awareness allowed him to avoid falling into the detailed illustration of every single moment of the story. The narrative realism of Fildes' Victorian academic painting raises in Fry a certain feeling of "nausea and disgust," because his representation is somehow distorted, especially in the description of the doctor and the parents of the child: "For all the mass of details which are correctly described for us there is something false about the whole thing: the dice are loaded: these people are too noble, they would not be like that unless we were looking on. They are keeping a noble pose. They ought to show traces of other feelings. In the doctor, in particular, there might be something of a purely professional scientific tension; he could not be, should not be, so purely, so nobly pitiful" (398). *The Doctor* is a clear example of "sentimental art" as defined by Fry. An

art whose sole purpose is to awaken our emotional partecipation in the story, moved by a fictitious sense of respect for the moral value of what is shown.[2] This does not happen with Giotto who, with the simple draftmanship of a child, is able to clean up the scene of the superfluous elements to give us back a story that finds its centre in the "dramatic tension" between Christ and Mary Magdalene:

> Giotto tells his story without any accessory details; he fixed his attention entirely on the broad outlines of the essential features and the relative positions of the figures. The stage is almost entirely bare, everything is focused on the actors. Even their dress is of an extreme simplicity, mere vague wrappings which seem to reveal the action of the limbs in large simple visible shapes. We are dealing only with the fundamental psychological facts of the story, the great oppositions and contrasts of the situation, and we see that such a bleak, abstract treatment, shows us the fundamental drama with incredible force. ("Telling a Story" 399)

In front of Giotto's work, rather than wondering how much the artist was able to make his painting realistic and truthful, we notice how he made "vivid to our imagination just what was most significant, more sublime in the dramatic moment" (399). Hence, the circle closes around what might be called the imaginative contemplation that, as Fry tries to explain, is the only approach that could allow the spectator "to tune into" the story represented by the artist. Fry turns implicitly on what had been a crucial turning point of his "Essay in Aesthetics," as complex as Bell's tormented identification of the significant form, that is the distinction between imaginative life and actual life. Once again Fry seems convinced that an individual can hope to enjoy art "imaginatively" only in the imaginative life, putting aside desires and vanities that animate his spirit in his actual, personal life. It is in this strict separation that the ambiguity of Fry's formalism is played until the end. We are interested in the telling of a story, the content of a painting, as long as it does not become the anecdotal narrative of detail. Filtered by the artist's imaginative vision, it

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[2] Bell had already expressed a similar negative judgment about *The Doctor* in *Art*, see Bell 19-20.

transcends into the imaginative dimension, from which we stay away because we cannot identify with its characters (in this case, Christ and Mary Magdalene), because they have nothing to do with our normal instinctive feelings experienced in actual life: "In the imaginative life no such action is necessary, and, therefore, the whole consciousness may be focused upon the perceptive and the emotional aspects of the experience. In this way we get, in the imaginative life, a different set of values, and a different kind of perception" ("An Essay in Aesthetics" 12).

It is in the distance of a careful contemplation of the forms of painting that its true meaning can be revealed. "Telling a Story" actually becomes the story of a formal contemplation of a painting rather than the story of a real event. The thread that distinguishes "truly aesthetic and merely anecdotal narrative" on which Fry insists in his radio lecture, as highlighted by Reed (320), is so thin that it is really difficult to fully grasp it without careful thought.

The first objections to Fry's discussion begin here. First of all, it can be said that Fry shows overconfidence in the fact that the scene of *Noli Me Tangere* is immediately recognized by all. If this is not the case, what would any observer who, in the time of Giotto as well as today, does not know the story of the Gospel of John, be able to understand? Would it be sufficient for the comprehension of the story to reduce it into a few figures, with a time overlap of various moments of storytelling synthesized in only one scene by Giotto's imaginative eye? There is another observation. The contemplative distance mentioned by Fry can be more easily maintained before a religious subject, as in this case, which none of us would ever think to identify with. It is all too obvious that no one can think of living the Christological drama in his actual life. It is much easier for us to share the grief of two parents who are losing their child and the suffering of a doctor who fails his medical care. In the story painted by Fildes, there are people who take on a role closer to our actual real dimension (parents, doctor), while none of us can imagine himself in the role of the risen Christ or the holy women. Therefore, we can deduce that in "Telling a Story" Fry succeeds only in part to reconcile the demands of form with content. First of all, it can be said that

he succeeds when some *a priori* unavoidable elements for the spectator's understanding remain incontrovertible. The story should already be known by the viewer who, therefore, does not need many descriptive details. The story should represent an imaginary, biblical, mythological or fantasy theme, in which it is impossible for spectators to recognize themselves. With these assumptions, the distinction between imaginative life and actual life stands still. It immediately sways when just one accessory element is added, an apparently unnecessary detail, that may be able to trigger in the viewer's mind a game of references and free associations from his real life. In the case of a scene such as that of the painting of Fildes the risk is very high. Who of us, when looking at a picture, puts aside completely what he has read, studied, thought, or simply made up to that point? Above all, would we ever be able, as Fry wanted to teach us, to judge a picture, taking into account only its forms? These are doubts and uncertainties that enrich the critical thinking of Fry with renewed vitality still today. If on one side it might seem fair to share the idea that formalism is "a dead end" against which Fry fought throughout his career (Elam 36), on the other, we feel we should once more take up the challenge that "Roger, first King of Bloomsbury" left us as a legacy.[3]

To better understand the difference between the "softened" formalism of Fry, in 1929, and the more severe one of a few years before, it is useful to remember what Fry wrote in 1920 in "Retrospect," conclusive essay of *Vision and Design* and an accurate clarification of his aesthetic theories in that time. The analysis that Fry proposes of Raphael's *Transfiguration* is particularly useful for our reflection. A complex and structured story, as the one painted by Raphael, will immediately produce in the mind of the Christian spectator "an immense complex of feelings interpenetrating and mutually affecting one another" and "all this merely by the content of the picture, its subject, the dramatic story it tells" ("Retrospect"196). This spectator, although not endowed with "any particular sensibility to form" (196), continues Fry, already knowing the gospel story, will be amazed to see that those

[3] Fry is sarcastically defined in this manner, in 1931, in one of the many caricatures that Max Beerbohm dedicated to him, see Harvey.

who should have been "unsophisticated peasants and fisherfolk" become on the canvas of Raphael figures with noble and theatrical poses who impassively attend both the exorcism of a boy, who occupies the lower part of the work, and the Transfiguration of Christ. Like Fildes, also Raphael puts in place a process of falsification of reality. The interest of the Christian spectator in the work is moved only by the countless "associated ideas" that follow one another in his mind in an attempt to answer a single question: does this representation correspond with what I already know?

In 1920, Fry is intransigent. Only the spectator who is "a person highly endowed with the special sensibility to form, who feels the intervals and forms of relations" ("Retrospect" 196-197), can aspire to "pure contemplation of the spatial relations of plastic volumes," thus getting "this extremely elusive aesthetic quality which is the one constant quality of all works of art, and which seems independent of all the prepossessions and associations which the spectator brings with him from his past life". To achieve such a similar experience of art, the content becomes almost without importance. Fry imagines his ideal spectator "either completely ignorant of, or indifferent to, the Gospel story". A spectator "so entirely preoccupied with the purely formal meaning of a work of art," says Fry, "is extremely rare" (197). However, despite the theoretical intransigence in which Fry seems to want to persist until the end, "Retrospect" leaves unresolved the *ultimatum* imposed by Fry's formalist aesthetics that, if further and vainly argued, would lead the critic "in the depth of mysticism" (199), as he recognized.

Fry knows that he needs to be necessarily more direct on the radio and the problems of formalism are implicitly addressed through practical examples argued in the clearest possible way. As noted by Frances Spalding, "had he been more obsessed with philosophical precision he would never have reached such a wide audience. His aim was not to impress but to make accessible" (491).

During the other five episodes of the series, that ended with the last broadcast on October 30, 1929, Piero della Francesca and Botticelli, Michelangelo and Raphael, Rubens and Velázquez all appeared, to name only a few. Analysing their works, Fry tried to carry on what he set out from the beginning: to provide the

listener-spectator with analytical tools to approach the detached contemplation of the painting, always keeping in mind some key points, that is "likeness to nature is not essential to a work of art, but that what is essential is always the harmonic disposition of all the parts in a single whole" ("Symphony of Line and Colour" 536) and that "is not what the artist says, but the way he says it that is the chief consideration in art" ("The Relations of Volume and Space" 499).

Is this a return to the theory of a complete indifference to the subject? Not completely. If considered in relation to actual life, the reunion of form and content remains inevitably precarious, because it is unbalanced in favour of the latter that immediately knows which strings to move in the spirit of the observer to arouse feelings that, according to Fry, have nothing to do with the aesthetic contemplation of a work of art. If transferred to the imaginative life dimension, however, the form-content dichotomy ends "in a single whole" where it is irrelevant knowing or not knowing the content of the story, because our imaginative faculty should immediately be able to transcend it and to analyze it through purely formal patterns. This is why, as argued by Fry, the represented subject itself is not important. What is relevant is the way it becomes part of the story. It is not quite true either, that the contents should necessarily be a fantastic and unreal theme, as assumed previously. For sure, we are not inclined to have, for example, the same emotional participation and empathy that Fildes wants us at all costs to feel with *The Doctor* when looking at the Parisians who flock to the banks of the Grande-Jatte in the famous work of Seurat, or before *The Card Players* by Cézanne, or in front of the ladies who are drinking tea in a painting by Matisse called *The Garden*. Even though they are scenes of real life, as is the one of Fildes, that all of us could experience. These examples were not chosen by chance. Seurat, Cézanne, Matisse were the great French artists whom Fry always looked at with admiration in the hope that what he baptized Post-Impressionism could save the fate of British art from the pedantry and the late Victorian academicism against which he fought in the early 1910s. As expressed by Fry, everything lies in the way an artist chooses to treat a theme. In the essay that he dedicated to Matisse in 1930,

Fry wrote about *The Garden* that "a familiar scene of everyday life takes on an air of almost monumental grandeur without any sense of rhetorical falsification. The shock of the word rhetorical in relation to Matisse proves, by the by, the fundamental simplicity and sincerity of his attitude to life" (*Matisse* 50).

If it is difficult to apply the formalist method to a work such as the one of Fildes, it is precisely because Fry's formalism demands "simplicity and sincerity" while *The Doctor* is a beautiful lie.

In conclusion, what is the meaning of painting, according to Fry? We could answer by saying that, ultimately, Fry recognized the undeniable interrelationship between form and content which reveals itself to the observers in an ever changing way. It all depends on the observer and the perceptual sensitivity that can be more or less stimulated by the aforementioned interrelationship. The critic is an intermediary who, through his work, tries to facilitate communication, or as written by Fry, the communion between artist and spectator through the medium of the work of art.

"One reason why Fry insisted on promoting form was because he knew it to be the fact in art that offers, potentially, the most democratic appeal" (Spalding 490). For example, even those who knew very little about Giotto, could hope to enter into communion with his mind, to see in the way he saw, to grasp his sensitivity for the "pure" form of things. To be initiated into this communion, it was sufficient to turn on the radio, following the talks of Roger Fry and "listening" to the painting through his words. To learn "the art of being a spectator," we should be able to put ourselves on the same wavelength of the artist's voice and listen to what he has to say. This is the sense of communion between artist and spectator which Fry talks about. A communion that is primarily a communication between human beings because, as Virginia Woolf wrote in her *Common Reader* essay "Montaigne": "Communication is health; communication is truth; communication is happiness. To share is our duty; to go down boldly and bring to light those hidden thoughts which are the most diseased; to conceal nothing; to pretend nothing; if we are ignorant to say so; if we love our friends to let them know it" (64-65).

Roger Fry, the art historian of Bloomsbury, taught us that looking at a picture is a little bit like spending time in a conversa-

tion with a new friend who is telling us a story. Every time we desire to listen to a new story by a new picture, all we can do is, as Woolf suggests, "to drop the book and take the next omnibus to the National Gallery, there to gratify the desire for seeing that has been so miraculously stimulated" (*Roger Fry* 228).

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Gerardo Salvati

Virginia Woolf, the Dandy and the BBC

The description of Virginia Woolf as an elitist artist who never got her hands dirty with mass culture, complacently exercising the rights of her station, is very familiar in the academic world. Indeed, the image of Virginia Woolf isolated in the ivory tower of Bloomsbury was, to some extent, corroborated by those theories which maintained that Modernism and mass culture were two separate phenomena. From this perspective, the depiction of Virginia Woolf as an ultra snob and archenemy of mass culture—it is no surprise that Arnold Bennett defined her "queen of the high-brows"—is the consequence of how scholars and critics have systematised Modernism. In this sense, A. Huyssen's publication, *The Great Divide*, played a crucial role. In his pathbreaking work of 1986, he corroborated the long-standing separation between highbrow and lowbrow, between "high" Modernism and "low" mass culture. In other words, Huyssen confirmed the hypothesis of a clear opposition between mass culture and Modernism which characterized themselves as two artistic phenomena marked by mutual exclusion. Nevertheless, in recent years literary criticism has changed its position. On the one hand, an increasing number of scholars, such as Avery, Pease, Rainey and Morrison among the others, have rejected this Manichean sharp division maintaining that Woolf and other modernist artists negotiated their primary ethical and aesthetic propositions with the rise of mass culture. On the other hand, other critics such as Jaffe and Brenda Silver, have stated that the primary consequence of the relation between Woolf and new media was her conversion into a celebrity acquiring a type of iconicity which was independent of her academic standing or literary reputation.

The present article focuses on Virginia Woolf's second BBC talk "Beau Brummell" in order to demonstrate that not only there

was a relationship between Modernism and mass culture but also Woolf employed radio as a form of communication and dissemination. Specifically, she made use of this experience as a sort of complementary place where she could explain and discuss her vision of art and literature. In other words, I argue that Woolf's involvement in radio, the quintessence of mass culture, represented the opportunity for her to introduce her modernist ideas to a new audience. As a kind of herald of her time Virginia Woolf presented herself and her cultural statements to the new listener, encouraging him to acknowledge the existence of a common ground between himself and the artist.

Many critics have underlined Woolf's peculiar ambivalence towards wireless as a primary means of communication and dissemination. However, her position on radio was essentially political to the extent that she was extremely aware of it as the new cultural medium for shaping public opinion. It follows that not only she well knew the power of the new medium but also she took responsibility for what she was vehiculating via broadcasting. Her duplicity towards radio is underlined, for example, by Cuddy-Keane who maintains that for Woolf it became increasingly identified with the patriarchy, the military, specifically the voice of Hitler, but "when Orlando plunges suddenly into the twentieth century the ability to be in England and listen to voices in America reflects the marvellous magic of the modern world" (239). Moreover, Leila Brosnan underlines that Woolf was not only "aware of [radio] power as a means of mass communication" but also "fully cognizant of how her own reputation could be conditioned by being the subject of broadcast and how the medium offered opportunities for disseminating her non-fictional prose" (164).

She broadcast three times in 1927, 1929, and some years later in 1937. Of these only eight minutes of the last one have not been lost. Jane Lewty describes Woolf's voice as "slurred and sulky" (150), while to her nephew Quentin Bell it appeared unrecognizable:

> This record is a very poor one. Her voice is deprived of depth and resonance; it seems altogether too fast and too flat; it is barely recognisable. Her speaking voice was in fact beautiful […] and it is sad that it should not have been immortalised in a more satisfactory manner. (200)

We do not know whether Woolf's voice sounded different or not, but Bell's words seem to be true because she recorded in her diary: "I got my pecker up & read with ease & emotion; was then checked by the obvious fact that my emotion didn't kindle George Barnes" (83).

Virginia's first broadcast, in collaboration with her husband Leonard, was aired on Friday, 15 July 1927, with the title "Are too many books published and written?". The topic was the rise of mass publishing and its consequences for the quality and the reading of books. Her other two broadcasts were solo talks aired respectively in 1929 and 1937. The latter was titled "Craftsmanship." It was a reflection on how the mind works with a specific reference to the process of the association of ideas, a process by which representations arise in consciousness as the result of various and multiple external stimuli.

In her second talk, "Beau Brummell," Woolf portrayed the *persona* of Brummell, the dandy. George Bryan "Beau" Brummell became an iconic figure in France and England in the first half of the nineteenth century. He was considered an *arbiter elegantiae* and a master of aplomb, wit and physical distinction. The French writer, Jules Barbey D'Aurevilly wrote an essay devoted to the celebration of the life of Beau Brummell, underlining that "heaven-born elegance was his, such as Social trammels often spoil, and he was thus able to supply the capricious wants of a society bored and too severely bent under the strict laws of decorum" (24).

Brummell was the apostle of masculine elegance, the first celebrity famous for being famous. In *Beau Brummell: The Ultimate Dandy*, Ian Kelly writes that Brummell was "indifferent to politics […] he was essentially the cult of celebrity" (3-4). In other words, Brummell became a polarizing social figure.

"Beau Brummell" was aired on 20th November 1929, after the nine o'clock news, as the second of a three-part series entitled "Miniature Biographies." The other two speakers were Bloomsbury friends, Harold Nicolson and Desmond MacCarthy.

Joe Ackerley (1896–1967), the assistant producer in the Talks Department of the BBC, wrote to Lytton Strachey on 24th September 1929, offering him to speak during a BBC broadcast on the theme of biography:

> We want to give you a talk one evening during the next two months—or not exactly a talk but a reading in a series which we are calling something like "Potted Biographies"—real or imaginary, and to which Virginia Woolf, Desmond MacCarthy and others are contributing. There are no rules to the game of choice—people are choosing just whatever character—real or imaginary—gives them most fun. I am not sure what Virginia's choice is, but Desmond is going to write up an imagery biography of Dr. Watson, Sherlock Holmes' friend, and someone else [Harold Nicolson] is going to do Lord Byron's valet, [William] Fletcher. Will you join the group and give us, for instance, the biography of a real or imaginary minor Victorian? We do hope you will be attracted by this idea, and please do not let yourself be influenced against it by any question of the suitability of your voice. (16)

So far the letter included also Virginia Woolf among the writers invited to contribute to the "Potted Biography" project. Lytton Strachey did not accept the offer, Harold Nicolson did, and gave his talk on 23rd October 1929, during the first radio broadcast of the series. Desmond MacCarthy gave the 4th of December 1929 talk. *The Radio Times* announced Nicolson's talk, proclaiming that "this is the first of a series of 'Biographies in Brief', specially written by the most distinguished biographers of today" (McNeillie and Clarke 617).

For the occasion, Woolf wrote "Dorothy Wordsworth," which was accepted by the BBC and also advertised for the 20th November 1929 to be broadcast, from 9:15 to 9:35, after the nine o'clock news. At the very last moment, however, Woolf replaced "Dorothy Wordsworth" with "Beau Brummel." Vita Sackville-West, an intimate friend of Hilda Matheson (1888-1940), the Director of Talks at the BBC from 1926 to 1932, received a letter dated 19th November 1929, in which Virginia expressed all her disappointment for the BBC experience and her dislike for Hilda Matheson:

> I shall be glad when my broadcasting and my speaking at Mauron's lecture are both over. And, your Hilda—my God what friends you have!—has not proved exactly helpful—but there—I daren't say more […]. She affects me as a strong purge, as a hair shirt, as a foggy day, as a cold in the head—which last indeed I believe I am now developing (but its sure to be the nerves) so if you listen in, you'll probably hear sneeze, cough, choke. But as, what with Hilda and the B.B.C, my poor little article has been completely ruined (but don't whisper a word of

> this) I'm not altogether looking forward to 9.20 tomorrow night. Also I am billed at 9.15—Oh dear oh dear what a tumult of things one does one doesnt (sic) want to do! (*Letters* 4: 110)

Even though the BBC experience was not pleasing, it is worth noticing that in 1929 radio was deeply interested in biography and in its circulation. The whole episode proves not only how prestigious biography had become in those years, but also that the genre was getting increasingly popular thanks to its mass diffusion through radio broadcasts and specific programmes. Woolf's prestige as a biographer had grown after the publication of *Four Figures* (September 1929), a collection of four essays on Austen, Brummell, Wollstonecraft and Wordsworth[1].

"Beau Brummell" could be categorized as a piece of celebrity journalism with many aspects in common with "Jack Mytton" which Woolf wrote for *Vogue*. In both cases she deals with mediocre figures who have, in Woolf's opinion, achieved fame and success in an inexplicable way. In portraying the *persona* of Beau Brummell, the dandy *par excellence*, Woolf introduces her reader to the life of an adventurous man who in the end becomes the caricature of himself.

The figure of the dandy became very famous in France and in Great Britain in 1830s causing contrasting responses. According to Thomas Carlyle, the dandy was just a "clothes-wearing man" (166), while to Baudelaire the dandy embodied the elevation of aesthetics to religion:

> Contrary to what many thoughtless people seem to believe, dandyism is not even an excessive delight in clothes and material elegance. For the perfect dandy, these things are no more than the symbol of the aristocratic superiority of mind. (420)

Even though Lord Byron defined Brummell the first of the great men of the nineteenth century, Woolf does not share the same vision but she criticizes his actions and his dandyism. The dandy was one of the main figures of the nineteenth century and considered to be a herald of Modernism because he was the embodiment of the disenchanted and leisured outsider, something

[1] The text of "Beau Brummell" was the same of the radio talk.

very close to the first definitions of the Bloomsbury Group[2]. Nevertheless, Woolf employs ironic words to express her aversion to Brummell's lifestyle. Woolf's sarcastic tone may sound very surprising because one would imagine that as an elitist icon she "praised" her equal. Woolf's essay starts from the last days of Brummell when "in his imbecility [he] was dreaming that he was back in London again giving a party" ("Beau Brummel" 114), and then moves retrospectively to his youth only to return to his current state of decay in order to demystify his figure. Moreover, Woolf writes that a " dandy's way of life was the only one which could place him in a prominent light, and enable him to separate himself from the ordinary herd of men" (116). She adds that Brummell was a curious combination of wit, of taste and insolence and Byron himself "in his moments of dandyism, always pronounced the name of Brummell with a mingled emotion of respect and jealousy" (117).

In addition, Woolf informs us that "he who had played at love all these years and kept so adroitly beyond the range of passion, now made violent advances to girls who were young enough to be his daughters" (116) and "he wrote such passionate letters to Mademoiselle Ellen of Caen that she did not know whether to laugh or to be angry" (116). In other words, Brummell was no longer the epitome of exquisite manners and style but a pervert and a "disgusting old man" (117). So the question is, why does Woolf employ such unexpected words in describing what was considered to be a sort of embryonic version of the modernist artist? Why does Woolf condemn the figure of the dandy? I am strongly convinced that in "Beau Brummell" Virginia Woolf clarifies her position towards dandyism and Aestheticism tracing a clear perimeter of her artistic vision. A vision that does not include the figure of the dandy but, on the contrary, includes the figure of the engaged artist. As anticipated, the figure of the dandy

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[2] The 1972 supplement to the most authoritative dictionary of language, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, defined Bloomsbury as a school of writers and aesthetes. Similarly, G. Holbrook Gerzina maintains that "those who portray Bloomsbury as a positive influence on art and culture use the term 'intellectuals'; those who denigrate their impact refer to them as 'dilettantes' or 'aesthetes'" (112).

was frequently associated to Woolf and her friends. As a rebel and opponent to his century, dominated by "the rising tide of democracy, which spreads everywhere and reduces everything to the same level" (Baudelaire 422), the dandy affirmed a new kind of aristocracy. Moreover, he made of his body, of his behaviour, his feelings and passions a work of art. In other words, the figure of the dandy was the *aesthete par eccellence* and, in some respect, the embodiment of the idea of *l'art pour l'art*, in that it had neither social nor political function.

Woolf shared several contact points with Aestheticism but such a connection was misread and this could be the reason why Woolf along with the other members of the Bloomsbury Group were associated to the figure of the dandy. For example, Michael Holroyd agrees with the idea that Bloomsbury was said to be "an over-serious, self important Bohemia. […] They formulated a set of restricting rules which had the effect of substituting phoney aestheticism for genuine creative talent" (232). In addition, Holroyd maintains that the Bloomsbury Group "represents more truly than anything else the culmination and ultimate refinement of the aesthetic movement" (53). But the arch-enemy of the Bloomsbury Group was F. R. Leavis, the Cambridge literary critic, who along with his wife, Q. D. Leavis and his prestigious journal, *Scrutiny*, defined Woolf and her friends as a "a corrupt clique" and he was "irritated by the extreme aestheticism of Bloomsbury" (qtd. in Silver, *Virginia Woolf Icon* 203). In other words, Bloombury became a term of abuse to identify a group of intellectuals who had no specific talents, marked by a snobbish and libertine lifestyle.

As I have just said, it is undeniable that Woolf shared several contact points with Aestheticism and in particular with his founder, Walter Pater. Rejecting the Victorian notions of objectivity and immutable truths, Pater described a world of fleeting impressions, a practice that Woolf refined in her fiction. Every individual, Pater maintains, has a subjective experience provided by intense sensory engagement with the things he loves. On the one hand, this seemed a recipe for self-indulgence through the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure if compared with Ruskin, who maintained that art existed to redeem the world, or Matthew Ar-

nold, who underlined that art had a moral purpose. On the other hand, Pater's statements represented a positive departure from Victorian moralism.

Perry Meisel provides a detailed analysis of the influence of Pater and his aesthetic principles on Woolf's writing, particularly on her work as critic and reviewer. In both authors he notes "a shared vocabulary of judgement and analysis" (73). Moreover, he highlights how both Pater and Woolf were concerned with the search for the "perfect fusion of form and matter" (58) in writing as well as the desire that superfluity be eliminated from the work of art. Moreover, Meisel underlines the fact that there is Pater's influence on Woolf's fiction in its concern with the description of her characters' thoughts and sensations. A significant part of Meisel's analysis is devoted to the fact that Woolf embraced Pater's Aestheticism as an effort to distance herself from the patriarchal Victorian tradition which called for a type of novel with a morally edifying purpose. Moreover, Meisel maintains that Pater's influence on Woolf is particularly evident in the search of "the languages of sense and perception" (44). Perhaps, he continues, the most important lesson that Woolf absorbed from Pater regarded the extremely important need for an acutely refined receptivity to life, the experiences it offers, and how these observations and experiences can affect one's subjectivity.

Although such a vision does not imply that the artist had to lead an active life among others, at the same time "it does preclude the self-willed isolation of the artist from society as exemplified by Des Esseintes, the aesthete-hero of Huysmans's novel *À Rebours* (1884)" (Ronchetti 30). As is commonly accepted, the English aesthetes and decadents of the late nineteenth century read Pater assiduously, but also took inspiration from the French Symbolists, declaring the will "to stand apart from the common life and live only in the imagination" (Wilson 32). This element marked the difference between Pater and his successors. Indeed, Ronchetti argues that "many opponents as well as proponents of Pater's Aestheticism misread his work, especially the notorious conclusion to *Studies in the History of Renassaince* (1873) as advocating the indulgence of the senses for one's personal gratification" (31).

In England, it was Wilde himself, and not Pater, who was identified as central to the English decadent tradition, along with Arthur Symons and the poet Ernest Dowson. Wilde became very famous and his name became the epitome of Aestheticism. He dressed flamboyantly, sparking fashions that others copied. He was a brilliant self-publicist, and quipped that his life was a work of art. In other words, he was the embodiment of the perfect dandy. The drift of Paterian Aestheticism was put into practice by Wilde with the acclamation of the *persona* of the dandy.

As anticipated, by the early 1930s, the label "Bloomsbury" became synonym of dandyism, suggesting a life style marked by superficiality and political indifference. This is corroborated, among the others, by Regina Marler who in *Bloomsbury Pie* maintains that the members of the Bloomsbury Group were seen "as irresponsible aesthetes […] and Woolf's novels in particular as idle experiments cut off from the concerns of ordinary life" (146).

Nevertheless this was a false depiction of Woolf and her friends. Indeed, among the Bloomsbury Group, E. M. Forster satirized the *persona* of the dandy as early as 1908 in his characterization of Cecil Vyse in *A Room with a View*. Moreover, Woolf herself did not appreciate the worsening of Aestheticism embodied by the dandy. One detects evidence of it in her portrayal of William Rodney in *Night and Day* (1919) and Ashley in *The Years* (1937).

Woolf was not a mere aesthete in defiance of the world surrounding her. For example, defending herself and the other "bloomsberries" against the accusation of elitism and snobbery, she wrote in a letter to Benedict Nicolson, 24 August 1940:

> Apparently you mean by Bloomsbury a set of people who sat on the floor at Bernard Street saying 'more and more I understand nothing of humanity in the mass' and were content with that […] I never went to school or college. My father spent perhaps £100 on my education. When I was a young woman I tried to share the fruits of that very imperfect education with the working classes by teaching literature at Morley College, and politically by working for the vote. It is true I wrote books and some of those books […] have sold many thousand copies. That is, I did my best to make them reach a far wider circle than a little private circle of exquisite and cultivated people. Leonard too is Bloomsbury […] he has spent half his life to prevent the growth of Nazism. Maynard Keynes is Bloomsbury. He wrote the Consequences of the Peace. Lytton was Bloomsbury […] Duncan was Bloomsbury […] These are facts

> about Bloomsbury and they do seem to me to prove that they have done their best to make humanity in the mass appreciate what they knew and saw. (*Letters* 6 : 418-20)

For this reason "Beau Brummell" could be read as a text in which Woolf traces in a clear way the perimeter of her vision of art and the engagement of the artist. It is not surprising that Woolf made such an operation given that in her essays she repeatedly underlined the need for artists and writers to live in the real world. For example, in "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" Woolf states that writers "shall come down off their plinths and pedestals, and describe beautifully if possible, truthfully at any rate, our Mrs Brown. […] for she is, of course, the spirit we live by, life itself" (118). Similarly, in "A Letter to a Young Poet" she remarks that the younger generation of British poets must not live in isolation but among others: "But how are you going to get out, into the world of other people? That is your problem now, if I may hazard a guess—to find the right relationship, now that you know yourself, between the self that you know and the world outside" (220).

In conclusion, Woolf's aversion to the figure of the aesthete embodied by Brummell, that is to say the idea of life as a work of art, could well indicate her discomfort at being associated with Aestheticism, especially during the highly politicized 1930s. In other words, unlike Brummell, who "without a single noble, important, or valuable action to his credit […] cuts a figure" ("Beau Brummel" 114), Woolf has no hesitation in affirming her sensitiveness to the atmosphere which surrounded her, whether personal, social, or historical. Although Woolf acknowledges that Brummell "stands for a symbol; his ghost walks among us still" (116), she underlines her distance from dandyism. Indeed, while Brummell was unconcerned about politics and this is proved by the fact that he did not face a single cannon during the French revolution, Virginia Woolf instead distances herself from this position because she was an engaged artist. She was not indifferent to politics, the social and civic instances of her writings emerged from the shadows of her supposed elitism. In other words, Woolf rejects the label of famous for "being famous" because even though she was implicated in the culture of celebrity—in this sense her cooperation with *Vogue* is very

significant (Garrity 188)—she aimed to be legitimated as an influential intellectual figure through her literary production and not her lifestyle.

This could be one of the reasons why she chose Brummell for her second BBC talk. If this is true, not only Woolf fulfilled the requirements of the BBC about biography but also she took advantage of the medium to bypass that part of criticism which associated her to dandyism and to introduce herself and her artistic principles.

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The Territorial Report as an Accountability Tool
A Proposal for Bloomsbury

Introduction

A recent trend is progressively emerging among actors within society in terms of new voluntary, cooperative and informal arrangements characterized by "non-hierarchical decision-making structures and address public policy issues" (Steets 25). Over time, this interaction has determined a non-legislative multi-sectorial network that entails collaborations between market, institutions, citizens and organizations. Proponents share ideals and purposes, supporting the same strategy to improve, safeguard and develop the community, in the aim of creating and enhancing social capital (Putnam).

No formal rules exist, since power is diffused among actors advocating the so-called *global governance system,* where voluntary problem solving and self-regulations occur (Keohane and Nye; Benner, Reinicke and Witte). Hence, in the absence of a supranational authority, global governance is enforced through a process based on legitimate political order and self-rules compliance (Bäckstrand).

Some scholars argue that this democratic involvement of stakeholders and institutions appears to be functional for better governance, since it could potentially support the development of a territory where, on the contrary, political organizations and representatives fail (Andonova). To this end, Haas argues that the model can potentially reduce the three "deficits" of environmental politics, namely governance, implementation and participation deficit. However, some critics argue that global governance fragments the power and lacks accountability, legitimacy and monitoring mechanisms.

In particular, the actors involved, the role that they play, the way through which the non-hierarchical network acts, as well as its main strategies and results, are well-known as issues that still lack full understanding. In this regard, the social and democratic cohesion existing in a community advocates the need for systematic accountability, capable of ensuring legitimacy and monitoring. The basic assumption is that when actors perform in a common territory, a common responsibility for which the same community has to be accountable occurs.

Several principles have been proposed by scholars, adopting a pluralistic system of accountability (Witte, Streck, and Benner), as the reputational, market or financial one. Conversely, very few studies have focused on the transparency-based accountability principle (Bäckstrand).

A reporting model sharing information about the development of a territory, the increase in its social capital, combined with a set of appropriate monitoring standards (indicators and measures) of goal attainment represent key components of transparency. The main question, however, is to *whom* and *how* community governance should *be accountable*.

Assuming this perspective, the paper aims to provide a useful insight on this topic.

Specially, based on flexible and decentralized relationships rather than top-down forms of accountability (Bäckstrand), the study discusses the usefulness of the so-called *territorial report*, a systematic, voluntary document aimed at reporting activities made *by* and *for* a territory where a collaborative, informal and democratic style of living occurs among people. The territorial report consists in a continuous process made by a wide number of actors sharing the same community, advocating the need to legitimate and monitor the creation of social capital (Pavan and Lemme).

To operationalize the concept of accountability, an Italian standards setter related to the GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) through its mutual recognition—the GBS (Gruppo Bilancio Sociale)—issued in 2011 a research paper entitled "Territorial reporting: objectives, process and performance indicators." This document offers a general architecture, explaining the main pro-

cedures to follow and the information to include in the report, identifying the actors of the territory, the *areas* in which they act and for what they are responsible, and the subjects to *whom* the reporting should be addressed.

On these grounds, this study observes Bloomsbury as a good example where this kind of reporting can be applied. Notably, it is one of the most famous districts in London; in the last quarter of the century, a significant change has been made, converting the area from a residential location into a professional, business and educational centre of intellectual, social and cultural life.

The paper is organized as follows. In the second section we describe Bloomsbury and its development suggesting the need for the application of a territorial report. The third section presents the most prominent literature on accountability, which forms the theoretical basis of the research. In the fourth, we describe how it would be possible to draw up a territorial report, suitable for ensuring a wide participation and accountability by all kinds of actors in a specific territorial context, discussing a possible way to implement it in Bloomsbury. In the final section, we draw our first conclusions.

Bloomsbury. A place of culture

Bloomsbury is a territorial area of the city of London located in the Camden district. Traditionally, its name seems to probably derive from the land owner, William de Blemund, although others believe that the origin comes from the previous 'Lomesbury' village. Since 1600 it was an agricultural area, while in 1660 an important process of development started and converted Bloomsbury from a residential to a professional and cultural area.

This place has been related to the concept of arts, studies and medicine, due to the numerous academic institutions and hospitals located here (it includes, for example, the Central Library of London University, the Birkbeck College, the School of Oriental and African Studies, the Great Ormond Street Hospital as well as the University College Hospital). Also, the predominant bulk of the British Museum in the heart of this part enhances its attractiveness. The fashionable

garden squares and the wide streets have attracted thinkers for centuries and many politicians, artists, scientists used to spend time here. It was here that Marx elaborated his views on Communism and that Darwin conceived the theory of natural selection.

All these social and cultural activities aided the creation of the so-called Bloomsbury Group, a small, informal association of artists and intellectuals who lived and worked here (the writer Virginia Woolf, or the economist John M. Keynes), considered a bridge between the Victorians and the Moderns. No fees were required to become a member, since the main concept was that the Group should represent an informal network of intellectual friendships, and no rules were issued to manage interactions.

In the 1989 Oxford Dictionary edition, the area was defined as "a set of writers, artists and intellectuals living in or associated with Bloomsbury in the early 20th century." Today, Bloomsbury is a collectivity of heterogenetic pieces of social life. Magnificent Georgian style buildings characterize Russell, Bloomsbury and Bedford Squares, museums and important universities alternate with old bookshops. The Mudie's Circulating Library used to be an establishment that owned no less than 800,000 volumes, including the main reserves. It closed long time ago, as a result of the rising number of government-funded public libraries. The Senate House—the administrative centre of the University of London—offers one of the oldest libraries in the world. Senate House is situated in the heart of Bloomsbury, while the Foundling Museum exhibits the art collection of the Foundling Hospital, the first charitable institute in the world. The Picture Gallery of the Foundling Museum displays many famous paintings by Reynolds or Hudson, whilst the Petrie Museum has more than 80,000 ancient Egyptian archaeological artefacts. A large number of artists' ateliers have been traditionally established here (Trotta). The so-called cultural geographists have underlined the "relationship between Bloomsbury as a site of social experience and cultural generation and the work of 'Bloomsbury,' particularly Woolf's" (Blair), which seems to promote the local presence of cultural enterprises differently aligned with the lives of London's progressives and radicals.

The archive-based account of all these institutions and activities is offered by the Bloomsbury Project (see http://www.ucl.ac.uk/

bloomsbury-project/), an initiative with the aim to trace the physical growth of the area over time, showing the development not only of public buildings, but also of handsome houses and squares erected during the first half of the nineteenth century. More than 300 reforming institutions, and all predominant philosophical, religious and artistic initiatives and innovations are described.

Another interesting initiative is the Safer Neighbourhoods Team Priorities, related to the whole territory of London, including Bloomsbury area. It consists in a document that each year the local police issues and updates, informing about purposes and activities planned and realized in order to ensure the safeguarding and safety of the area. The panel is created by the interaction of members of the community who discuss issues of concern that need to be resolved.

The brief description clearly shows how the strong relations among individuals, the rules of reciprocity and trustworthiness, the leisure time spent in financial, cultural and professional activities are the products of a common *mission* featuring this area, based on the neighbourhood social capital development (Putnam). A tacit, implicit and voluntary strategy to improve, safeguard and develop the territory seems to occur among people living occasionally or continuously there, where actions and initiatives are interrelated and oriented towards the same purpose: the increase in the social capital of the area.

This social cohesion makes Bloomsbury a "community," where individuals interact with the territory and among themselves. The concept of territory adopted is not intended in terms of geographical, political or economic boundaries, but it consists in actors having different roles and backgrounds, sharing ideals, interests, time and relations. This perspective advocates the need for accountability where the "territory" plays a twofold role: the preparer and the user of such disclosure.

Accountability. A literature review

There is a wide amount of literature attempting to define the concept of accountability, whose meaning can slightly change in accordance with the different social, cultural and political

contexts (Boyne, Gould-Williams, Law and Walker; Dubnick "Clarifying Accountability;" Dubnick "Accountability and the Promise of Performance;" Gray and Jenkins; Mulgan; Sinclair; Stewart) and whose theoretical bases can be referred both to the agency theory, as already discussed in public sector (Mayston; Olson, Guthrie and Humphrey), and to the stakeholder theory (Freeman).

Looking at the *agency theory* in a wider context like the public one, rather than within the narrow boundaries of private enterprises, the agent has to act in the interest of the principal, assuming the responsibility for the decisions and the actions undertaken. Assuming that their interests can diverge, a principal-agent conflict may arise and accountability can prevent or reduce this conflict (Fama and Jensen). The agent can be either an individual or an organisation—both private and public—and the principal can also be an individual or an organization, even in this case both public and private.

According to the *stakeholder theory* (Freeman) each organization can grow and survive only by creating relations with all kinds of stakeholders, both internal and external. Quoting Freeman, a stakeholder is "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm's objectives," (25) and accountability is necessary to allow stakeholders to participate in or judge the decision process.

The concepts of accountability can be seen as a large umbrella (Sinclair), often used to include other somehow elusive concepts such as transparency, equity, democracy, efficiency, responsiveness, responsibility, and integrity (Behn 3-6; Mulgan 555). In addition, changes in accountability induce changes in the tools adopted to disclose information, as well as in the kind of information released (Stewart).

The theme of accountability requires defining *who* is accountable, to *whom*, *how*, for *which* actions and results, as well as how rewarding and punishing the accountor's behaviour should be (Fearon; Behn).

In accordance with Bovens accountability is regarded here as "a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and justify his or her conduct, and

the forum can pose questions and pass judgement, and the actor may face consequences" (467). This kind of approach is mainly focused on *ex post* evaluation.

Nevertheless, in our research we also consider the relevance of *ex ante* inputs in the governance processes. Diverging from the large literature on the subject, we relate accountability to the participation in strategic decisions and reporting not by a single agent but by a wide number of agents who operate in a common territory.

As previously described, the concept of territory concerns a community that deliberately decides to share resources, values and strategies, operating in a common context. In such a view, they operate like a network even if no formal relations between the different actors necessarily occur. Nowadays, information and communication technology (ICT)—and the Internet in particular—can contribute to building a virtual territory in relation to common interests (Pavan and Lemme).

This idea recalls an ancient idea of democracy developed in Athens, based on an almost unique principle in political life (Held). It implies a life among equals, activity of governing and be governed in turn and a devotion of citizens to the common interest. As in Athens, the philosophy underpinning the territorial reporting assumes horizontal democracy, where those interested in making the territory grow (*alias* actors) can exercise their power directly rather than elect representatives. Each actor can express an opinion and can actively contribute to the preparation of strategies and disclosure of activities in a sort of *agora*. Nevertheless, activities deliberated and exercised by actors (*agents*) require to be disclosed through a social reporting to all the members of the community (*principal*). In fact, even if no delegation of power has been exercised, the main idea is to create horizontal democracy. This implies the possibility to extend the number of actors asking for accountability concerning strategies approved and actions already carried out. This in turn contributes to the creation of social capital.

Social capital has been defined as "features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Social capital enhances the benefits of investment in physical and human capital" (Putnam 2).

In accordance with Putnam's notion of "social capital" (Putnam), accountability can have a vertical or horizontal nature, depending on the kind of democracy. Thus, while the first occurs in the case of delegated power through an election mechanism, the second is recognizable when no representative power is formalized. In this case, accountability is the answer to the need of organizations to work across formal structures to face issues and challenges which overcome the limited boundaries of the single organization (Hodges).

This kind of situation can be realized only under certain conditions: a highly shared knowledge has to permeate the social context, which in turn allows the growth of structured social capital (Pavan and Lemme).

Moreover, when a community (which includes public and private organizations) shares interests for mutual benefit, a structured kind of communication is necessary to share also common strategies and activities. Assuming that communication is a "structuring relationship" where the content is strictly related to the kind of relationship existing between the participants (Watzlawick, Beavin Bavelas, and Jackson) we consider that a wide accountability of deliberated strategies from a plurality of actors can shape also future relationships between those actors and the community with which they interplay. To this end, a specific tool attuned to communicate common strategies and related results, such as a territorial report, would be beneficial for the development of these relations.

The territorial report as an accountability tool. A proposal for Bloomsbury

Based on the literature review already discussed, this section presents how it is possible to draw up a territorial report, in accordance with some guidelines already provided on the international scenario. Moreover, we propose a model suitable for those contexts, like Bloomsbury, where different actors interplay for the benefit of a community.

The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) issued in 2015 the update version of the Sustainability Reporting Guidelines, based on a wide stakeholders' engagement, encouraging any kind of organization to adopt these guidelines for the preparation of sustainability reporting. The principles inspiring the document can be considered as a reference for the preparation of a kind of reporting prepared by a territory.

As previously discussed, a territory is a place (even virtual) where a diverse number of actors operate—both in civil society, government and business—sharing a common interest and performing as a partnership network. Thus, understanding a territory as a kind of partnership network, we can argue like Bäckstrand that a territory, "spanning the public–private domain, captures the essence of 'governance from below', counter the participation gap and effectively addresses the implementation gap in global environmental politics" (291).

In this kind of reality, there is a complex collaborative system characterized by a weak institutional relationship, where governance and power are diffused among different actors not directly accountable in force of a delegation or a clear principal-agent relation (Benner, Reinicke, and Witte; Keohane and Nye), but towards multiple stakeholders, so that accountability assumes a fundamental role.

With the aim of operationalizing the concept of accountability in a territory, an Italian standards setter related to GRI through the mutual recognition—the GBS (Gruppo Bilancio Sociale)—in 2011 issued a research paper entitled "Territorial reporting: objectives, process and performance indicators." The document—rather than providing a specific model—tends to describe a possible process to follow in order to achieve the production of a territorial report. Thus far, the document discusses how to identify actors on the territory and a progressive path to include the largest number of entities in the report. In addition, it suggests the preparation of a set of indicators, attuned to quantify the output and outcome of common strategies realized. To complete the process, an assurance, at least by the main stakeholders, is required, in order to avoid the document being self-proved.

In our view, the proposal made by the GBS can support the preparation of this kind of report, assuming that, as already noticed, "a disclosure assessment needs both quantitative and qualitative considerations" (Monfardini 634). The basic idea is that when more actors perform in a common realm, also a common responsibility would raise, for which all the actors have to be accountable.

This concept is all but new, as the idea of partnership (policy networks)—although in relation to what is almost a transnational context—was analysed a long time ago and is based on non-hierarchical governance, relations between different groups and actors, the ability to support policy success or failure (Rodes; Peterson and Bomberg) and accountability to gain legitimacy.

The first issue to address is: *who will take the initiative to prepare the territorial report?* There is no single answer, as each of the actors performing in the territory—or, better, each group of actors—can take the lead to disclose to the whole community what the common strategies, input, output and outcome are. Moreover, this/those actor/s (public or private) have to feel the responsibility for the development of the community and the territory and the need to aggregate other possible actors already operating in the same context, in order to increase the social capital in a sustainable approach. In fact, in this sense the territorial report can retort to a common moment of reflection to deliberate strategies for future growth.

In accordance with previous studies on partnership networks (Bäckstrand) and with stakeholders theory, the core questions to answer through the preparation of the territorial reporting are the following: *What are the common strategies deliberated for the territory? Do the actors in the territory perform and deliver the promised results for the community? Are the actors open to the involvement of other actors and to public scrutiny? Are the actors representative and inclusive of different stakeholders?*

By clarifying strategies and all related actions already put in place, the actors-proponents declare their responsiveness in relation to results already obtained: even if each of them, individually, can be motivated by different aims, their interests converge towards the creation of the social capital in the community.

Moreover, by quantifying results, through the adoption of key performance indicators, actors allow any kind of stakeholders to assess the results achieved.

A second point to clarify regards *who* are the recipients of the reporting. In accordance with the approach chosen by the GBS, we consider the possibility to classify stakeholders in two groups: *intermediates* or *finals*. The first category includes those stakeholders, involved through a mediate pathway, on which there is an indirect impact of actions and activities organized and performed in the territory (i.e.: national and local governments, public agencies, banks, universities, schools, healthcare organizations, etc.). Conversely, the final stakeholders are all those immediately involved in the actions and activities, which receive a direct impact as result of the performance (i.e.: families, employees, professionals, entrepreneurs, non-profit entities, students, elderly people, etc.). (Manes Rossi and Ricci).

A territorial report for Bloomsbury

In order to operationalize the process to draw up a territorial report, following the model proposed by the GBS, we intend to depict hereafter the so-called "cube of responsibility," a three-dimensional model suitable for defining *who* are the actors on the territory, what are the *areas* where they act and for what they are responsible, and who are the main *stakeholders* the reporting tries to address. Logically, it is possible to be an actor and stakeholder at the same time.

In a territory like Bloomsbury, where a large number of private and public actors simultaneously operate, most of them already brought together by their involvement in cultural activities, a territorial report would be a useful tool to communicate common strategies, clarify action put in place and quantify the results achieved, being beneficial for the entire community. It is essential to point out that the territorial report does not have to be the simple sum of the activities carried out by the single actors, but a document which discloses common strategies and actions addressed to increase the social capital for the community. Thus, in

the case of Bloomsbury, the common mission could be to favour the economic and social growth of the community, by increasing cultural activities, tourism and—consequently—employment.

An example to clarify the model: imagine that Camden Council and the Bloomsbury Association decide to start the preparation of a territorial report for Bloomsbury.

First, they have to consider if, between the hundreds of actors operating in the area, some others would be interested in participating in the preparation of the report.

Assume that a bank and the British Museum's Board of Trustees decide to join the project, as they have a strong interest in proposing common strategies and actions, while others actors have refused this possibility.

As a first step, they have to decide the areas where they act and for which they have to consider themselves responsible. Consequently, they have to decide how to measure their activities (quantitative and qualitative measures, eventually considering also financial resources invested to manage the activities). In addition, they have to map categories of the final stakeholders to which to address their communication.

Pursuing this assumption further, imagine that they consider the students, schools inside the Bloomsbury area, families, tourists and London Municipalities as the main stakeholders to address. At this point, for each of the categories of stakeholders identified and for each area of activities (i.e.: cultural promotion, leisure, financing, training activities) they have to identify the impact produced for different groups of stakeholders.

Basically, the actors-proponents of the territorial report would explicitly declare their responsibility to the recipients of activities by measuring, possibly with key performance indicators, the results obtained.

The communication has to be clear and trustable, identifying both the output and outcome obtained. Thus, following our speculation, an output could be a summer school jointly organized by the Bloomsbury association and the British Museum, while the outcome could be an increase in the number of students approaching this activity. Evidently, it would be desirable to define the target from the outset of the planning of the activities, so that in the report it would

be possible also to compare the target with the results measured *ex post*, in order to improve future planning and programmes.

Moreover, if the actors-proponents really consider the territory report as an accountability tool, suitable to increase a dialogue with the stakeholders, they will try to collect opinions and involve some of them in the definition of future strategies.

Figure 1 shows the three-dimensional model proposed, in respect to which a set of performance indicators—to assess both the output and outcome—can be prepared. Performance indicators need to be in line with the objectives and results achieved and comments have to highlight to what extent there is place for improvements and for participation by other actors.

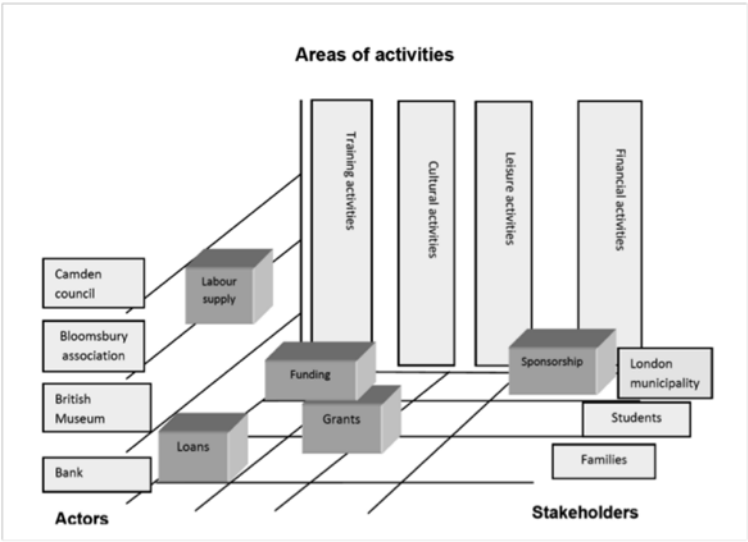

Figure 1. The cube of responsibilities for Bloomsbury

Undeniably, for each activity some performance indicators can be prepared, able to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the results achieved and effects produced.

By disclosing and measuring the actions taken, the actors would be able to involve both other actors in the territory and stakeholders in future planning, creating a virtual circle, attuned to the growth of the social capital.

Conclusions

The study aims to propose and discuss a territorial reporting model for the case of the Bloomsbury community. Notably, Bloomsbury is one of the most famous districts in London where people share professional, academic, cultural and social activities. The existence of a social cohesion creates a demand for accountability in order to capture how and for whom the social capital is created.

To this end, the territorial report complies with this need. It consists in a tool used from an *ex-ante* and an *ex-post* perspective to map and report the creation of social capital by the people living in the same territory, having in common ideals, relations, knowledge and interests. The premise is the existence of a horizontal democracy style where no representative power is formalized (Putnam) but each of the subjects operating in the community is both the actor and user of such reporting.

To operationalize this model, we adopted the 2011 guidelines issued by the Italian standard setter, the Gruppo Bilancio Sociale (GBS).

Once the identification of the territorial strategy in the Bloomsbury area was planned—namely to favour the economic and social growth of the territory by increasing the cultural activities, tourism and employment—the process was traced by developing the "three-dimensional cube of responsibility" as required by the guidelines: in this respect, the actors, stakeholders and activities were displayed.

In particular, training, cultural, leisure and financial services represent the main areas of Bloomsbury where the responsibilities of the actors occur. Thus, for each strand some possible actions have been depicted, requiring to be mapped and reported.

The principles and structure of the model proposed can represent a basic conceptualisation for its development in other communities, where a strong social cohesion exists, enhancing the social capital. Starting from the recognition of a common mission, the first step consists in defining who the main actors of the community are and what the main areas of activities supporting the creation of social capital are. Thus, the actors-proponents of the territorial report have to make clear their responsibility towards the community and, *ex-post*, measure the related results that have been achieved.

In this respect, the adoption of appropriate key performance indicators (both output and outcome ratios) should be selected and displayed in order to map, over time, the effectiveness of the territorial mission and highlight which areas of activity need to be improved or re-addressed.

The GBS standard suggests a *basic* set of performance and outcome indicators that can be implemented and a matrix is showed in order to support the preparation of this report. In particular, the ratios are proposed by interacting each category of stakeholders with some possible areas of activity featuring the territory.

Potentially, the territorial report is useful in assessing and improving the effectiveness of the social capital by the community, enhancing transparency. Nevertheless, from an operational point of view, some limitations can occur, reducing the benefits.

In particular, the concept of territory is extremely flexible in the sense that no general rules and criteria exist to advocate an *a-priori* definition and identification. Its metaphoric boundaries, social activities, actors, ideals and relations vary among cases. Consequently, also the content of the report is heterogeneous, since the actors decide what is the necessary extent for the understanding of the territory, as a whole. In this respect, the comparability across areas and over time could decrease. Furthermore, the territorial report should be the result of a continuous process, enhancing feedback and feed-forward assessments. In this process, the absence of any hierarchical governance structure is assumed; hence the actors should play the same pro-active role, being involved in the *ex-ante* and *ex-post* phases. However, an overlapping of roles exists, since they act as preparers, users and auditors of the report. The adoption of such a tool can support its future improvement and testify its usefulness toward the enhancement of social capital.

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