

## *Virginia Woolf: From Book Reviewer to Literary Critic, 1904–1918*

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At the beginning of 1905, after Woolf had broken into the field of reviewing by publishing her first two reviews, she wrote to Violet Dickinson, "reading makes me intensely happy, and culminates in a fit of writing always" (L 1: 172). From the beginning of her career Woolf established a lifelong connection between reading and writing. Though she undoubtedly enjoyed reading as an end in itself, reading often meant more when there was another end in view (D 2: 259), an end that saw itself in published print. The desire of Woolf to publish is similar to that of her character Orlando, who had been carrying around a manuscript throughout most of the novel:

The manuscript which reposed above her heart began shuffling and beating as if it were a living thing, and, what was still odder, and showed how fine a sympathy was between them, Orlando, by inclining her head, could make out what it was that it was saying. It wanted to be read. It must be read. It would die in her bosom if it were not read.  
(C 272)

As if her own words might miscarry, the young Virginia Stephen cagerly and quickly sought to be published.

The major avenue open to her was through book reviewing. For the first fourteen years of her writing career, from 1904 to 1918, Woolf served her apprenticeship in the trade of publishing as a book reviewer. Toward the end of her apprenticeship she began increasingly to take on the role of a critic, a writer who self-consciously both espouses and shapes opinions in a public forum. In the essays written from the time she began to publish her

short fiction in 1917, Woolf began to articulate critical principles that she would continue to develop over the rest of her life.

The first decade and a half of Woolf's writing career are important for us to know about if we are to understand the process by which she became a professional writer and if we are to realize the influences and forces that shaped her writing career. Woolf's training as a writer enabled her to enter another world, outside that of her imagination, a public realm in which she had to conform to editorial control. In exchange for this control over her authorial freedom, she received much more, earning money, adapting herself to the discipline required for a professional writer's life, growing in confidence, entering into a community of other writers, learning how to anticipate audience response, and perhaps most important of all, gaining skill and experience in writing.

Woolf also became more familiar with a wide range of books, a range that pulled her away from the mostly canonical literature and history with which she had nourished her imagination. This familiarity helped to make her essays, as McNeillie writes, "democratic in spirit: uncanonical, inquisitive, open, and unacademic" (*E* 1: ix). At the beginning of her career she accepted all the books she was asked to review, including popular fiction, travelogues, cookbooks. But she was asked to write on more than the ephemeral; she was also allowed to write thoughtful pieces about writers who were important to her. By 1918, with the acquisition of the Hogarth Press the previous year, her growing desire to pursue her fiction, her established sense of herself as a professional writer, and her improved economic state, Woolf was not as compelled to continue her reviewing with the same drive as she had throughout most of her apprenticeship. Having learned what she could and accrued what benefits she could, Woolf was now free to pursue her own writing and to write criticism on her own terms.

#### 1904–1909

The first five years of Woolf's career as a journalist, 1904 to 1909, show how diligently she pursued her family's social connections in order to realize her dream as a writer. The social and personal dimensions of her connections persisted even as these dimensions expanded to include the professional. Part of her goal to be in print was motivated by a desire to make money, something that would signify her professional status and, at first, grant her a modicum of self-sufficiency (her income was to grow considerably by the time she published *Orlando*, which sold more than 20,000 copies within the

first six months of publication). Another part of her goal was to get a response to her writing: "Oh—for some one to tell me whether it is well, very well, or indifferently done" (PA 226). Woolf quickly settled into a pattern of writing, a pattern that was to last her the rest of her life. Though she learned strategies to get around what were to her censorious editors, she soon grew frustrated with having to contend with their often hampering and stifling expectations.

Woolf may have grown up in a house that fostered a love of reading and books, and she may have been exposed to literary giants—especially her father Leslie Stephen—who helped to create an atmosphere that inspired learning, but she did not have the benefit of active assistance. Stephen may have regarded his youngest daughter as his literary heir, and to that end he may have directed his discussions of literature to her, but he did nothing practical—such as providing a university education—in the way of ensuring her success at this or any other vocation. Woolf, notably, did not start to publish until after her father's death. The following oft-quoted passage from her 1928 diary indicates her recognition that his life surely would have prevented her literary life from developing:

Father's birthday. He would have been . . . 96, yes, today; & could have been 96, like other people one has known; but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books,—inconceivable. (D 3: 208)

If Julia Stephen had lived, she undoubtedly would have thwarted her daughter's career as well, believing as strongly as she did that a woman's place is in the home.

However, in terms of providing help passively, the Stephens were of immeasurable assistance. In addition to fostering a milieu of high culture, they were possessed of family and social connections that gave Woolf the opportunity to meet people who might help her further her quest to become a published writer.<sup>1</sup> The Stephen family was connected in one way or another to the editors<sup>2</sup> of the first three publications for which Woolf wrote: *The Guardian*, the *Cornhill Magazine*, and the *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS).<sup>3</sup> Violet Dickinson, who had been friends with Woolf's older stepsister Stella, was Woolf's most intimate friend while she was in her twenties. Through Dickinson Woolf met Margaret Lyttelton, the editor of the *Women's Supplement* of *The Guardian*. Reginald Smith was the editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, which Leslie Stephen had edited for the ten years preceding Woolf's birth. In 1902 Leslie was asked to contribute to the just-founded

*TLS* but was unable to do so because his health was fading. By the time Woolf met Bruce Richmond, the editor of the *TLS*, in 1905, at a dinner party given by some friends of Dickinson's, she had already submitted several pieces for him to read. Woolf continued to socialize with all of these and other editors during her tenure as a writer for their publications.

It is important to note that apart from F. W. Maitland, who was writing a biography of Leslie Stephen and asked Woolf to contribute a piece on her father, none of these other editors sought her out. It was up to the young Virginia Stephen to take advantage of the opportunities her family and social ties afforded her. Her letters and diary reveal how hard she worked at making the most of these connections, and how she maintained these connections on a social level as well as in the professional sphere.

In November 1904 Woolf proposed the idea to Dickinson of writing an essay for Lyttelton. Woolf wrote to Dickinson that she wanted to show Lyttelton the kind of essay she wrote, and continued, "I only want to get some idea as to whether possibly she would like me to write something in the future" (L 1: 154). Woolf did give an article to Dickinson to pass on to Lyttelton. Anxious over Lyttelton's opinion of this piece, Woolf wrote to Dickinson several times to learn what her reaction was. If Lyttelton wouldn't accept it, Woolf wrote, "... I must try and get someone to take it" (L 1: 155), possibly, she would later write, the *Cornhill Magazine* or *The National Review* (L 1: 156). Finally, Lyttelton sent Woolf a book to review, W. D. Howells's *The Son of Royal Langbrith*. Woolf did not stop with this piece. She submitted to Lyttelton an unsolicited article on her visit to the Brontës' home Haworth—written, she boasted to Dickinson, in less than two hours (L 1: 158)—and followed that up with an obituary of Shag, the family dog. These two articles presage Woolf's interest in women writers and the playful, mock-serious tone that characterized many of her pieces and culminated in *Orlando*.

Woolf's letters and diary at this time, from the end of 1904 to late spring of the following year, are filled with a mixture of responses: heady excitement, frustration, anticipation, boasting, and, what is possibly more telling, a desire to make money. Indeed, it would almost seem that the desire to make money prevailed over the desire to get published. She wrote to her friend Emma Vaughan in a postscript, "By the way, I am reviewing novels and writing articles for the *Guardian* and so hope to make a little money—which was our old ambition" (L 1: 160). When Woolf received another book to review, she wrote in her diary, "so that means more work, & cheques ultimately" (PA 219). She did not make much at first, only a few pounds here and there, which she often used to buy treasured items, such as an "extravagant little table" (PA 235) or "that long coveted & resisted coal scuttle, all

of beaten brass," about which, she continues, "This was extravagance—So I must write another article" (PA 241). No doubt Woolf enjoyed being able to afford these little purchases.

But making money meant more to her than allowing herself to indulge in household items; it also signified that she was a professional, a real writer. It was one thing to practice writing essays for her eye alone; it was another to enter another money-making sphere, an entry required to legitimize her calling. After all, as she later wrote in *A Room of One's Own*, "Money dignifies what is frivolous if unpaid for" (68). Even in 1905 Woolf was not unaware that she had adopted the "Grub St. point of view" (PA 256), an attitude that regarded the writing of articles as a means to an end—namely, the making of money. In line with her newly won professionalism, Woolf also established a pattern of work that was to last her the rest of her life. In her diary entries dating from 9 January to 26 March 1905, she meticulously records her days' schedules. We see how quickly, in her new calling, she settled into a routine, one that involved writing every morning. She was also learning how it can take, as she wrote in February 1905, "as long to rewrite one page, as to write 4 fresh ones" (PA 239), and how there were mornings when she faced blocks, when words just wouldn't come (PA 250).

After her initiation at *The Guardian*, it seemed as if nothing could stop her. At a tea held in early 1905, Richmond asked her if she would write a review for a number of other magazines. Yes, she eagerly responded. Then he came to the point—would she write a review for the *TLS*? She wrote in her diary, "So I said yes—& thus my work gets established, & I suppose I shall soon have as much as I can do . . ." (PA 234). In 1905 Woolf did have as much as she could do: she published thirty-five reviews and articles in *The Guardian* and in the *TLS*, *Academy & Literature*, the *Cornhill Magazine*, and the *National Review*. For the following three years she continued to publish an average of thirty reviews a year, and after a hiatus of several years (brought about, in part, by her mental breakdowns), she continued to average thirty reviews a year for the next six years. Though most of her earliest publications were reviews, she also was able to write some occasional pieces (for example, "Street Music").

With the writing of her articles she encountered not only the joy of being published but also the frustration of being edited, a process that often felt like censorship. The articles she wrote for *The Guardian* are a case in point. On the first occasion, the obituary of the family dog, when Lyttelton asked her "to cut out certain things," Woolf agreed to, going so far as to say, as she wrote Dickinson, "please do, and always alter my things as you like" (L 1: 169). But she was not happy with the way Lyttelton had "cobbled" her article



(L 1: 172). Such editing, Woolf indicated here, results in laming, crippling. Woolf next experienced Lyttelton's editing of her writing in her first significant critical project, a review of Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*, a book acclaimed as great by nearly all of James's contemporaries. This time, Woolf was not so accommodating of Lyttelton's criticism, as she wrote to Dickinson:

I spend 5 days of precious time toiling through Henry James' subtleties for Mrs Lyttelton, and write a very hardworking review for her; then come orders to cut out quite half of it—at once, as it has to go into next weeks Guardian, and the Parsonesses, I suppose, prefer midwifery, to literature. . . . Really I never read such pedantic commonplace as the Guardianese: it takes up the line of a Governess, and maiden Lady, and high church Parson mixed; how they ever got such a black little goat into their fold, I cant conceive. (L 1: 178)

In her failure to appreciate Woolf's writing, Lyttelton has become a parsoness and a prude. Moreover, she does not recognize her young writer's subversiveness. Woolf soon tired of the priggish and religious ideology informing *The Guardian*, and yearned to uncover her real thoughts and feelings, to make her ideas heard loud and clear: "If only I could attack the Church of England!" she exclaimed to Dickinson in July 1905 (L 1: 201). Though she was frustrated from the very beginning of her tenure at *The Guardian* with its narrow focus (L 1: 214), Woolf was to continue reviewing for it until 1909.

The essays Woolf wrote in 1908 for Reginald Smith, the editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, show how she had anticipated the editor's scissors and used this anticipation to her advantage. The *Cornhill Magazine* was a family magazine; as such, it toed the line. Having written for *The Guardian*, and having the first essay that she submitted to the *Cornhill Magazine* in late 1904 (or early 1905) rejected by Smith, Woolf knew in 1908 not to write anything too controversial. Nevertheless, though Woolf wrote her essays for the *Cornhill Magazine* under tight stricture, these are among the most playful from the early part of her career and enjoins us to participate in her rather spirited obliquity, as the following explication of "A Week at the White House" shows.

In "A Week in the White House," a review of a biography of Theodore Roosevelt by William Hale, Woolf includes some metacommentary. When she writes, "no one can be confused, or subtle, or malicious beneath such a torrent of good humour" (E 1: 206), she means the opposite, both of Roosevelt and of her own writing. The surface of Woolf's essay is a torrent

of good humor, beneath which flow subtlety and sarcasm. Beneath Roosevelt's good humor, Woolf suggests, lie confusion and maliciousness. Woolf wrote to Dickinson about this review, "The subtlety of the insinuations is so serpentine that no Smith in Europe will see how I jeer the President to derision, seeming to approve the while" (L 1: 337). Smith must have been very obtuse because the insinuations are not always serpentine, but obvious. Woolf easily belittles by hyperbole and extreme contrasts when she writes, for example, "Dr Hale is surely speaking the truth when he says that if . . . one could get an 'accurate and realistic' picture of the President (or of the dustman, we might add) nothing could exceed the interest of it" (E 1: 204).

As she does in her other essays, Woolf frequently quotes from the book she is reviewing, not to flatter the author but rather to show how inane he can be. In "*A Week at the White House*" Woolf sets a one-sentence citation from the Roosevelt biography apart from her own text. In this particular citation the biographer describes Roosevelt's appearance; "close-clipped brachycephalous head" (E 1: 205) hardly shows Roosevelt at his best. Brachycephalous, a term from physiognomy, a pseudo-science in decline by the first part of the twentieth century, suggests dinosaurs and prehistoric beasts. Woolf also includes a clip from Roosevelt's speech, the flavor of which is apparent in the following line: "Senator, this is a—VERY great pleasure!" Woolf's commentary on this clip is blatantly sarcastic: "the remarkable point about these greetings is, not only that they are discriminating, but that with all their emphasis they are sincere" (E 1: 206).

Smith's desire that, according to Woolf, she "become a popular lady biographer, safe for—graceful portrait, and such a lady!" (L 1: 356) was disappointed, for she broke with his editorship within a year after she had begun to write for the *Cornhill Magazine*. The instigating factor was his rejection of her short story "Memoirs of a Novelist" in 1909. But as with Lyttelton, events had been leading in that direction. She grew tired of the *Cornhill Magazine's* proprieties, which would not allow it, for example, to "call a prostitute, or a mistress a mistress" (L 1: 343). And just as Woolf was a black goat among the flock of writers for *The Guardian*, so she perceived herself as a misfit among those whose articles easily fit into the *Cornhill Magazine*. She was well aware of her deliberate posturing at this early stage of her career, as she wrote to her sister: "Of course, I had been posing as an illiterate woman, who had twice as much difficulty in writing an article as other people" (L 1: 360).

Even if anonymity had not been imposed on Woolf, she would have needed to adopt a disguise as a self-protective measure. She also would have needed to shield herself from criticism. When she first wrote articles she

frequently sent them to friends. But from her diary entries and letters, we see how she wilted under their criticism and bloomed under their praise. For example, she wrote in February 1905, "How I hate criticism, & what waste it is, because I never take it really" (PA 232). She confided to her diary when her brother Thoby told her that he liked her latest note, "Thoby's approval of the Note gives me great pleasure, as I think he meant it, & I am very glad to have made it good" (PA 230).

Even as she continued for a time to send articles for preview—and for praise—to her friends, she looked for a mentor in journalism. She found one in Bruce Richmond, the editor of the *TLS*. Richmond and Woolf developed a working relationship that was to last for most of Woolf's writing career. That Richmond resumed his professional relationship with Woolf after her two-year hiatus from 1914 to 1915 (and one might say possibly longer, for she reviewed only a handful of books from 1910 to 1913), and in full measure, for Woolf averaged thirty articles a year for the *TLS* from 1916 to 1920, is another indication of how helpful he could be. On Richmond's retirement in 1938 from the *TLS* she paid high tribute to him: "I learnt a lot of my craft writing for him: how to compress; how to enliven; & also was made to read with a pen & notebook, seriously" (D 5: 145).<sup>4</sup>

As she became more established, she reviewed only for the *TLS*. It is important to note here that although Woolf was critical of Lyttelton and Smith for their censorship, they initially allowed her more space than Richmond usually did at first, and it was in the pages of *The Guardian* and the *Cornhill Magazine* that Woolf published her first nonreview essays, or occasional pieces, most of which were unsolicited. Also, Richmond did not give Woolf important books to review when Woolf was starting to review for him; only with a publication like *The Guardian* did she have at the beginning of her career the opportunity to read something as non-ephemeral as James's *The Golden Bowl*. Moreover, most of her early reviews of contemporary fiction for the *TLS* consisted of notices, or one-paragraph write-ups in which she could do little more than give plot summaries.

During their thirty-three-year relationship Woolf recorded social engagements and the frequent correspondence she and Richmond maintained, a record that shows his stature quickly diminishing in her eyes. In 1908, three years after Woolf started to write for the *TLS*, Richmond paid her a visit, one she missed; "however," she wrote to Dickinson, "nothing would alarm me more than to give him tea" (L 1: 337). With the years he seemed to shrink literally. Writing again to Dickinson, she described how she met Richmond at a concert the night before: "He has shrunk, and become a lively little old man [Richmond was born in 1871 and was only eleven years older than Woolf;



in 1908, he was thirty-seven years old]—I thought he was younger and bigger" (L 1: 372). By 1919 Woolf describes him as if he were a squirrel, "jumping onto a chair to see the traffic over the blind, & chivvying a piece of paper round the room with his feet" (D 1: 263). In September 1925 she devoted a paragraph-long diatribe that she entitled "Disillusionment" to savaging Richmond verbally. The conversation she had with him that night "was practically imbecile" (J 3: 39). "And to think," she wrote, "that I have ever wasted a thought upon what that goodtempered worldly little grocer thought of my writing!" (D 3: 40). By 1935 he has become a "petrified culture-bug" (L 5: 453).

The devolving course of Woolf's relationship with Richmond paralleled those with her other editors Lyttelton and Smith, and also, for that matter, Richmond's wife Elena (née Rathbone), a friend from Woolf's childhood. Part of this disintegration had to do with Woolf's tendency to idolize her friends—including Violet Dickinson—only to become disillusioned. Another had to do with the kind of strictures these editors placed on her writing. At the end of 1921, for example, she commented in her diary how restricted she felt in writing, in this case for the *TLS*: "... I wonder whether to break off, with an explanation, or to pander, or to go on writing against the current. This last is probably right, but somehow the consciousness of doing that cramps one. One writes stiffly, without spontaneity" (D 2: 152). For someone like Woolf, whose career was marked by one consistency—the desire to change, to seek out new forms—this kind of cramping could be deadly. It is no wonder that she would want to break free from writing for editors, to devise "something far less stiff & formal than these Times articles" (D 4: 53).

#### 1910–1915

It is not because of her desire to break out of the stiff and formal format of the *TLS* articles, however, that her journalistic output at this time slowed to a trickle over the next five years. In 1909 she received a legacy of £2500 from her aunt Caroline Emilia Stephen, who had wanted her niece to abandon journalism and devote her attention solely to other, more glorious writing pursuits. Stephen's legacy did enable Woolf to devote more time to her fiction, her first love. Fiction was also a form of writing that allowed her far more freedom than journalism, as she wrote to Dickinson as early as 1905: "I am writing for my own pleasure, which is rather a relief after my Guardian drudgery, and I can assail the sanctity of Love and Religion without care for the Parsons morals" (L 1: 206).

Another significant reason for this decline has to do with Woolf's personal circumstances. With her marriage to Leonard in 1912, Woolf's life changed dramatically. Though ultimately this marriage did, I think, empower Woolf in her writing—it is notable that she did not publish *The Voyage Out*, her first work of fiction, until after she married—it initially resulted in one of Woolf's severest breakdowns, from which she did not recover until the end of 1915. Woolf had given up her journalism to write her novel, which, as Mepham points out, was not going anywhere, it seemed, even after repeated drafts, and she could not bring herself to publish it. Without even her journalism to sustain her—in 1914 and 1915 records show that she published no reviews at all—Woolf must have felt like a failure. Mepham writes, "With hindsight it is perhaps difficult for us to realise that her permanent failure was a very serious possibility. It seemed quite likely that she would never become an author. In fact, it was not at all clear that she would even survive" (35).

#### 1916–1918

But survive she did. The sign of her returning health was the resumption of her literary journalism. When Woolf started to review again, it was, over the next few years, solely for the *TLS*. Table 1.1 shows a somewhat significant difference between the kind of reviews that she wrote at this period and those she wrote during the first five years of her apprenticeship.

The table is not meant to be comprehensive. These numbers, for example, do not include the forty-four essays that, according to McNeillie, as reported to John Mepham (20), have been discovered since the publication of his edition. Most of these forty-four were published in 1907. Moreover, the Virginia Woolf Special Issue of the Spring 1992 *Modern Fiction Studies* printed some newly found essays. Nor is this table meant to be exact. Some of the books included under the category of Life-writings could also fit under that of Classics, and vice versa. For example, Woolf reviewed biographies on and letters by authors such as Whitman, Rossetti, and Boswell, and in the course of her review she might also discuss their works. If it appeared that she devoted as much or more attention to their texts, then I included that review under the category of Classics. From 1916 to 1918 she reviewed collections of essays, many of which were combined reflections upon literature and life. When they veered more toward the life end of the pendulum, then I included them under Non-literary-critical essays. Moreover, the line dividing Contemporary popular from Contemporary impor-

Table 1.1

KINDS OF ESSAYS PUBLISHED	NUMBER OF ESSAYS PUBLISHED		
	1904-1909	1910-1913	1916-1918
Life-writing (biographies, autobiographies, letters, memoirs, journals, diaries)	37	6	12
Contemporary popular writers (e.g., romantic)	28	0	10
Contemporary important popular writers (e.g., James and Conrad)	7	1	8
Foreign popular fiction (especially Russian writers, who were becoming popular in England)	0	2	6
Classics (Woolf often wrote commemorative essays when new editions appeared, on, for example, Austen and Brontë)	5	1	9
Literary-critical essays and books	3	0	15
Non-literary-critical essays and literature (including travelogues, social and personal histories, reflections on a place, children's, and even a cookbook)	9	1	19
Contemporary poetry	0	0	10
Contemporary drama	0	0	1
Occasional pieces (Woolf's own essays, not reviews)	10	0	2
Obituaries	2	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>93</b>

Source: *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie.

tant popular is problematic at best. The slippery adjective "important" is based on how seriously these authors were taken by the high literary establishment at the time. Henry James clearly was; A. Cunliffe Inchbold was not, having published only one other fictional work before she published the novel that Woolf reviewed in 1915. My decision to put the novel by Marjorie Bowen, who had received critical acclaim from other reviewers and whose novel had quickly gone into a second edition soon after the time that Woolf reviewed her *The Glen o' Weeping* (E 1: 138-39), under Contemporary Popular is in part determined by Woolf's own evaluation that it belonged in this category rather than the other.

Rather than being comprehensive or exact, this table is meant to give a flavor of the kinds of books that Woolf reviewed so that we can better understand the shape of her early career. Beginning in 1916, we see that Woolf was given a wider range of books to read. Her critical acumen could grow in having the opportunity to review many other kinds of works besides life-writings and prose fiction and nonfiction. It may be surprising to many Woolf critics that she had at this time reviewed at least ten books of and about poetry, so steeped is she in prose, even if that prose took on poetic dimensions. More significantly for her criticism, we see how she read many books of collections of literary critical essays, a form that was clearly in vogue at the time, and most likely planted the seed of an idea in her to compile her own collections in the two volumes of *The Common Reader*, the first volume of which was published in her twentieth year as a reviewer. The collections she reviewed were written by popularizers of classical literature, figures such as Sir Walter Raleigh, J. C. Squire, Arnold Bennett, Alice Meynell, and the then-popular American critic J. E. Spingarn. Woolf also reviewed critical studies of authors, such as Eliza Haywood and Henry James. As a reviewer, Woolf's literary taste could broaden to encompass foreign writers, namely the great Russian triumvirate Chekhov, Tolstoy, and especially Dostoyevsky, all of whose works were currently being translated into English.

Woolf did not have the power to select the specific books she wanted to review, but as early as 1908 she let it be known what kind of books she preferred to review, as she wrote to Dickinson: "I have refused to review any more novels for the Times; and they send me Philosophy" (L 1: 331). Apart from reviewing E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View*, from the fall of 1907 to 1916 Woolf had stopped reviewing novels for the *TLS*. She was not exactly, however, reviewing philosophy, but rather, in 1908 and 1909, mostly life-writings; out of the twenty-seven books she reviewed for the *TLS*, seventeen were some form of life-writing. From the kinds of works of fiction that we

see Woolf reviewed, it is apparent that at this point in her career she had not quite reached the tastemaker stage. The reputations of the "important" writers—James, Conrad, Galsworthy, Wells—were already established; as a reviewer she was in a position to maintain the status quo and function as a cheerleader. Her own reviews of the popular writers reveal that almost all were, to put it mildly, far from groundbreaking. Indeed, it is amusing to think of the young Virginia Stephen reading a conventional romance, the plot of which sounds little different from today's Harlequins.

It is interesting to read what Woolf wrote, with self-prescience, in a 1906 review: "It is no disparagement to the author to say that we find his volumes of greater interest as a revelation of his point of view than as a criticism of the subjects which he professes to treat" (E 1: 83). One consistency that emerges from reading Woolf's reviews in chronological order is, as McNeillie also notes (E 1: xv), her growing tendency to focus less on the text and more on expressing her own viewpoints. In her early reviews Woolf carefully describes the plot and outline of the text; later, she feels freer to pay them shorter shrift.

To gain an even clearer sense of the changes in style and emphasis that took place during Woolf's apprenticeship as a reviewer, it is helpful to look more closely at one set of reviews, one that dates to an early period in her career and the other to a later stage. Both reviews—"The Genius of Boswell" (1909) and "Papers on Pepys" (1918)—treat life-writing. In "The Genius of Boswell" Woolf is reviewing a collection of letters by Boswell that had been discovered decades after Boswell's death. Her tone is respectful. Woolf devotes the first long paragraph, or a fourth of the review, to narrating a history—which, as she describes it, is clearly an "adventurous" one, for they were first found as sheets wrapped around a parcel in Boulogne—of the letters and the editors under whose hands they have passed. That is, she foregrounds the physical text itself. We then move from its history to that of Boswell's. Addressed to a college friend, these letters reveal Boswell, as Woolf portrays him, to be a man of many contradictions: self-obsessed yet largely sympathetic and understanding; exuberant toward life but unable to settle down to any one project. This review shows Woolf to be insightful, particularly in her awareness that the true artist, like Boswell, knows to leave "out much that other people put in" and in her understanding that one's strong point may also, as in Boswell's case, be one's undoing. Moreover Woolf even at this early stage is well aware of effective rhetorical strategies. She prefaces her own discussion by referring to what other authorities have said, and then offers her own commentary, which serves in part to supplant if not undermine those whose evaluation could not, as she proclaimed with



almost self-acknowledged false modesty, be surpassed: "When a man has had the eyes of Carlyle and Macaulay fixed upon him it may well seem that there is nothing fresh to be said." After we read this review we easily conclude that, yes, there is something more to be added to Carlyle's conclusive summation that Boswell is "an ill-assorted, glaring mixture of the highest and the lowest" (*E* 1: 249).

In "Papers on Pepys" Woolf does not ever bother to cite authorities nor, for that matter, does she even get around to describing the text under consideration—a collection of papers by the Pepys Club—until the end of her review. Rather than referring to an illustrious authority as Carlyle, Woolf instead focuses on the reader. Great must be the number of people "who read themselves at night with Pepys and awake at day with Pepys," but far greater the number who do not read Pepys at all. To that end, the Pepys Club has been formed, as Woolf writes, "to convert the heathen." The tone immediately becomes a recognizably Woolfian one: mock-serious and playful. She takes the desire of the Pepys Club to have the public treat Pepys with respect, and she sends it in orbit: "Lack of respect for Pepys," she writes, "seems to us a heresy which is beyond argument, and deserving of punishment . . ." (*E* 2: 233). At this point, rather than turning to the arguments presented by the Pepys Club, as she might have if she had written this review nine years ago, Woolf highlights her *own* reasons why Pepys deserves to be read. According to Woolf, Pepys wrote his diary out of a desire to create for himself a private self that his public self as a civil servant and administrator could not accommodate. In his diary he confides not only affairs of state but also his personal weaknesses, weaknesses that continue to draw contemporary readers to him. In his self-consciousness Pepys reveals himself to be a modern, but in his record of the life around him he also shows himself to be a product of his seventeenth-century climate. It is this mixture of the new and the old that will make his diary, while not ranking in the highest echelons of the literary canon, persist in its appeal to readers. Only at the end of this review, when Woolf refers to one of the papers that elaborates on how, if Pepys had only had a pair of reading glasses, he would have continued the diary for the remaining thirty years of his life, does she specifically attend to the text. And then, she refers to this particular paper in an effort to show the tragedy of Pepys's life: in losing the opportunity to write in his diary, Pepys lost "the store house of his most private self . . ." (236). In conclusion, this contrast of an early review to a later one is representative of the way Woolf undermines authorities, takes on the position of the underdog, emphasizes the reader, demonstrates her interest

in the private self, and adopts a mock-serious and playful tone while at the same time making her criticism less covert and more explicit.

Woolf's review of "Papers on Pepys" appeared as her first foray into experimental fiction, the short story "The Mark on the Wall." It was because she sought more time to write fiction that she wanted to reduce her reviewing. Even as Woolf had been "writ[ing] articles without end" (L 2: 391), even as she had never "been so pressed with reviewing" (I 1: 308), "get[ting] 2 or even 3 books weekly from the Times, & thus breast[ing] one short choppy wave after another" (I 1: 224), she never lost the desire to write fiction. Before the end of her second decade as a reviewer, she was expressing this desire more frequently and regarding her reviewing as an obstacle. It got in the way of the writing of *Night and Day* and *Jacob's Room*. She confided to her diary, "my private aim is to drop my reviewing . . ." (2: 34). By 1920 she had worked up the nerve to break the review habit, which, as the following quote shows, had become a destructive addiction rather than an empowering discipline; she wrote in August 1920, "[I] feel like a drunkard who has successfully resisted three invitations to drink" (I 2: 58). By the next month she was dictating her own conditions: "only leading articles, or those I suggest myself" (I 2: 63). Woolf wanted to review initially to prove herself a professional writer. By the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, she clearly had.

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## Notes

1. From the beginning of her career Woolf also reviewed books written by people who were connected to her family, such as *A Dark Lantern* by Elizabeth Robins in 1905.
2. Woolf also published an essay, "Street Music," in the *National Review*, edited by Leo Maxse, whose marriage to Kitty Lushington was engineered by Julia Stephen. "Street Music" was the only piece Woolf contributed to this review, though, as she wrote to Dickinson in 1907, Leo Maxse had written to her that he was "constantly trying to think of subjects what [sic] would be likely to appeal to you and is open to any suggestions" (L 1: 309).
3. See also McNeillie's introductions to the first two volumes of his edition of the collected essays. Using essentially the same periodizations, he also traces the early history of Woolf's essay writing. But where McNeillie emphasizes the variety and kinds of essays Woolf wrote at this time, I focus here on the nature of her relationships with her editors and the efforts she made to get her material published.
4. Richmond not only supported her journalism. He made sure that the review of *Jacob's Room* appeared when it would get the most publicity, on Thursday, the day on which the *TLS* was out, rather than on Friday, the day on which it was published (D 2: 207). Richmond was supportive about giving Woolf release time from reviewing so that she could write *Mrs. Dalloway*; Woolf wrote in her diary, "... Richmond rather touched me by saying that he gives way to my novel with all the will in the world" (D 2: 312).