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Virginia Woolf Miscellany

NUMBER 88

FALL 2015/WINTER 2016

To the Readers:

Virginia Woolf in the Modern Machine Age

The embeddedness of the mechanical in modernist art and everyday modernity has been the topic of such influential studies as Andrew Thacker's *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (2003), *Modernism and the Culture of Efficiency: Ideology & Fiction* by Evelyn Cobley (2009), and *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain Between the Wars* (2013) by David Trotter. Jeanne Dubino notes in her introduction to *Virginia Woolf and the Literary Marketplace* (2010) that Woolf's operation of the Hogarth Press, not just her co-ownership, generated her "in-depth knowledge of and expertise in the entire realm of book production" (5), and it is this engagement with technologies, especially through their effects upon modernist art and its circulation, that is the topic of *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (2000), edited by Pamela L. Caughie. Building upon the work of critics such as Gillian Beer and Michele Pridmore-Brown, Caughie and her contributors draw attention to and thus estrange the mechanical from its habitual, near-tacit place in Woolf's interactions with interwar culture. In dialogue with these and other literary and cultural studies, we present a special issue of the *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, which explores technologies in Woolf's work according to the delicate tension between individual and community.

... To return to the meaning—Are machines the devil, or do they introduce a discord... Ding dong, ding... by means of which we reach the final... Ding dong... (*Between the Acts* [BTA] 181)

The interrupted, incomplete, overheard question, posed in a syncopated, fragmented rhythm, leaves unanswered technology's state in Woolf's own writings for a modern machine age. It's the balance between unwelcome intrusions and unanticipated openings that so many modernists address through the mechanized elements of their characters' lives, their own lives, and their aesthetics. But for every "Brekekekex coax coax" that connects the Nord-Sud to Aristophanes's *The Frogs* (Mirrlees 3),¹ there is the less brilliant text, such as the "tone-poem" performed and discussed in Dorothy L. Sayers's *Strong Poison*: "The soul of rebellion in the crowd—the clash, the revolt at the heart of the machinery. It gives the bourgeois something to think of, oh, yes!" (88). Sayers's parody of a revolutionary delight in industry-made-art intersects with the question

¹ I am indebted to Joel Salt for this reading of Hope Mirrlees's work.

Read the VWM online on Wordpress!
<<https://virginiawoolfmiscellany.wordpress.com/>>

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Editorial note:

While previously published work may be submitted for consideration, both the original publication and any other versions of it must be acknowledged and cited in the text at the time of submission.

Upcoming Issues, Special Topics & CFPs

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Issue #89—Spring 2016:
A Truly Miscellaneous Issue
Editor: Diana Swanson
<dswanson@niu.edu>

Issue #90—Fall 2016:
Woolf and Illness
Guest Editor: Cheryl Hindrichs
<cherylhindrichs@boisestate.edu>
Deadline: July 15, 2016

Issue #91—Spring 2017:
Virginia Woolf, Bloomsbury, and the War to End War
Guest Editor: Karen Levenback
<kllevenback@att.net>
Deadline: August 1, 2016

Issue #92—Fall 2017:
Virginia Woolf and Indigenous Literatures
Editor: Kristin Czarnecki
<kristin_czarnecki@georgetowncollege.edu>
Deadline for submission:
March 31, 2017

Issue #93—Spring 2018:
Woolf, Bloomsbury, and biofiction
Guest Editors: Michael Lackey & Todd Avery
<lacke010@morris.umn.edu> and
<Todd_Avery@umt.edu>
July 15, 2017

Issue #94—Fall 2018:
Almost a Century: Reading Jacob's Room
Alexandra DeLuise <a.deluise@aol.com>
Deadline for submission:
August 31, 2017

Queries? Contact Vara Neverow
<neverowv1@southernct.edu>

almost posed by Woolf's pageant-goer, when a more critical listener points out that the music "is as old as the hills—you can sense the resolution at the back of all his discords. Mere harmony in camouflage" (89). To reflect this theme in a puddle of oil from *Vile Bodies*—where modern subjects careen Toad- and/or Marinetti-like into ditches—to what extent does technology disrupt "all sense of proportion and balance" (Loss 164), and to what extent does it liberate the individual's energies, enabling the blessed "MACHINES that work the little boats across clean liquid space, in beelines" (Lewis 345)? Or a variation: to what extent does technology draw the individual into a renewed harmony with an established, traditional communal order, and to what extent is that accord an enforced and mechanistic orthodoxy?

The everyday machines in Woolf's work rarely represent a "raging broom of madness" (Marinetti 185) or a vacuum sucking up the remnants of the past into a purifying vortex of the New. More often, they are modes used by individuals to negotiate identity in private and public spaces, which are themselves newly layered with industrial innovations. As Catherine Driscoll notes, "the modernist present is always saturated with various pasts and futures" (160), and even though "technology" is often read as "a signifier of modernity" (Caughie xxiv), the ends to which it is put are not necessarily modern. Technologies are imbricated in historical processes, but machines are also the properties through which the shifting nature of group identity and relatedness is performed, restaged, and critiqued. Whether it is the crowd assembled by the spectacle of the car on Bond Street or the consumers who are interpellated by the advertisement that is produced by the sky-writing plane; whether it is the village that is constituted by the hail of the gramophone and megaphone, or the subjects who are called into existence through the ghostly presence of voice in newspaper print and radio waves—and even through the sightlines created by car windows—identities emerge from the intersectional and, as Michele Pridmore-Brown suggests in her essay, subjunctive places of those who use and are used by machines.

The multiple applications and histories of technologies—their contradictory signifying roles, their unanticipated uses, their tenacity as well as their obsolescence—undo a clear opposition between historical moments and values. David Trotter has pointed out that such cultural complexities render less productive those approaches that take the "ubiquity" of machines and materials "merely as an index to the modern" ("Techno-Primitivism" 150). It is

not just that the revolutionary potential of technology could be and was harnessed to serve the same ends as it would have for the previous generation's leaders (here, one is reminded of Bill Brown's observation that, in Woolf's diary entries of mid-1910s, "the things of the world, such as paper and paint, have become the materials of war" [16]); it is also that the potential of technology could be and was realized across the apparent binaries of modernity: city and country, street and home, male and female, upper- and working-class; high- and lowbrow, elites and masses—albeit differentially. Alison Light points out that by 1933, "the arrival of electric light, electric fires and a fridge at Monk's House" resulted in "more independence for the Woolfs" but also unemployment for Nellie Boxall (207). The same gravelled country roads that Woolf defended against macadamization in 1924's "The Cheapening of Motorcars" (*The Essays of Virginia Woolf* 3 440) led past farms where, in 1936, residents were being counselled to buy two vehicles: "an older car could be used on the farm, but every farmer should also possess a good modern car for off-farm use" (O'Connell 171). And even as the construction "of a car factory and of an aerodrome in the neighbourhood" (BTA 68) results in new, seemingly undesirable members of the community and signals the ties between automobile manufacturers and the military (Martin 51-53), and even as church absences are blamed on "The motor bike, the motor bus, and the movies" (BTA 69), "Mr and Mrs Rupert Haines, detained by a breakdown on the road," arrive at Pointz Hall only a little late for the communal experience of the village pageant because of their car's smooth progress on paved roads (74).

Woolf's own vehicles—two used Singers purchased in the late 1920s, followed by a new 1933 Lanchester 18—are the inspiration for Sandra Inskeep-Fox's poem, "One's Whole World a Cinema" and for Robert Hemmings's essay "A Motorcar of One's Own." In reading the material object of the car as an enactment of the financial agency linked to women's writing in *A Room of One's Own*, Hemmings explores the discourse of the woman driver through Kay Petre Bruce's celebration of women's car ownership and of the new views available through the windscreen. Woolf's purchase of a vehicle is linked to an emerging "syntax of velocity" and thus a materially-grounded form of the woman's sentence.

The gendering of technology and literature also informs Ria Banerjee's "The Uprising of the Anecdotes: Women's Letters and Mass-Produced News," where the private, handwritten, tear-stained letter represents a space of local community and thus alterity in an age of male-dominated national newspapers. Banerjee's reading of *Jacob's Room* and of *Three Guineas* draws upon Walter Benjamin to examine Woolf's complication of official, regimented accounts of history. Representations of lived experience that are linked to the unpaid-for labor implicit in personal correspondence provide another perspective upon world events: the domestic layers understandings of the public sphere.

Gregory Dekter focuses on the home front too, where large-scale technological changes have profound effects on immediate experience. In "Perishable and Permanent": Industry, Commodity, and Society in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*," the social connotations of milk are traced from Julia Stephen's *Notes From Sick Rooms* through Mrs. Ramsay's concerns with quality and ultimately to the sky-written advertisement for Glaxo dried milk. The purity of dairy products informs a nostalgia for personal and communal relationships with farmers and milkmen, but also a critique of processes that have become outdated in a post-war world. In its packaged form, milk becomes the conflicted sign of progress in a quasi-religious moment of global capitalism that links the domestic to the imperial.

The social strata drawn together or apart by technology are the topic of Celiese Lypka's "Modern Machines: Intersecting Public and Private Spheres in *Mrs. Dalloway*," in which machines, though rarely described in detail, affect subjects differently depending upon location and context. Where the social dimension of mechanistic spectacle appears to emphasize public roles and hierarchies, technologies in the

home generate opportunities for personal reflection. Those liminal moments, then, at which characters reflect upon the self in public but in relation to machines signal the fluidity of identity, which ruptures clear distinctions between uses and spaces, and suggests an alternative to rigid demarcations of place.

It is the fluidity of radio waves and their effects upon Woolf's understanding of presence and absence that Jeremy Lakoff addresses in "Virginia Woolf's Absent Radio." Lakoff's point of departure is that the medium of the wireless is grounded in both tangible technology and intangible sound waves, a "paradox" that applies to the individual as a receiver, especially in *Between the Acts*. This reconfiguration of materiality and ephemerality connects the subject to a large but diffuse network of signals, which at the same time disconnects the individual from a conventional apprehension of presence.

The disruptive potential of technology lies, then, not just in a reconfiguration of subjectivity but also in a reconfiguration of community. For Jonathan Naito, the clock time marked by the sounds of machines in *Between the Acts* signals the temporary nature of group affiliation. In "The Techno-Onomatopoeia of Woolf's Machines," Naito explores the distinction between sounds produced by the functional object that is the gramophone, and the noises emitted by the machine itself. Where music pushes the action along, the "tick" of the device brings the audience to an awareness of time and existence, and it results in a group suspended together in liminal stasis.

Allan Pero reads the provisionality of the group that is the audience of the pageant through Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of "being-with." In this examination of the gramophone, Pero distinguishes its voice from its content. The voice of the gramophone is "a mediumistic relation" that underwrites the interruption-ridden performance of the pageant and the audience as community. As "an effect of the real," the voice is a mediating presence that speaks from gaps and splits, and that suggests "the contingency that makes the recognition of a 'we' possible" even in a moment of fascistic conceptualizations of self and society.

One of the most influential essays for readings of sound and machines in *Between the Acts* is Michele Pridmore-Brown's 1998 article, "1939-40: Of Virginia Woolf, Gramophones, and Fascism." In her piece for this issue, Pridmore-Brown revisits Woolf to reflect upon media technologies and reproductive technologies as they disrupt patriarchal clocks and interrupt the rhythms of "totalizing experiences" and narratives. The subversive effects of leaning sideways, and of moving subjunctively not just linearly, thus invoke the creation of new syntaxes, the applications of mechanical possibilities in art and life, and the layered implications of technologies produced in and by the hegemonic systems of modernity.

Ann Martin
University of Saskatchewan

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the viewer. In the modern machine age, however, the motor car has taken over, “becom[ing] a viewing instrument on the order of, say the Claude-glass” (Danius 118), but retaining the strange power to place the view behind the viewer. Petre Bruce remarks on “surprisingly good” photographs taken out the rear windows. In Woolf’s essay, the speed of a motor car makes views difficult to successfully isolate: “beauty spread at one’s right hand, at one’s left; *at one’s back too*; it was escaping all the time” (DM 7; emphasis added). The view out the motor car window is conflated with an existential journey: “Gone, gone; over, over; past and down with, past and down with. I feel life left behind even as the road is left behind” (8). In Woolf’s essay, the significance of the view, renovated or otherwise, is inevitably anchored in the viewer.

IV. Conclusion: a new syntax

Partly influenced by the “machines of vision” (Danius 100), partly by the exhilarating experience of motoring at speed through the countryside, Proust realized that to capture the impact of this entirely modern experience of the visual field, a new type of writing was required. Danius calls this new writing Proust’s “syntax of velocity” in which “the inanimate becomes animate; the immobile becomes mobile” (110, 113-14). Given this linkage between the speed of the motor car, Proust, and sentences, it is noteworthy that Woolf’s attraction to Proust is rooted in the syntactic: “he will I suppose,” notes Woolf in her diary, “both influence me & make me out of temper with every sentence of my own” (D3 7). When she wrote this in 1925, Woolf was still a critic of the destructive impact of the motor car on the countryside,⁵ and wary of Proust’s influence and capacity to shake her confidence in her own syntax. But by the time she became a convert to motoring, she was, like the speaker of *A Room of One’s Own*, striving to discern a feminine syntax—“a perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use” (AROO 70)—and more willing to acquiesce to Proust’s presciently modernist rhetoric of speed. Woolf concludes *Orlando*, which she was writing with gusto during her first year of motor car ownership, with a modern, modish driving scene: “Streets widened and narrowed. Long vistas steadily shrunk together” (O 292). As in Proust before her, the immobile objects become mobilized, and the mobilized subject becomes an immobilized tatter of “chopp[ed] up identity” almost “entirely disassembled” (293). From the interior of the motor car, the driver, Orlando, like Woolf’s passenger in “Evening over Sussex,” appeals to other “selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled on a waiter’s hand” (294). It is a scene from a motor car of Orlando’s own, composed in Woolf’s own syntax of velocity.

Robert Hemmings
University of Leeds

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⁵ In her 1924 essay “The Cheapening of Motor-cars,” Woolf describes the harmful impact of these new machines on the “character” of English roads (440).

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The Uprising of the Anecdotes: Women’s Letters and Mass-Produced News in *Jacob’s Room* and *Three Guineas*

In the opening lines of *Jacob’s Room*, Betty Flanders sits on a beach in Cornwall writing home to Captain Barfoot in Scarborough. Recounting her recent trials, her eyes well with tears and, as she looks away, her fountain pen stays at a full stop, making a “horrid blot” on the page. She looks down, ignores the punctuation and continues, “but [sic] mercifully everything seems satisfactorily arranged” (*Jacob’s Room* [JR] 7). The story begun *in medias res*, the page stained with emotion, Betty’s casual overstepping of the bounds of written convention: in Woolf’s treatment, these become symbolic of her vision of letters as a site of resistant women’s writing. This concern recurs some sixteen years later with another series of letters in *Three Guineas*, in which Woolf privileges the private letter over popular formats such as newspapers and the biographies of great men. Personal letters are associated with femininity rather than masculinity, and they carry with them an always-incomplete desire to communicate felt experience. Despite its limitations, letter-writing is imbued with a certain power in that Betty symbolically overrides the barrier of the full stop to shape her thoughts. While books and newspapers are “pressed nightly over the brain and heart of the world” and addressed to a wide audience, taking “the impression of the whole” (JR 98), the personal letter has a restricted readership, which, in Woolf’s treatment, is its strength. In both the early fiction and later non-fiction, the feminized space of the personal letter counters the public, masculine sphere of the modern machine age.

Not that Woolf's men don't write letters—the Captain must have replied to Betty, as do Jacob and his brothers when they are older. Betty receives at least one love letter too (from Mr. Floyd [JR 20-21]). Still, Woolf's feminine narrator claims personal letters to be “our stays and props” that “lace our days together and make of life a perfect globe” (JR 93). In contrast, Jacob is always public-minded: his recurrent ambition is to address Parliament (JR 73, 139); he writes serious notes “upon the importance of history—upon democracy” (150), intending to solidify his position among the literati; and, in one hilarious instance of failed literary criticism, he finds an edition of William Wycherley's plays so poorly edited by a Professor Bulteel of Leeds that he sends off indignant essays to three journals that are quickly returned. His writing is a pole apart in tone and content from his mother's, a product of the public persona Jacob is consciously cultivating at Cambridge and then in London. However, Woolf makes no qualitative distinction between Betty's tear-stained, semi-incoherent private rambles and Jacob's erudite, presumably rational public writing. Hers are gossipy, his boring; hers are short-sighted for being limited to her neighbors in Scarborough, and his equally short-sighted for parroting inaccurate ideas about Ancient Greece (JR 75-76). Such leveling echoes Woolf's conviction in “Modern Fiction” that readers must not “take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small” (*The Common Reader* [CR1] 150). Walter Benjamin, writing almost concurrently with Woolf, isolates the same literary device and names it “the street insurgence of the anecdote” (*The Arcades Project* [AP] 846), distinct from the more orderly constructions of history appearing in newspapers, conventional literature, and published accounts. Woolf and Benjamin, although unaware of each other's work, arrive at a similar conclusion: that paid-for work (masculine/bourgeois) is held as more socially valuable than unpaid-for work (feminine/working class). Just as work is inflected with class and gender, so is writing: newspapers, being products of the extant economic system, are not simple reports of events but complex networks of politics and finance. Hence, Woolf says to the daughters of educated men, “[I]f you want to know any fact about politics you must read at least three different papers...and come in the end to your own conclusion” (*Three Guineas* [TG] 95).

Woolf repeatedly takes up the newspaper as an exemplar of modernity in early stories such as “The Mark on the Wall” or “Sympathy,” and in “An Unwritten Novel” it appears as the ubiquitous prop of everyday life. Like most men his age, Jacob regularly reads papers like *The Globe*, *The Evening Standard*, and the shorter-lived *The Star* (which ran from 1869-1900 [JR 90]) and seeks out London papers while travelling. Vincent Sherry points out that in these stories, the “culture of journalism” is “a medium equally unreliable and irresistible” (258). In Woolf's early fiction this attitude of wariness towards news media is expressed as the narrator's gentle mockery of Jacob's upwardly-mobile writerly ambitions, of a part with his sketchy grasp of Greek and a “typically masculine desire for power” (Spiropoulou 71). By 1938, when *Three Guineas* appears in print, Woolf's attitude has hardened. She acknowledges that, “daughters of educated men,” being “generalists not specialists...must rely upon such evidence as we can collect from history, biography, and from the daily paper” (TG 130). She then embarks on a sustained reading against the grain of masculinist historical accounts, biographies of men, and newspaper accounts. Merry Pawlowski has observed that Woolf's inclusion of labeled and unlabeled newspaper images in her reading notebooks sets up an intricate destabilization of the truth claims of precisely those published accounts. Particularly in detailing her research on the newspapers' treatment of the women's suffrage movement, Woolf writes, “The power of the Press to burke discussion of any undesirable subject was, and still is, very formidable” (TG n16 162), and goes on to list police brutality and reporters' scorn for women activists. Masculinity, the newspapers, and war are collated into an elegy for lost innocence in *Jacob's Room*; they coalesce in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and then in *Three Guineas* to form a repressive cultural mass against which Woolf pits her record of

the systematic persecution of the feminine. The experimental method of the early novel spurs the emphatic political bent of the later essays.

Benjamin's view of the relationship between contemporary literature, the newspaper, and business in the twentieth century is useful in examining the further consequences of Woolf's literary method. In “The Author as Producer” (1934), Benjamin hopes that the newspaper will be a forum in which the traditionally disenfranchised can wrest control of the written word away from its bourgeois owners. Like Woolf's canny woman reader in *Three Guineas*, Benjamin is all too aware that the revolutionary potential of the newspaper has not been realized, since it “still belongs to capital” (*Reflections* [R] 225). In the newspaper, Benjamin writes, “Work itself has its turn to speak” (R 225). Woolf also states that although “the control of the Press—the decision what to print, what not to print—is entirely in the hands of [the male] sex” (TG 12), it is possible to envision a future in which “some daughter of an educated man who has enough to live upon... can read and write for her own pleasure” (TG 95) and does not have to acquiesce to the literary prostitution of popular romance writers like Mrs. Oliphant (TG 91-92). Woolf doesn't shun the newspaper, for it is “history and biography in the raw...sometimes openly in the lines, sometimes covertly behind them” (TG 115). Instead of a retort damning the popular press, she offers a “counter-discourse” of the politics of reading using “an elastic, pluralistic prose that challenges the reader to think” (Cuddy-Keane 27) rather than agreeing with simplified oppositional binaries.

The crux of capital's control of the newspaper, Benjamin suggests, is that it “makes everything abstract. ‘Empathy’: this is what newspaper reading terminates in” (AP 846; original emphasis). In his sense, empathy is not positive because it is an easy emotion indulged in without real attachment or consequences, sustaining a detached complacency in the newspaper reader. The struggle of the modern reader is, instead, for closeness, as David Rando writes, to “clear a space for fleeting moments of shocking nearness of experience” (38). Countering the impersonality of the newspaper report and its attempt to disguise the circumstances of its production, Benjamin elevates the anecdote to supreme importance. In a section named “Uprising of the anecdotes” he notes: “The constructions of history are comparable to instructions that commandeer the true life and confine it to barracks. On the other hand: the street insurgence of the anecdote. The anecdote brings things near to us spatially, lets them enter our life” (AP 846). Instead of distant and detached empathy, Benjamin advocates nearness and specificity. In a parallel move, Woolf shines the “coloured light of biography” on her subjects in *Three Guineas* instead of the “white light of facts” (TG 45). War is on both their minds—Benjamin directly refers to history's barracking of lived experience, above. Woolf utilizes a narrative method whose attention to domestic scenes counters the anonymized nature of war news or propaganda reports. The precise way she connotes the scene of writing—“how mothers down at Scarborough scribble over the fire with their feet on the fender, when tea's cleared away” (JR 90)—emphasizes that Betty Flanders's letters are lit through by the colored light of lived experience. *Jacob's Room* dramatizes this conflict, pitching Jacob's writing against his mother's to mark the extent to which her work is ignored or dismissed.

Betty's real purpose in writing to her sons is “probably this—Don't go with bad women, do be a good boy; wear your thick shirts; and come back, come back, come back to me” (JR 90). What she actually says is quite different, a collection of seemingly inconsequential Scarborough gossip. As Anna Snaith has written, letters “both empower and limit women in [Woolf's] writing” (1), and Betty's letters can be seen as a site of failure, torn between the specter of sex that she wants to confront and the bonds of convention that dictate what a mother can properly ask her son. She is, like the culture she represents, an “amorphous bundle, swaddled up...in insincerity,

emitting half truths from her timid lips, sweetening and diluting her message with whatever sugar or water serves [her purpose]" (TG 99). Indeed, Woolf's narrator seems almost convinced midway through Chapter Eight that Betty's attempts to communicate are pointless: "[E]verywhere we go wires and tubes surround us to carry the voices that try to penetrate...[yet] something whispers, Is this all? Can I never know, share, be certain? Am I doomed all my days to write letters, send voices...while life dwindles...?" (JR 93). In this light, *Jacob's Room* can sound like an elegy for thwarted motherhood and Betty Flanders's "pale blue envelope lying by the biscuit-box" (JR 92) an icon of defeat.

Yet, Woolf reminds us in *Three Guineas* that culture "is, in reality, muscular, adventurous, free" (TG 99) if only it can break from its adherence to extant (masculinist, commercial) principles. Betty Flanders marks a beginning, not an end. She is a precursor to liberated new women like Jinny Carslake or Sandra Wentworth Williams, whom Jacob admires, and also to the daughters of educated men who embody an emergent culture and fresh intellectual freedom. Woolf's third letter in *Three Guineas* makes an unambiguous distinction between "paid-for culture," which includes formal learning and writing undertaken for money such as in the newspapers, and "unpaid-for culture, that which consists in being able to read and write [one's] own tongue" (TG 90). The Oxbridge universities are unilaterally masculinist (recall that in *Jacob's Room* Miss Umphelby, who sings Virgil just as well as the men, nevertheless attracts fewer students than Professor Cowan, [JR 42]) and so are most professions. Woolf, a "democratic highbrow" (Cuddy-Keane 13), sees the uprising of anecdotes and the freeing of culture coming from generalists like the daughters of educated men who know their own tongue but not always Latin and Greek. For Benjamin too the revolutionary potential of the newspapers exists because the average reporter's "[l]iterary qualification is founded no longer on specialized but, rather, on polytechnic education and is thus public property" (R 225). He also locates hope for change in the dissolution of barriers to access, chief among which are those associated with higher learning and foreign languages. Finally, it is worth noting that Woolf was, in Benjaminian terms, at another revolutionary focal point. Where Benjamin postulates that "the best [opinions] are no use if they make nothing useful out of those that have them" (R 233), Woolf, as one of the few writers with control of a "private printing press...[within] a moderate income" (TG 98), emerges as a potential fulcrum for real change.

With an eye peeled for anecdotes, chapter 8 of *Jacob's Room* reads in a more positive light despite the narrator's momentary gloom. In the course of the chapter, Jacob leaves work and returns home after a walk with Richard Bonamy; his lover Florinda arrives at his lodgings and, seeing the letter downstairs, brings it up for him. Jacob recognizes his mother's hand and ignores it in his ardor; later he reads it with half his attention, simultaneously musing that Florinda must care deeply for him because she "could no more pretend a feeling than swallow whisky" (JR 94). Woolf draws the mother and lover together through the blue envelope that passes through their fingers, their lowbrow femininity excluding them from Jacob's world of "male society, cloistered rooms, and the works of the classics" (82). Although Jacob doesn't find his mother as "horribly brainless" (80) as he does his lover, he reserves his respect for male friends like Bonamy, and women like Clara, or Mrs. Wentworth Williams, all of whom have greater access to the aura of Oxbridge than Betty or Florinda.

"Then," the narrator casually lets slip, "[Jacob] saw [Florinda] turning up Greek Street upon another man's arm" (94). Apparently she does have reserves and depths of deception that Jacob has missed. He walks the streets in torment, finally returning to his room to sit by his fire and pick up *The Globe*. Betty's chatty letter has already told him that, "things look bad, politics that is" (91); the paper now retells her anecdote in formal, masculinized language "over five columns" (98). Jacob appears to be reading for fifteen long minutes, then fiddles with his pipe and reads on. The narrator ironizes his feigned attention: "He was *certainly* thinking

about Home Rule in Ireland—a very difficult matter. A very cold night" (98; emphasis mine).

The night brings him thoughts of Florinda, and recalls for readers the restless nighttime walks of Mrs. Jarvis (27) and twilight reverie of Mrs. Durrant (56). As if carried by the weather, the scene breaks away from Jacob and wafts elliptically to Scarborough, where the day has "gone out" by four o'clock. An unnamed woman, probably Betty Flanders, lingers at a window and sees that "the old shepherd returned stiffly across the field" (99). Intimately familiar with the scene, she senses that "[s]tiffly and painfully the frozen earth was trodden under" and, awake worrying about her sons, she would hear the "worn voice of clocks repeat[ing] the fact of the hour all night long." There is another break in the narration that collapses space, as if Betty's sensations reach her son in London: "Jacob, too, hear[s] them" (99) and goes to bed. Even though Jacob privileges the world of paid-for culture and devalues the women who love him, the feminine impulse rearranges the narrative. The maternal chimes displace the newspaper in Jacob's sensory world, usurping his attention. As the chapter closes, it comes to mind that the narrator has earlier equated Betty's failed letter with those of Byron and Cowper, "[m]asters of language, poets of long ages, [who have] addressed themselves to the task of reaching, touching, penetrating the individual heart. Would that it were possible!" (93). The failure is not of Betty's intellect but of language worn threadbare into clichés. Anticipating the outraged letter-writer of *Three Guineas*, the narrator of *Jacob's Room* widens the issue of women's writing into a universal problem of language, showing the writer to be as worthy as anyone but her task uniquely impossible.

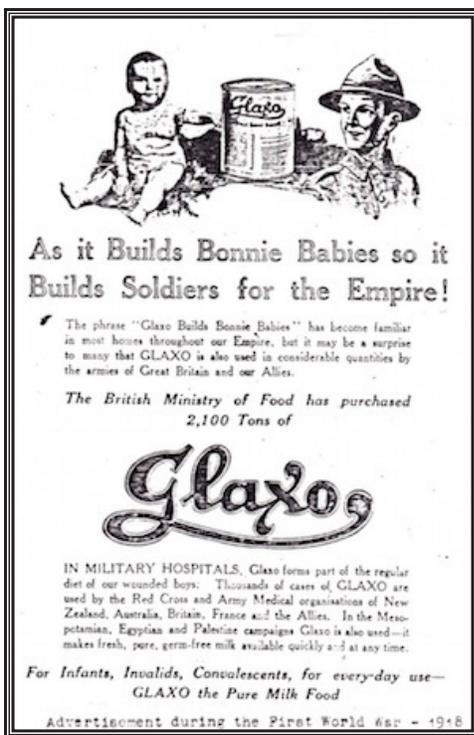
Woolf's narrative method begins the task of breaking the control of the Press (and culture more generally) by a single gender by distinguishing the particular within the general. She encourages writers to "[f]ind out new ways of approaching 'the public': single it into separate people instead of massing it into one monster, gross in body, feeble in mind" (TG 98). There is perhaps no better example of writing than a personal letter that addresses people as individuals. I find it particularly resonant that Benjamin himself edited a collection of letters, *German Men and Women* (1936) as a snapshot of the educated middle class over the nineteenth century, unknowingly mirroring Woolf's fictional method. The letters scattered throughout *Jacob's Room* are an important symbol of unpaid-for women's work whose power Woolf examines more systematically in *Three Guineas*. After the war, the devastated Jinny Carslake is reported to have become an eccentric who made "the strangest confidences to shy young Englishmen" who remind her of Jacob. Holding out a box of ordinary pebbles, Jinny says to whoever will listen: "[I]f you look at them steadily...multiplicity becomes unity, which is somehow the secret of life" (JR 131). At the end of *Three Guineas*, Woolf's letter-writer says that to "make unity out of multiplicity...that would be to dream—to dream the recurring dream that has haunted the human mind since the beginning of time; the dream of peace, the dream of freedom" (TG 143). Jinny's haunted ramblings delivered secondhand in *Jacob's Room* are yet another anecdote in a text peppered with them. Despite the prosaic, masculine world of facts these little stories haunt our human minds.

Ria Banerjee
Guttman Community College, CUNY

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"Medical Advertisement from Days Past."

Waiuku Museum. 27 October 2014. 18 April 2016

<https://waiukumuseum.wordpress.com/2014/10/27/medical-advertisement-from-days-past-3/>

"Perishable and Permanent": Industry, Commodity, and Society in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*

Although the larger outputs of modern technology are often read as some of the most emblematic features of Virginia Woolf's writing—in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the car with a punctured tire or the airplane tracing letters in the sky (2, 17); in *To the Lighthouse*, the mechanized lighthouse itself, pulsing cool and impersonal beams into the Ramsay cottage (109)—these describe only one part of the quickly changing material world Woolf observed and recorded in her novels. Indeed, the period spanning

Woolf's birth at the end of the nineteenth century through to the Second World War was one of significant change not just in terms of obvious mechanical technologies, but also in a more immediate and personal sense. Everything of material value, from clothing to milk, was applied to the mechanisms of industry in the hope that it could be improved. Part of Woolf's formal project in both novels, then, is to exhibit the large and small concerns in equal measure, so that we read as much in the airplane itself as the message it delivers. To complement the range of scholarship examining the larger societal currents of change at play in Woolf's writing, it is important to examine the smaller, more domestic ebbs as well.

In 1883, one year after her daughter Virginia was born, Julia Stephen published *Notes From Sick Rooms*, a series of practical ruminations on contemporary medicine intended for use by nurses, a profession Stephen herself once practiced. The handbook covers the general duties of a nurse, along with a range of treatments and remedies that, in her experience, Stephen found "useful, or useless, in such cases of illness as I have had the opportunity of watching" (Stephen 35). An important section on convalescence begins by discussing the preparation and administration of certain foods, and identifies, for example, that beef-tea is a good meal supplement due to its simplicity and soothing nature. Significant in her contribution to a long history of English domestic handbooks, and a feature that clearly situates it in the late nineteenth-century, is that these remedies are marked with references to contemporary consumer products: homemade beef-tea can be thickened with Groult's tapioca, or replaced altogether by Brand's essence of beef (38).

Because the contemporary understanding of nutrition was yet rudimentary, scientific explanations are lacking from Stephen's procedures. Wisdom, in any case, was the nurse's guide—not chemistry. For this reason—that it could not be relied on as common knowledge—Stephen carefully advises that for the patient needing milk, "the nurse must see the milkman herself and impress on him the importance of sweet fresh milk from one cow being always brought," and that furthermore, she "must empty the milk into a flat pan[;]... this pan must be placed in a cold place, and must be well scalded each time it is emptied" (39). Implied but unstated are the manifold factors of sanitation and contamination to which milk is naturally susceptible, especially when lacking refrigeration. Stephen's instructions are also an attempt, then, to protect against the intentional adulteration of milk, a crime so prevalent in England in 1882 that "one-fifth of the 20,000 milk analyses made by the 52 county and 172 borough analysts was adulterated" with such compounds as boric acid, chalk, and water, itself often contaminated (Wohl 21). And yet, despite these risks, milk remained a staple of the English diet, for both the sick and well, because of its relative affordability and widespread availability. A study from 1892 shows, in fact, "the annual consumption per capita in London was 11.5 gallons... and in the country generally 19.7 gallons" (Farmers 136). The social value of milk cannot be overemphasized.

The state of milk remained a contentious issue for the first half of the twentieth century, not just in London but throughout the rest of Britain as well. We might glean from Stephen's knowledge on the subject, and because it was Woolf's desire to insert her mother's character into *To the Lighthouse* (Zwerdling 180), at least one reason for Woolf's interest in the milk problem. As with Stephen, Mrs. Ramsay is upset by the "milk delivered at your door in London positively brown with dirt" (*To the Lighthouse* [TTL] 49), and at the dinner table advocates for reform: it was "a question (she was thoroughly roused [...] and talked very empathetically) of real butter and clean milk. Speaking with warmth and eloquence she described the iniquity of the English dairy system, and in what state milk was delivered at the door" (84). The dairy system Mrs. Ramsay refers to was, by the first decade of the nineteenth century, vastly outdated. Since the mid-1800s populations in towns and cities relied largely on milk carried by rail, "its freshness [...] dependent on