“Scraps, orts and fragments”: Collecting Virginia Woolf

By Emily Kopley, 4th year doctoral student in English at Stanford

In Virginia Woolf’s last novel, the posthumously published *Between the Acts* (1941), a gramophone plays a cacophonous blend of classical, folk, and popular music to an audience of English villagers at the beginning of the Second World War. Listening to this chaos, the villagers wonder “Was that voice ourselves? Scraps, orts and fragments, are we, also, that?” They identify their own motley, confused, and anxious selves with the serial snatches of tunes, and in this identification find a sense of calm. “They crashed; solved; united,” Woolf writes of the villagers’ communal listening. In *To the Lighthouse* (1927), the philosophy student Charles Tansley feels painfully baffled in the home of his professor, his perception “all in scraps and fragments.” Yet in *The Waves* (1931), the novelist Bernard thinks, “I begin to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement.” Woolf’s fiction reveals fragments—of song, of language, of thoughts, of memory—to be the stuff that life is made on, insufficient splinters when seen from one angle, inviting scraps of a human-made order, when seen from another.

Woolf’s writing seems to me to have great aesthetic unity, a beauty formed of coherent patterns that made me fall in love with it when, in high school AP English, my teacher assigned *To the Lighthouse*. But the pieces of Woolf’s writing, and the pieces of writing about Woolf, have little physical unity: Woolf’s work exists in thousands of printings and editions and translations, The Hogarth Press (1917-1987) published around a thousand books and pamphlets, the scholarly and biographical and imaginative work on Woolf mounts by several bookshelves every year, and all these publications lie scattered. When I realized, as an undergraduate, that I wanted to become a Woolf scholar, I decided to gather the pieces. In collecting work by, published by, and about Virginia Woolf, I seek to make some unity out of material scraps, orts and fragments.

Early in college at Yale University, I bought reading copies of Woolf’s novels, none of them rare, some of them ratty. During the summer after my sophomore year, I purchased my first unusual Woolf item: a pristine copy of her “A Letter to a Young Poet,” which I discovered in the Concord, Massachusetts, shop “Books with a Past.” This essay is now a key text in my dissertation. The pamphlet is one in a series called The Hogarth Letters, each cover bearing John Banting’s drawing of a veiny pen-wielding hand poised above several sheets of paper. Every “Letter” features this design in a different color. After my Concord conquest, I aimed to own the rainbow. So far I’ve got a half-arc, heavy on the blues and greens. The Concord purchase prompted me to seek more items published by The Hogarth Press and made me realize that certain rare Woolf items, such as pamphlets and periodicals, are affordable even on a student budget. I also started collecting The Hogarth Press’s “Sixpenny Pamphlet” series, as well as first printings of Woolf essays and short
stories, and whatever first or signed or unusual editions I could obtain. On coffee runs to New Haven’s Book Trader café, on visits home to central Pennsylvania, on family vacations in New England, on weekend trips from Yale to New York and Boston, and on procrastinatory explorations of AbeBooks.com, I sought out my treasures.

A junior year seminar on Woolf, taught by Margaret Homans, confirmed my desire to study Woolf professionally. The following summer (2005) I traveled for two months in England on a grant to visit Woolf’s homes and landscapes. I began my trip a proud light packer, with only one book in my hiker’s backpack: a guidebook about Woolf’s houses. But each house I visited sold its own guidebook, and bookstores on Woolfian terrain, such as Bow Windows in Lewes, sold much worth weighing me down. On these travels I also found what is now one of my favorite pieces: a postcard of Godrevy lighthouse, the inspiration for To the Lighthouse. This I found at a flea market in St. Ives, the town where Woolf spent childhood summers and the harbor to which Godrevy guides sailors.

When I returned to Yale, I wrote my senior thesis on structural symmetry in Woolf’s fiction. My writing inspired my collecting: I bought a first printing of “The Lady in the Looking Glass” to see the original appearance of a story my thesis considered; I bought a full set of Woolf’s essays, letters, and diaries to grasp the context around the fiction; I bought scholarly books, recent and classic and forgotten, to know what had been said. With Yale’s Adrian van Sinderen Prize, which is similar to the Wreden prize, I bought from William Reese my first bibliography, J. Howard Woolmer’s A Checklist of The Hogarth Press, 1917-1946. Now I was serious! A good friend gave me as a graduation present a letterpress broadside that features passages drawn from a Woolf concordance. And my parents gave me a handsome first British edition of Between the Acts.

Once in graduate school here at Stanford, I delighted in the Bay Area’s abundance of bookstores and book fairs. At Serendipity Books in Berkeley I found many Hogarth Press publications, a letter by Hogarth Press editor John Lehmann, rare and foreign scholarly volumes, and a nicely heavy and gilded biography of Leslie Stephen, Woolf’s father, that includes Woolf’s first publication in a book. At Serendipity, my pile would start to teeter and I in turn to waver, but Peter Howard offered a quiet generosity that assured me I could manage everything. At the San Francisco Book Fair in 2009, I had the great luck to find, anomalous among the Americana of MacDonnell Rare Books, The Hogarth Press’s publication of a translation of Ivan Bunin’s The Gentleman From San Francisco. “I thought someone here would buy it for the title,” said Kevin MacDonnell. I’m buying it for the publisher, I explained.

The volume fascinated me – who was S. S. Koteliansky, credited for the translation along with Leonard Woolf and D. H. Lawrence, neither of whom knew Russian? For a term paper in Spring 2010, I found out: Samuel Solomonovich Koteliansky was a Ukrainian Jew who immigrated to England before the Russian Revolution and became a devoted friend of Lawrence, as well as a frequent and idiosyncratic translator for the Hogarth Press. He also translated for the London Mercury two folk stories his mother had written down for him in Yiddish. I have been studying Yiddish since I came to Stanford, so this information heightened my interest in “Kot,” as he was called. I hope someday to turn the term paper into an article.
Another example of a discovery-turned-research-project: close to home, at Bell’s Books in Palo Alto, I found a first American edition of the doctoral thesis of George Rylands, who worked at The Hogarth Press from July to December 1924. The book, *Words and Poetry*, reveals Rylands’s sympathy with Woolf’s project of absorbing the rhythms and patterns of poetry into the novel. Rylands now figures prominently in my dissertation chapter about Woolf’s relationship to young male poets. Similarly, my mounting John Lehmann material both built on and bolstered my interest in the Oxford and Cambridge poets of Lehmann’s and Woolf’s circle. As these examples indicate, collecting Woolf both satisfies and stimulates my research on her.

Stanford has a rich history of Woolf scholarship. The late Lucio Ruotolo, who taught in the English department, wrote a monograph on interruption in Woolf’s novels, co-founded the enduring *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* in 1973, and for decades mentored graduate students who worked on Woolf. The books of Ruotolo’s students encourage me from their perches on my shelves. Today, Terry Castle, Peter Stansky, and Alice Staveley continue the tradition of teaching and studying Woolf at Stanford, and all have been helpful mentors to me. This past summer I enjoyed helping Peter Stansky prepare an exhibition for the San Francisco Book Club, “The Birth of Bloomsbury: 1910.” I am now writing my dissertation, under the direction of Terry Castle, about Woolf’s attitude towards the poetry of her time.

It was not Woolf who first wrote about “scraps, orts and fragments”; Shakespeare used the words in *Troilus and Cressida*, when Troilus fumes about Cressida’s unfaithfulness: “The fractions of her faith, orts of her love, / The fragments, orts, the bits and greasy relics / Of her o’er-eaten faith, are bound to Diomed” (V.ii.179-181). In *Between the Acts*, Woolf elevates these “fragments of . . . faith, orts of . . . love” from the “greasy” parcels representing infidelity to the profound puzzle pieces that, when assembled, create a feeling of completeness and community—a feeling, indeed, of faith and love. Gathering scraps, orts and fragments of writing associated with Woolf testifies to something similar.

**Bibliography : an annotated selection of fifty items**

Note: This selection does not include certain items mentioned above, including Woolf’s letters, diaries, essays; the guidebook to her houses; the Woolmer bibliography; and the books written by Ruotolo and his Stanford advisees.

**Rare Woolf editions** *(In my selection I have focused on work published during Woolf’s lifetime or soon after her death)*


> Of *Mrs. Dalloway* then one can only bring to light at the moment a few scraps, of little importance or none perhaps; as that in the first version Septimus, who later is intended to be her double, had no existence; and that Mrs. Dalloway was originally to kill herself, or perhaps merely to die at the end of the party [. . .] The novel was the obvious lodging, but the novel it seemed was built on the wrong plan. Thus rebuked the idea started as the oyster starts or the snail to secrete a house for itself. (vii-viii)

---. *Ponia Delovéj*. Translation of *Mrs. Dalloway* into Lithuanian by Violeta Tauragiene. Vilnius: Zaltvyksle, 1994. Bought Summer 2009 at Pigios Knygos (bookstore), Vilnius. Very good hb, no dj (as apparently issued). Cover image of glamorous 1920s woman in mirror-image over horizontal. In Summer 2009, I spent a month studying Yiddish at the Vilnius Yiddish Institute. Every day I walked from a military dorm to campus, passing this book in the window of a used bookstore. Only at the end of the month did I take a closer look and realize that this was a Lithuanian Clarissa!


**Periodicals featuring work by or related to Woolf, ordered chronologically**

Woolf scholar Krystyna Colburn. Auction benefited Girls Write Now, a mentoring program run from the New School.


*The Yale Review.* New Haven: Yale UP, June 1932 (Vol. 21, No. 4). Good condition: front cover chipped, back cover gone, inside clean and intact. Includes first printing of Woolf’s “A Letter to a Young Poet.” This printing has several small variants from the printing in the Hogarth Letters series.


*The Criterion: A Quarterly Review.* Ed. T. S. Eliot. London: Faber & Faber Ltd., April 1936 (Vol. 15, No. 60). Good condition: cover chipped, spine worn. Bought at Commonwealth Books, Boston, on 6/8/10. Includes “Fiction Chronicle” by A. Desmond Hawkins. Hawkins assesses the current discussion about the distinction (or lack thereof) between prose and poetry, a discussion in which Woolf vociferously participated in essays such as “Poetry, Fiction and the Future” (1927) and “A Letter to a Young Poet” (1932). Hawkins responds specifically to Louis MacNeice, who had recently written in *The Arts Today* (1935, ed. Geoffrey Grigson) that “The more sensitive novelists (e.g., Mrs. Virginia Woolf) are approaching poetic form.” Hawkins disliked MacNeice’s argument that verse would overtake fiction, and he disliked too MacNeice’s esteem of Woolf. In this “Fiction Chronicle,” he wrote:
Miss [Dorothy] Richardson has an essentially feminine sensibility, and a very sterile verbal inventiveness. Her idiom is a critical idiom, rapidly converting action into abstraction, hurriedly evaporating minimal event into the very refined, very rarefied vapour that is also exhaled (though with a more rainbowed hue) by that other most ladylike lady, Mrs. Woolf. This is fine work, a most delicate embroidery of exquisite nuance. It is even over-refined, a bit genteel from lack of an informing vitality, a spinning of less out of little with the end in sight but never arriving. (486)


Hogarth Press publications, independent of Woolf’s work listed above

Hogarth Press Books

Bunin, I. A. The Gentleman from San Francisco and Other Stories. 1922. Trans. S. S. Koteliansky and Leonard Woolf. D. H. Lawrence also credited as translator in errata slip, still attached. NF condition: Beautiful blue, green, and yellow cover paper boards. No dj, as issued. Woolmer 19. 1,000 copies printed. Bought at the San Francisco Antiquarian Book Fair, 2/16/09, from MacDonnell Rare Books of Austin, TX.


Forster, E. M. England’s Pleasant Land. 1940. Fine orange cloth boards in NF yellow dj lettered in green. Woolmer 466. 2,030 copies printed. Bought at Serendipity Books in Berkeley, CA, in Spring 2010. This pageant play by Woolf’s good friend Forster may have influenced or confirmed Woolf’s decision to set the action of Between the Acts at a country pageant.

Conference, in NYC, June 2009, from the collection of Woolf scholar Krystyna Colburn. Auction benefited Girls Write Now, a mentoring program run from the New School.


Book includes MS Lehmann letter! Not published. Postmarked 25 Aug. 1942 to John Hayward, Esq. / Merton Hall (c/o Lord Rothschild) / Cambridge. Transcribed:

[stationary reads at top: 601 Carrington House Hertford Street. W.I. / Grosvenor 3181]

25.viii.42

My dear John,

I have asked my secretary to send you a copy of “New Writing and Daylight,” and shall look forward to hearing any observations you may have to make about it.

About Tambi’s book—I promised to let you know what the [illegible] omissions seemed to me to be. I don’t want to do captions, as I like Tambi and am interested in his work, and also derived considerable pleasure from the book; however he admits himself that he didn’t complete his scenes [?]. I think that if he puts Herbert Read in, he ought certainly to include work by Edith Sitwell (from that wonderful “Street Song”), Robert Graves, Norman Cameron (from “Work in Hand” or elsewhere) and William Plomer. All these have written work of real value since the war began; and among the younger lot, the work of Peter Yates, Adam Jinan [?] and Lawrence Little seems to me just as promising as an apocalyptic horseman he has represented. Also, --and I think he agrees with me
now—Roy Fuller has done far more impressive work than he has got hold of here.
There are others too, but I wouldn’t push them forward yet.

I gave Rosamond [Lehmann’s sister] your message. It was so very nice seeing you.

Yours ever

John L.

Note: The first issue of *New Writing and Daylight* was published in September 1942
(Woolmer 494), and it is this that Lehmann promises to send to Hayward. This issue was
the first in a series of seven. John Hayward (1905-65) was a Cambridge friend of
Lehmann’s who became a great editor and archivist. He worked on editions of the Earl of
Rochester, John Donne, Jonathan Swift, and, in the 1950s and 1960s, T. S. Eliot. From
1946 to 1957 he lived with Eliot as a friend and secretary. “Tambi” is Tambimuttu, an
editor and poet. I have not yet identified the anthology in question.

Palmer, Herbert. *Songs of Salvation, Sin, and Satire*. 1925. VG condition: original red and blue
marbled boards with paste-down title, a white label lettered in black. No dj, as issued. Presented
to me by William Reese upon my receiving Yale’s Adrian van Sinderen Prize. Woolmer 72. 300
copies printed.

Series, No. 24. 1932. Fine condition: striking blue cloth boards lettered in gilt, with no dj, as
issued; some tanning to spine. Woolmer 306. 600 copies printed. Includes work by W. H. Auden,
Stephan Spender, Cecil Day-Lewis, William Plomer, William Empson, Julian Bell, John

by Lytton Strachey. VG green-and-blue diamond-print boards with no dj, as issued. This is the
American first edition of a book originally published in 1928 by The Hogarth Press (Woolmer
175). Rylands worked at the Press for six months in 1924 and remained close friends of the
Woolfs. This book, Rylands’s Cambridge doctoral thesis, says much that corresponds to Woolf’s
convictions about the power of prose to take over the burden of poetry. Rylands writes, “Modern
poets have poached upon the preserves of prose, and modern novelists are returning the
compliment” (5). He cites *Mrs Dalloway* “as an example of prose employing poetic method”
because “the striking of Big Ben inspires a rhythmical phrase which is repeated” (75). Rylands
also perpetuates the argument of Woolf’s essay “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown”: “Novelists (with
the exception of Arnold Bennett and the old school) are abandoning descriptive detail [. . . ]
They describe emotionally, impressionistically like the poet” (n1 on 6).

cloth boards lettered in red, VG orange dj lettered in red. Woolmer 212. 3,057 copies printed.
Bought at 20th Annual Virginia Woolf Conference, in Georgetown, KY, for auction to benefit
Old Friends, a charity to take care of aging horses.

Hogarth Press Pamphlets


Forster, E. M. *A Letter to Madan Blanchard—The Hogarth Letters No. 1*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1931. Fine: bright buff wrappers printed in black and blue. Woolmer 254. 5,000 copies printed; 500 bound up in collected edition of *The Hogarth Letters*. The British Madan Blanchard ventured upon a Robinson Crusoë-like existence on the island of Palau, Micronesia, after the *Antelope* wrecked there in August 1783. He remained on the island in exchange for the Prince of Palau, Lee Boo, who was taken back to England in order to become “civilized.” Forster archly retells the story, stating as his premise: “I want to know why you stopped behind when the others went.”


Spender, Stephen. *The New Realism: A Discussion—Hogarth Sixpenny Pamphlets, Number 2*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1939. NF: some browning to edges of cover and pages, original stitched binding. Woolmer 459. Number of copies printed unknown. Spender became a friend of Woolf in 1933, even though in the 1932 “A Letter to a Young Poet” she had faulted his poetry for being solipsistic. Throughout the 1930s they exchanged long letters about their work, and after Woolf’s death Spender discussed Woolf and her work in his memoir *World Within World* and in his several books of criticism.


West, Rebecca. *A Letter to a Grandfather*—*The Hogarth Letters No. 7*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1933. VG: cover edges slightly chipped and browned, binding tight and stapled—as issued, I think. Woolmer 333. 2,500 copies printed. Woolmer does not mention stapling. He does note that of the Hogarth Letters, this is “the only one to be bound in yapp wrappers.” Despite the “No. 7” designation, this was actually the last—that is, the 12th—to be published in the series. As such, it was not included in the collected edition of *The Hogarth Letters* (1933), a volume designed to sell unsold copies of the other letters.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Letter to a Young Poet*—*The Hogarth Letters No. 8*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1932. NF: slight browning to cover and pages, very tight. Green design on buff wrappers. Woolmer 314. 6,000 copies printed; 500 bound up in collected edition of *The Hogarth Letters*. Bought in Concord, MA, in Summer 2003 at Books With a Past. In this essay Woolf criticizes the young male poets Lehmann, Spender, Auden, and Day-Lewis for writing egotistical verse that does not reflect modern reality. She identifies their challenge as finding a form to blend quotidian modern life (“the bicycle and the omnibus”) with beauty and lyricism (“daffodils”). A solution she proposes is that they write about other people, the way Shakespeare and Crabbe did. That is, she seems to argue against writing lyric poetry, which is literally self-centered, and rather to argue for writing dramatic poetry, which is more like the novel in its concern for many people. She wrote the essay at John Lehmann’s suggestion. As a young assistant to The Hogarth Press, Lehmann had established the Hogarth Letters series. Knowing that Woolf had many thoughts about the difference between poetry and prose, and the contemporary roles of each, he encouraged her to write an essay advising young poets. Lehmann and the other young poets quoted in the essay were not immensely pleased with the result.

---. *Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown*—*The Hogarth Essays*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1928. 2nd Impression (first published 1924). Vanessa Bell black and white cover image of androgynous person reading open book. Yellowing at top, else VG. Woolmer 54. 1,000 copies printed in this 2nd impression. Bought by my father at Daedalus Used Books, Charlottesville, CA, in July 2010. In this essay, frequently anthologized and taken as Woolf’s definitive statement of her own method, Woolf faults the Georgian novelists Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, and John Galsworthy for their attention to material description at the expense of mental exploration. She proposes that the novel should convey characters’ minds, just as she is beginning to do in her own fiction.


Rare scholarly books and other rare books associated with Woolf

Bell, Clive. Civilization: An Essay. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1928. First American Edition. Good condition: original black boards, title and author rewritten onto spine with white ink, last few pages uncut, missing dj. Opens with three-page short essay titled “Dedication to Virginia Woolf.” Bought at The Strand in 2007. Clive Bell had married Vanessa Stephen, Virginia’s sister, in 1907, and had enjoyed a brief flirtation with Virginia while Vanessa tended to the Bells’ first son, Julian. But by 1928 Clive’s relationship with both Vanessa and Virginia was platonic. This book embarrassed the dedicatee and many others in the fairly socialist Bloomsbury circle because it argued that an elite leisured class was necessary for a “civilized” society.

Guiguet, Jean. Virginia Woolf et Son Oeuvre: L’Art et la Quête du Réel. Paris: Études Anglaises 13: Didier, 1962. VG first ed., some pages uncut; pages browned at edges, some pencil underlining. Inscribed: “With the author’s / compliments / Jean Guiguet.” Bought at The Strand’s upstairs Rare Book Dept. in 2008. This is a classic French study of Woolf that details the history of criticism on Woolf until 1962 and thoughtfully surveys Woolf’s essays, novels, stories, and biographies. The concluding chapter remains one of the best assessments of Woolf’s project, and ranges from the arguable problems of Woolf’s work to her humor and lyricism. Guiguet understands Woolf’s desire to achieve in prose the density of poetry:

For her, only intensity mattered. All her quest, all her efforts were devoted to the elimination of wasted time, to the expression of pure intensity; and that is the way that leads to poetry. The shower of atoms, the myriad impressions that struck her [these are Woolf’s descriptions], always called forth, sooner or later, that lyric note mingling wonder and anguish, and striving, through the opacity of language, to render the emotion of a human beings at grips with the obsessive mysteries: life, love and death—and time and space, which are the forms under which we apprehend them. (in Jean Stewart’s English translation for The Hogarth Press, 1965)

Lee, Hermione. The Novels of Virginia Woolf. NF hb in VG dj. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1977. First US ed. Cover illustration of Roger Fry’s “Woman in a Garden.” Hermione Lee, Woolf’s most thorough and just biographer, published this study as her first book. It remains one of the finest books centered on Woolf’s novels. Lee positions her study as specifically not about Woolf’s childhood sexual abuse, mental illness, marriage, or sexuality, subjects that drained many inkpots in the 1970s. She insists that to understand Woolf’s writing one should focus on the text, not the life, and demonstrates the rewards of this focus. Of course, in her 1997 biography, she is appreciative of the value of the life to understanding the work.

from that moment onwards Virginia Woolf was to remain more poet than novelist, forever searching for new means of dissolving prose into poetry, of refining away all but the husk of action in works which still went under the name of novels, and irradiating them with this strange new light. (27)


His memory for poetry was wonderful; he could absorb a poem that he liked almost unconsciously from a single reading [. . .] The poets whose work he most cared to recite were, I think, Wordsworth, Tennyson and Matthew Arnold, whose ‘Scholar Gipsey’ was one of his greatest favourites. He very much disliked reading poems from a book, and if he could not speak from memory he generally refused to recite at all. His recitation, or whatever it may be called, gained immensely from this fact, for as he lay back in his chair and spoke the beautiful words with closed eyes, we felt that he was speaking not merely the words of Tennyson or Wordsworth but what he himself felt and knew. Thus many of the great English poems now seem to me inseparable from my father; I hear in them not only his voice, but in some sort his teaching and belief. (475-6)

Miscellaneous

Postcard of Godrevy Lighthouse. Postmark 1944. Sender writes about good weather and a visit to Zennor, a little coastal town near St. Ives. The Godrevy lighthouse is the model for that of *To the Lighthouse*. The young Virginia Stephen could see it from her family’s summer home in St. Ives, Cornwall, a house still standing though subdivided into smaller rooms to increase its guest capacity as a bed-and-breakfast. I bought the postcard in St. Ives in Summer 2005, along with a postcard of the Parish Church in which Woolf and her older brother Thoby hid out during a rainstorm.

Letterpress broadside titled “Pieces of Peace,” featuring two columns taken from the concordance to Woolf’s fiction, featuring passages with the word “peace.” Published by Cuneiform Press. 18” x 6”. Handset from Dante type and printed on Zecchi in an edition of 100. Red and black ink. Given to me upon Yale graduation in Summer 2006 by Nancy Kuhl, Curator of the Yale Collection of American Literature, for which I worked as a curatorial assistant through my time at Yale.