

WOOLF STUDIES ANNUAL 22 ABSTRACTS (2016)

Emily Dalgarno

Virginia Woolf Reinvents the Socratic Dialogue

Although Woolf's lifelong interest in Plato has been widely noted, we have not yet fully explored the kinds of tension that arise in her work when a text by Plato is translated into contemporary culture. Unlike her British peers Woolf did not see Socrates as the mouthpiece of wisdom, but rather chose to adapt in her essays the structure of Socratic argument. A two-tier structure of *aporia* begins with *elenchus*, Socrates' challenge to his respondents' vocabulary, and when that leads to impasse, unfolds a second tier that focuses the philosophical question. Among those critics who read with and against Socrates, *aporia* demonstrates how philosophy originates out of divergent and conflicting opinion. Woolf's adaptation of Socratic interrogation in "On Not Knowing Greek," and "On Being Ill" begins with citations from the dialogues that she read as a student, whereas in *Three Guineas* she tacitly employs the two stages of *aporia* in order to redefine Fascism. In her work *elenchus* is far from being merely a conversation or an exchange of ideas: it begins with emotions felt in the body as the source of doubts and fears about a world in the absence of an ideal model or an authoritative interpreter. *Aporia* as a way of thinking that starts with a challenge to semantics sets the scene for the philosophical questions that are the hallmark of her work.

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J. Ashley Foster

Writing in the "White Light of Truth": History, Ethics, and Community in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*

This article explores the way in which Virginia Woolf uses metaphors of light and fire to articulate what it means to write and to define the task of the modern author. These images of light can be traced to the Quaker language of Caroline Emelia Stephen, Woolf's aunt. The connection that Woolf's works develop between writing, metaphysics, and politics formulate an ontology of literature that this paper demonstrates is rooted in Quaker thought and practice. I show that using Quaker philosophies as an entrance point into Woolf's texts provides a framework for unpacking her mysticism, which was oriented towards political ends and rooted very concretely within-the-world. Her ontology of literature opens onto an ethic and situates being-in-the-world as a political act. Through a close-reading of Stephen's theological texts, including *Quaker Strongholds*, *Light Arising*, and *Vision of Faith*, next to Woolf's works on life and writing, it becomes clear that Woolf, consciously or not, adopted Stephen's Quaker language to forge for herself a practice of writing based on an attempt to capture a metaphysics grounded in reality and existence while still expressing "things which are unseen and eternal'."

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Christine Fournaies

Was Virginia Woolf a Snob? The Case of Aristocratic Portraits in *Orlando*

Although it is widely acknowledged that Virginia Woolf's political views were feminist, her stance in relation to class has been met with much contestation. This article shows that the illustrations in *Orlando* (1928), Woolf's novel based on Vita Sackville-West, provide an especially illuminating insight into Woolf's attitude to class. The photographs of Sackville-West, an aristocrat proud of her status, and the traditionally aristocratic paintings of her ancestors ostensibly reflect a fascination with the upper class – a fascination that Woolf admitted to in her autobiographical sketch "Am I a Snob?" (1936). However, the origins of these portraits (which I have researched in archives and at Knole, Sackville-West's ancestral castle), the work that went into selecting and producing them, and their final interaction with the text suggest a more nuanced and critical approach to the institution of aristocracy. Indeed, *Orlando's* engagement with the aristocracy can only really be understood if the illustrations are taken into account. Extensive research and in-depth analysis of the illustrations offer a perspective that questions usual readings of Woolf's class politics, which also has implications for the understanding of Woolf's relationship to Sackville-West and her strategic use of the visual arts.

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Clara Jones

Virginia Woolf and "The Villa Jones" (1931)

This article discusses "The Villa Jones," the second unpublished sketch from Virginia Woolf's 1931 notebook in the Morgan Library, and presents a transcription of this archival discovery. In this letter-essay, Woolf laments building on the Sussex Downs, focusing her ire on the figure of Jones, her archetypal showy and threateningly mobile middle-class villa owner. The article situates Woolf's tirade against "voluntary view spoilers" in the context of her relationship to the Sussex countryside surrounding her home in Rodmell. As with the "Cook Sketch," also contained in the Morgan notebook, the flights of imagination and "raucousness" of "The Villa Jones" suggest that it is a piece of writing that burst out of the pressure of completing her 1931 novel *The Waves*. But just as the "Cook Sketch" is much more than comic relief, the playful, personal reaction to building in the countryside we find in "The Villa Jones" has much to tell us about the social and cultural politics of England in the 1930s and the vagaries of Woolf's thinking about social class and community.

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