

**THE ESSAYS OF  
VIRGINIA WOOLF:  
VOLUME VI**

1933–1941

VIRGINIA WOOLF

**VINTAGE**

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## About the Book

With this sixth volume The Hogarth Press completes a major literary undertaking — the publication of the complete essays of Virginia Woolf. In this, the last decade of her life, Woolf wrote distinguished literary essays on Turgenev, Goldsmith, Congreve, Gibbon and Horace Walpole. In addition, there are a number of more political essays, such as ‘Why Art To-Day Follows Politics’, ‘Women Must Weep’ (a cut-down version of *Three Guineas* and never before reprinted), ‘Royalty’ (rejected by *Picture Post* in 1939 as ‘an attack on the Royal family, and on the institution of kingship in this country’), ‘Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid’, and even ‘America, which I Have Never Seen ...’ (‘[Americans are] the most interesting people in the world - they face the future, not the past’). In ‘The Leaning Tower’ (1940), Virginia Woolf faced the future and looked forward to a more democratic post-war age: ‘will there be no more towers and no more classes and shall we stand, without hedges between us, on the common ground?’ Woolf stimulates her readers to think for themselves, so she ‘never forges manifestos, issues guidelines, or gives instructions that must be followed to the letter’ (Maria DiBattista).

In providing an authoritative text, introduction and annotations to Virginia Woolf’s essays, Stuart N. Clarke has prepared a common ground — for students, common readers and scholars alike — so that all can come to Woolf without specialised knowledge.

## About the Author

Virginia Woolf was born in London in 1882. After her father's death in 1904 Virginia and her sister, the painter Vanessa Bell, moved to Bloomsbury and became the centre of 'The Bloomsbury Group'. This informal collective of artists and writers exerted a powerful influence over early twentieth-century British culture.

In 1912 Virginia married Leonard Woolf, a writer and social reformer. Three years later, her first novel *The Voyage Out* was published, followed by *Night and Day* (1919) and *Jacob's Room* (1922). Between 1925 and 1931 Virginia Woolf produced what are now regarded as her finest masterpieces, from *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) to *The Waves* (1931). She also maintained an astonishing output of literary criticism, short fiction, journalism and biography. On 28 March 1941, a few months before the publication of her final novel, *Between the Acts*, Virginia Woolf committed suicide.

## About the Editor

Stuart N. Clarke has transcribed and edited Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: The Original Holograph Draft* (1993), was co-compiler with B.J. Kirkpatrick of the 4th edition of *A Bibliography of Virginia Woolf* (1997), and edited *Translations from the Russian* (2006) by Virginia Woolf and S.S. Kotliansky. He is a founding member of the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain and has edited its journal, the *Virginia Woolf Bulletin*, since its inception in 1999. Stuart also edited Volume 5 in this series.

# THE ESSAYS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

**Volume I: 1904–1912**

**Volume II: 1912–1918**

**Volume III: 1919–1924**

**Volume IV: 1925–1928**

**Volume V: 1929–1932**

# The Essays of Virginia Woolf

VOLUME VI

1933-1941

AND

Additional Essays  
1906-1924

EDITED BY

STUART N. CLARKE

The Hogarth Press

LONDON

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# Introduction

On 14 February 1934 Virginia Woolf recorded that she had gone 'out to buy ink for my new Waterman, with which I am to take notes for a new Common Reader', but by November she would tell her American publisher, Donald Brace: 'I dont suppose that I shall have enough essays for a book for some time to come.'<sup>fn1</sup> During the last eight years of her life, Woolf published fewer essays on an annual count compared with the previous sixteen years. We can, however, perceive a reduction from 1929 onwards, although this is partially obscured by the publication of *The Common Reader: Second Series* in 1932. If we accept that Woolf 'wrote essays primarily as a relief from fiction and as a means of making money',<sup>fn2</sup> we may deduce that neither motive was as strong as formerly.

Taking the latter point first, we note that, while the Woolfs jointly spent just over £1000 annually (or £500 a year each – admittedly after tax) in the years 1927–39, their joint net income annually was significantly more from 1928; the highest was £4053 in 1932. According to Leonard Woolf, the 'turning point in Virginia's career as a successful novelist came in 1928 with the publication of *Orlando*', and she earned over £1000 p.a. from her books from then on, with the exception of 1935, 1936 and 1939. As well as the income from their writings, the Woolfs also received profits from the operation of the Hogarth Press, and these were significant in 1930–3 and 1937. Leonard stated that consequent on their increased income: 'Within the material framework which we had chosen for our existence ... we did ... less in the occupations which we did not want to do, for instance journalism.'<sup>fn3</sup>

To some extent Virginia Woolf's attitude changed with the advent of the Second World War. Three-quarters of an hour before war was declared on 3 September 1939, she noted her reactions: 'Its the unreality of force that muffles every thing. Its now about 10.33. Not

to attitudinise is one reflection. Nice to be entirely genuine & obscure. Then of course I shall have to work to make money. That's a comfort. Write articles for America. I suppose take on some writing for some society. Keep the Press going.<sup>fn4</sup> American newspapers and periodicals generally paid better than British ones.<sup>fn5</sup> In any case, Woolf's stock in the United States had been particularly high since the publication of *The Waves*: when *Time* magazine reviewed it on 12 April 1937, its front cover was adorned with a photograph of her by Man Ray; and the novel became a best-seller, with 38,900 copies printed between April and October.<sup>fn6</sup>

Although the only article that Woolf would write for America was 'Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid', on 7 September 1939 she replied to Raymond Mortimer, the Literary Editor of the *New Statesman and Nation* who had asked her for contributions, that she had 'an idea or two at the back of my mind for a possible article – perhaps Gilbert White into whom I've plunged by way of a respite, or ... there's an account of a party at Abbotsford that might be made amusing. I'm horribly rusty and distracted, so you must be severe and reject.'<sup>fn7</sup> On 11 September she noted: 'I've offered to write for the NS. I don't know if wisely: but it's best to have a job, & I don't think I can stand aloof with comfort at the moment. So my reasons are half in half.'<sup>fn8</sup> She was also willing in theory to write for the *Listener*, but in practice the constraints of space were a problem in peacetime: 'Joe [Ackerley, the Literary Editor] will only allow me 800 words of unsigned; 1500 of signed. An amusing illustration of the virtues of capitalism. It's the advertisement, not the article, they want. And it's the advertisement I don't want.'<sup>fn9</sup> In wartime the constraints were worse: 'The Dream' and 'Georgiana and Florence' were both signed and fewer than 1500 words each. Leonard recalled: 'The war years were a publishing nightmare for The Hogarth Press, as indeed they were, I suppose, for all publishers. The blackest spot in the nightmare, perpetually preying on our minds, was the shortage and rationing of paper.'<sup>fn10</sup>

Following the completion of *The Waves* (1931), Woolf embarked on *Flush: A Biography* (1933), a fictionalised biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's dog. Critics tend to include it among her novels, but it does not fit neatly into any genre. It presents 'that perpetual

marriage of granite and rainbow'<sup>fn11</sup> more completely than the fictional *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) and the factual *Roger Fry: A Biography* (1940). However, to the extent that *Flush* is based on fact, there was less need for Woolf to turn to writing essays 'as a relief from fiction'. With *The Years*, the situation was similar although more complex. Initially conceived in 1932 as 'an Essay-Novel, called the Pargiters – & its to take in everything, sex, education, life &c',<sup>fn12</sup> it soon became unmanageable. The essays were broken off and eventually redrafted in a very different form as *Three Guineas* (1938), while Woolf struggled with increasing desperation to complete the novel. Dorothy Wellesley reported to W. B. Yeats on 6 July 1936 that she had received a letter from Woolf: 'She has been ill for months, and writes for the first time I have known a dispirited letter; she says she cannot write; but of course this will be only temporary.'<sup>fn13</sup> When *Three Guineas* was published Woolf called it 'the end of six years floundering, striving, much agony, some ecstasy: lumping the Years and 3Gs together as one book – as indeed they are'.<sup>fn14</sup>

Owing mainly to the indefatigable researches of the late Brownlee Kirkpatrick, over fifty additional essays dating from 1906 to 1924 have been discovered subsequent to the publication of the first three volumes of this edition.<sup>fn15</sup> They are included in this volume and, incidentally, allow us here to compare Virginia Stephen's early reviews with Virginia Woolf's last essays. Virginia Stephen served a long apprenticeship, but even the most practised reviewer would be hard put to strike sparks of inspiration from the series of trashy novels that Bruce Richmond, the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, saw fit to set before his tyro reviewer.

An egregious example was *The Desert Venture* (1907), which its (and E. M. Forster's) publisher Edward Arnold described as:

a good stirring story, reminding one of the late H. Seton Merriman in its power of introducing a series of exciting adventures which, but for the author's skill, might seem almost too extraordinary for the twentieth century. As we read these pages, however, we feel that there is no reason whatever why an enterprising European should not even to-day attempt to carve out for himself a new little empire in the heart of Africa, why he should not have to confront all sorts of intrigues culminating in most sanguinary fighting both with natives and European rivals; while the chain of circumstances which takes out Eva, the heroine, to follow the fortunes of 'Uncle

Dick' and her cousin Arthur in the hinterland of Morocco seems the inevitable result of an ingeniously-contrived situation. An interesting and exciting book, which arrests attention and retains it.<sup>fn16</sup>

With its 'English county family',<sup>fn17</sup> the novel is set clearly within 'that school of Snobbery with Violence that runs like a thread of good-class tweed through twentieth-century literature'.<sup>fn18</sup> Racism also runs through *The Desert Venture* as a matter of course, from the 'fair-haired, blue-eyed, British'<sup>fn19</sup> hero down to a hierarchy among slaves:

the chained wretches were not negroes, but men of aquiline countenance, blackened to negroid colouring by force of sun and sand.

'Moors!' he [Saint Serreze] ejaculated. 'Full-blooded Moors in a slave-gang!'<sup>fn20</sup>

The novel's crude scenes would pass before any modern-day reader like a series of oleographs faded with the years. Stephen is more generous than she would have been thirty years later, when she might well have dismissed it as 'a very exciting yet infinitely childish book'.<sup>fn21</sup>

With the publication of *The Years* in March 1937, Woolf turned again to writing a few essays: 'I don't want to write more fiction. I want to explore a new criticism'.<sup>fn22</sup> She was dissatisfied with the form of her *Common Reader* essays, but had difficulty in March 1939 finding an alternative: 'I'm thinking of a critical book. Suppose I used the diary form? Would this make one free to go from book to book – or wd it be too personal?'<sup>fn23</sup> On 22 June 1940 she wrote: 'I wish I cd invent a new critical method – something swifter & lighter & more colloquial & yet intense: more to the point & less composed; more fluid & following the flight, than my C.R. essays. The old problem: how to keep the flight of the mind, yet be exact.'<sup>fn24</sup> A month later she noted: 'I can write entirely to please myself: first a C.R'.<sup>fn25</sup> while on 22 October she appears to have accepted the old format: 'I will write supports & additions for my old TLS articles'.<sup>fn26</sup> On 1 March 1941 she told her friend, the composer Ethel Smyth: 'I am at the moment trying, without the least success, to write an article or two for a new Common Reader. I am stuck in Elizabethan plays. I cant move back or forwards. I've read too much, but not enough.'<sup>fn27</sup>

According to Leonard: 'At the time of her death she was already engaged in getting together essays for a further volume, which she proposed to publish in the autumn of 1941 or the spring of 1942.'<sup>fn28</sup> While his first posthumous collection of her essays, *The Death of the Moth* (1942), is comparable in length with the two *Common Readers*, it is unlikely that she would have chosen the same essays, and of course 'there is no doubt that she would have made large alterations and revisions in nearly all'<sup>fn29</sup> of them. *The Death of the Moth* contains only eleven from 1933 to 1941, ten from 1917 to 1932, and seven which had never previously been published. Woolf herself would probably have included more of her published essays from 1933 to 1941, and would certainly have included 'Walter Sickert: A Conversation' (1934).<sup>fn30</sup>

Nevertheless, Woolf remained worried by the formal literary manner of her 'old *Literary Supplement* articles' with 'their suavity, their politeness, their sidelong approach'.<sup>fn31</sup> She continued to identify herself as a 'common reader'.<sup>fn32</sup> While she had tried in such books as 'the *Common Reader*, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*' to 'reach a far wider circle than a little private circle of cultivated people', she still felt that she 'ought to have been able to make not merely thousands of people interested in literature; but millions'.<sup>fn33</sup>

And in September 1940 she began to write a book that was to be called 'Reading at Random' or 'Turning the Page'.<sup>fn34</sup> In her notes for the book, she wrote: 'The idea of the book is to find the end of a ball of string & wind out. Let one book suggest another.'<sup>fn35</sup> In October she noted:

Ideas for the shape of the book.  
To begin with the country. The eye the youthful sense. Or floods. This brings back the wildness.  
Out of doors. *Indoors. no study no library.*  
*Songs sung at the door.*  
The importance of the audience.  
No public, in our sense.  
*Anonymity.*<sup>fn36</sup>

We have the first chapter, 'Anon', and a fragment of the second, 'The Reader'. How the book would have continued, evolved and been completed in its final form, we shall never know, yet these two extant draft chapters about 'Anon', 'the common voice singing out of doors', and his or her<sup>fn37</sup> successor 'The Reader', whose 'life history could we discover it would be worth writing, for the effect it had upon literature', seem to be at the very heart of Woolf's literary concerns. On the one hand, it is only the 'song' that is important. She was pleased by how little was known about Shakespeare's life. On a visit to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1934, she reflected:

Yes, everything seemed to say, this was Shakespeare's, had he sat & walked; but you wont find me not exactly in the flesh. He is serenely absent-present; both at once; radiating round one; yes; in the flowers, in the old hall, in the garden; but never to be pinned down ... all the rest, books, furniture pictures &c has completely vanished? Now I think Shre was very happy in this, that there was no impediment of fame, but his genius flowed out of him, & is still there, in Stratford.<sup>fn38</sup>

This goes a long way to explain Woolf's extreme distaste for self-advertisement, personal publicity and the cult of the celebrity.<sup>fn39</sup> The words she put into Christina Rossetti's mouth applied to her too: 'Here you are rambling among unimportant trifles, rattling my writing-table drawers ... when all I care for you to know is here. Behold this green volume. It is a copy of my collected works. It costs four shillings and sixpence. Read that.'<sup>fn40</sup>

As indicated below, for Woolf reading is a supreme pleasure, but she is also aware of the effect that the reader has on the writer: 'a book is always written for somebody to read, and, since the patron is not merely the paymaster, but also in a very subtle and insidious way the instigator and inspirer of what is written, it is of the utmost importance that he should be a desirable man'.<sup>fn41</sup> Not only that, but she also sees that the book is only completed by the reader's contribution – what the reader brings to the book – and, as long as there are readers of the book, 'We are in a world where nothing is concluded.'<sup>fn42</sup> Maria DiBattista argues that '*The Common Reader* may be regarded as the first volume of that life history' of 'The Reader' and 'how the English reader developed habits in response to the customs of the playhouse'.<sup>fn43</sup> Actually, it is worth reading both

'Anon' and 'The Reader' in conjunction with the first six essays of *The Common Reader* (1925): 'The Common Reader', 'The Pastons and Chaucer', 'On Not Knowing Greek', 'The Elizabethan Lumber Room', 'Notes on an Elizabethan Play' and 'Montaigne'.

In this final volume of *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, there are more overtly political and socio-political essays than in the previous volumes, notably 'Why?', 'Royalty', 'Why Art To-day Follows Politics', 'Women Must Weep', 'Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid', 'The Leaning Tower' and the version of 'Royalty' that was rejected by *Picture Post* in 1939 'as an attack on the Royal family, and on the institution of kingship in this country'.<sup>fn44</sup> Even in 'America, which I Have Never Seen ...', we find that:

the best way of illustrating the difference between them and us is to bid you observe that while we have shadows that stalk behind us, they have a light that dances in front of them. That is what makes them the most interesting people in the world – they face the future, not the past.

It is, however, 'The Leaning Tower', which was based on a talk given to the Workers' Educational Association in 1940 – and which can be seen as a successor to 'A Letter to a Young Poet' (1932) – that is Woolf's most sustained vision of the future. In discussing the political young writers of the 1930s, she points out that they sit 'upon a tower raised above the rest of us' – 'the tower of middle-class birth and expensive education':

If you think of them ... as people trapped on a leaning tower from which they cannot descend, much that is puzzling in their work is easier to understand. It explains the violence of their attack upon bourgeois society and also its half-heartedness. They are profiting by a society which they abuse ... It explains the destructiveness of their work; and also its emptiness. They can destroy bourgeois society, in part at least; but what have they put in its place? How can a writer who has no first-hand experience of a towerless, of a classless society create that society?

Surprisingly perhaps, the views of Woolf, with her belief in 'educated men's daughters working in their own class – how, indeed, can they work in any other?',<sup>fn45</sup> are close to those of George Orwell:

when you come to the normal working class ... there is no short cut into their midst ... the left-winger continues to feel that he has no moral responsibility for

imperialism. He is perfectly ready to accept the products of Empire and to save his soul by sneering at the people who hold the Empire together ... The fact that has got to be faced is that to abolish class-distinctions means abolishing a part of yourself. Here am I, a typical member of the middle class. It is easy for me to say that I want to get rid of class-distinctions, but nearly everything I think and do is a result of class-distinctions ... For to get outside the class-racket I have got to suppress not merely my private snobbishness, but most of my other tastes and prejudices as well. I have got to alter myself so completely that at the end I should hardly be recognisable as the same person. What is involved is not merely the amelioration of working-class conditions, nor an avoidance of the more stupid forms of snobbery, but a complete abandonment of the upper-class and middle-class attitude to life. And whether I say Yes or No probably depends upon the extent to which I grasp what is demanded of me.<sup>fn46</sup>

Woolf tried to distinguish herself from the 'leaning-tower writers' and ally herself with her audience: 'are we not commoners, outsiders?' It was this that Desmond MacCarthy particularly objected to in his 'World of Books' column when he wrote that 'she ought not to have used the pronoun "we" in addressing an audience of working-men'.<sup>fn47</sup> Woolf responded to him the very same day:

Compare my wretched little £150 education with yours, with Lytton's, with Leonard's ... I assure you, my tower was a mere toadstool, about six inches high ... Of course I'm not on the ground with the WEA but I'm about four thousand five hundred and fifty pounds nearer them than you are. So I'm right to say 'we' when I talk to them; just as I'm right to say 'they' when I look up ... at you.<sup>fn48</sup>

In perusing Woolf's literary and literary-biographical essays, one can almost forget that she was also a creative writer, for her concern for reading seems overriding: her 'essays are a celebration of reading, as a pleasure and as a challenge'.<sup>fn49</sup> Here is Woolf's apotheosis of reading:

I have sometimes dreamt, at least, that when the Day of Judgment dawns and the great conquerors and lawyers and statesmen come to receive their rewards – their crowns, their laurels, their names carved indelibly upon imperishable marble – the Almighty will turn to Peter and will say, not without a certain envy when He sees us coming with our books under our arms, 'Look, these need no reward. We have nothing to give them here. They have loved reading.'<sup>fn50</sup>

As Melba Cuddy-Keane points out:

Woolf was a highbrow and to be a highbrow was – and still is to a large extent – to have benefited from certain kinds of privilege, if nothing more than the privilege of

having had the time to read books. But rather than disdaining the results of privilege, Woolf modeled a future world in which the attainments traditionally reserved for a privileged few would be available for all. Democratic highbrowism was her ideal – not to be confused with what she claimed herself to have achieved.<sup>fn51</sup>

However, Woolf did not *model* a future world: ‘Of course, the *ideological* impact of her writing is undeniable, especially in such polemical works as *Three Guineas*. But Woolf never forges manifestoes, issues guidelines, or gives instructions that must be followed to the letter.’<sup>fn52</sup> She wanted her readers to think for themselves. This is why she was unsympathetic to the academic approach to teaching English Literature that was coming to the forefront in her time, and even more to the *Scrutiny*–Leavisite approach that ‘habitually use[d] the language of intimidation, the language which brooks no opposition’.<sup>fn53</sup> Thus we can also see that Woolf’s strong opposition to ‘the vain and vicious system of lecturing’<sup>fn54</sup> is based on a democratic approach to education. In addition, ‘Woolf developed a reader-oriented approach that affirms a plurality of views ... marked by another feature virtually absent in the emerging academic criticism: a self-reflexive questioning of her own approach.’<sup>fn55</sup>

It is not too much to say that Woolf saw reading as a birthright. She knew that some sections of society were too uneducated to read or to want to read. She knew that some people were unable to acquire books because they were too expensive to buy or public libraries were too difficult to access. Agnes Smith, a Yorkshire millworker, wrote to her: ‘Yes, I can get books, the trouble is the shortage of time, when one is working, the shortage of money when one is not ... I could use Huddersfield [Library] for 5/- yearly, but it costs me eighteen-pence return and takes twenty minutes each way to get there.’<sup>fn56</sup> And she knew that some people worked so hard that they were too tired to read – here she would have included not only the working classes who worked a twelve-hour day but many professionals also: ‘most successful barristers are hardly worth sitting next at dinner – they yawn so’.<sup>fn57</sup>

Increasingly, in Woolf’s diary we read of repeated criticisms of the ‘system’.<sup>fn58</sup> Her attitudes are a long way from Harold Nicolson’s

lament on the outbreak of the Second World War that 'the world as I know it has only a few more hours to run'.<sup>fn59</sup> They are even further from Vita Sackville-West's 'manifesto' of 7 February 1945:

I hate democracy. I hate *la populace*. I wish education had never been introduced. I don't like tyranny, but I like an intelligent oligarchy. I wish *la populace* had never been encouraged to emerge from its rightful place. I should like to see them as well fed as T.T. [tuberculin-tested] cows, but no more articulate than that.<sup>fn60</sup>

Instead, in 1940 Virginia Woolf could welcome signs of change: 'The income tax is saying to middle-class parents: You cannot afford to send your sons to public schools any longer; you must send them to the elementary schools.' This is not levelling down: it is about mixing with the living, not with the dead. And she could look forward positively to a more democratic age:

The next generation will be, when peace comes, a post-war generation too. Must it too be a leaning-tower generation – an oblique, sidelong, self-centred, squinting, self-conscious generation with a foot in two worlds? Or will there be no more towers and no more classes and shall we stand, without hedges between us, on the common ground?<sup>fn61</sup>

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## Editorial Note

The present volume is compiled upon the principles already established for the edition. Of the thirty-five pieces it includes from 1933 to 1941, four are reprinted for the first time. As in the previous volumes the contents follow the listing in Section C of the late B. J. Kirkpatrick's bibliography (4th ed., 1997), with the insertion of the following: 'Foreword to *Catalogue of Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell*' (p. 29), 'The Roger Fry Memorial Exhibition' (p. 59) and 'Reviewing' (p. 195).

Of the fifty-five additional essays from 1906 to 1924, thirty-five are reprinted for the first time. The contents follow the listing in Section C of the Kirkpatrick bibliography, with the insertion of the following: 'Some Poetic Plays' (p. 318), 'The Call of the East' (p. 323), '*Maud-Evelyn, &c. [and] The Sacred Fount*' (p. 395), '*The Art of Thomas Hardy*' (p. 396), 'Strangely enough, that engaging acrobat ...' (p. 399) and '*The Faithful Shepherdess ...*' (p. 399). All of the essays in the appendices have been published before.

Every effort has been made, using manuscript reading notes, to trace references to sources in the editions Woolf used, or at the very least in the editions the Woolfs owned. A great deal is known thanks to the labours of Brenda Silver, Elizabeth Steele and Andrew McNeillie, but a number of mysteries remain. In a very few cases it has been impossible to discover the work from which a quotation derives, let alone the relevant edition, and these failures are acknowledged in the notes.

Manuscript drafts of a number of articles survive and where these have been identified they have been listed under the essays to which they refer.

The following general changes to the text have usually been made throughout: double quotation marks have been changed to single, and vice versa; the full stops after Dr, Messrs, Mr, Mrs, and St have been omitted, except in quotations; M-dashes have been changed to

spaced N-dashes; American spellings changed to British; book-titles have been italicised; and words ending in –ize changed to –ise. However, the question of regularising quotations inside or outside punctuation has not been addressed. In dealing with quotations made by Woolf, significant discrepancies are drawn attention to in the notes, but errors of punctuation have usually been ignored.

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## Abbreviations

- Berg Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, New York Public Library
- CDB *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf (Hogarth Press, London, and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1950)
- CDML *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life, Selected Essays: Volume Two*, ed. Rachel Bowlby (Penguin Books, London, 1993)
- CE *Collected Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf (vols 1–2, Hogarth Press, London, 1966, and Harcourt Brace & World Inc., New York, 1967; vols 3–4, Hogarth Press, London, and Harcourt Brace & World Inc., New York, 1967)
- CR *The Common Reader*: 1st series (Hogarth Press, London, and Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, 1925; annotated edition by Andrew McNeillie, 1984); 2nd series (Hogarth Press, London, and Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, 1932; annotated edition by Andrew McNeillie, 1986)
- CSF *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, ed. Susan Dick (Hogarth Press, London, and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1985)
- DNB *Dictionary of National Biography*
- DoM *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf (Hogarth Press, London, and Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, 1942)
- G&R *Granite and Rainbow*, ed. Leonard Woolf (Hogarth Press, London, and Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, 1958)
- Kp4 B. J. Kirkpatrick and Stuart N. Clarke, *A Bibliography of Virginia Woolf* (4th ed., Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997)

- £ s. d. Pounds, shillings and pence. In pre-decimal currency there were twenty shillings in the pound and twelve pence in the shilling. A guinea was 21s., but there was no corresponding coin. In the 1930s £1 was worth approximately US\$4.
- LW Leonard Woolf
- LWP Leonard Woolf Papers, Sussex University Library
- M&M *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1975)
- MFS *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. xxxviii, no. 1 (Spring 1992)
- MHP Monks House Papers, Sussex University Library
- MoB *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (2nd ed., Hogarth Press, London, and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1985)
- Mom *The Moment and Other Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf (Hogarth Press, London, 1947, and Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, 1948)
- N&A *Nation & Athenaeum*
- NS&N *New Statesman and Nation*
- O *Orlando: A Biography* (Hogarth Press, London, 1928)
- O *Orlando: The Original Holograph Draft*, ed. Stuart Nelson Clarke (S. N. Clarke, London, 1993)
- OBEV *The Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250–1900*, ed. Arthur Quiller-Couch (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1900)
- ODNB *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
- OED *Oxford English Dictionary*
- PA *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals, 1897–1909*, ed. Mitchell A. Leaska (Hogarth Press, London, and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1990)
- Room *A Room of One's Own* (Hogarth Press, London, 1929)
- TG *Three Guineas* (Hogarth Press, London, 1938). Annotated editions by Morag Shiach, *A Room of One's Own [and] Three Guineas* (Oxford World's Classics, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992); Michèle Barrett,

*A Room of One's Own [and] Three Guineas* (Penguin Books, London, 1993); Naomi Black, *Three Guineas* (Blackwell Publishers for the Shakespeare Head Press, 2001); and Jane Marcus, *Three Guineas* (Harvest Book, Harcourt, Inc., Orlando, 2006)

TLS *Times Literary Supplement*

VW Virginia Woolf

VW Diary *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (5 vols, Hogarth Press, London, and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1977–84)

VW Essays *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 6 vols, ed. Andrew McNeillie, vols i–iv (Hogarth Press, London, 1986–94, and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1987–2008), and Stuart N. Clarke, vols v–vi (Hogarth Press, London, 2009–11)

VW Letters *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (6 vols, Hogarth Press, London, and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1975–80)

VWB *Virginia Woolf Bulletin* of the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain

VWRN Brenda R. Silver, *Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1983)

W&W *Women and Writing*, ed. Michèle Barrett (The Women's Press, London, 1979)

WE *A Woman's Essays, Selected Essays: Volume One*, ed. Rachel Bowlby (Penguin Books, London, 1992)

WSA *Woolf Studies Annual*

WSU Virginia Woolf's account book of payments received July 1928–July 1937, Holland Library (MASC Cage 4661), Washington State University

# The Essays

1933

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# London Squares

Some fortunate people during this hot summer have found a moment's respite under the shade of the trees in one of the London squares. Many of them will leave town in August and September; but the gates will remain locked and the gardens unused. The sensible and humane suggestion is now made that the squares should be opened during August, and perhaps part of July and September, to some of those who would otherwise have no place to walk or sit in but the streets. The Square Committees have, of course, to give their consent, but it is hard to believe that this will be withheld. And there must be many who would be willing, if the squares were thrown open as suggested, to contribute towards the sum needed for their upkeep. In this belief, at least, may I draw your readers' attention to the scheme and add that further details can be had from The London Council of Social Service,<sup>[fn2](#)</sup> Lincoln's Inn Fields, W.C.2?

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## ‘Twelfth Night’ at the Old Vic

Shakespearians are divided, it is well known, into three classes; those who prefer to read Shakespeare in the book; those who prefer to see him acted on the stage; and those who run perpetually from book to stage gathering plunder. Certainly there is a good deal to be said for reading *Twelfth Night* in the book if the book can be read in a garden, with no sound but the thud of an apple falling to the earth, or of the wind ruffling the branches of the trees. For one thing there is time – time not only to hear ‘the sweet sound that breathes upon a bank of violets’<sup>fn2</sup> but to unfold the implications of that very subtle speech as the Duke winds into the nature of love. There is time, too, to make a note in the margin; time to wonder at queer jingles like ‘that live in her; when liver, brain, and heart’<sup>fn3</sup> ... ‘and of a foolish knight that you brought in one night’<sup>fn4</sup> and to ask oneself whether it was from them that was born the lovely, ‘And what should I do in Illyria? My brother he is in Elysium.’<sup>fn5</sup> For Shakespeare is writing, it seems, not with the whole of his mind mobilised and under control but with feelers left flying that sport and play with words so that the trail of a chance word is caught and followed recklessly. From the echo of one word is born another word, for which reason, perhaps, the play seems as we read it to tremble perpetually on the brink of music. They are always calling for songs in *Twelfth Night*, ‘O fellow come, the song we had last night.’<sup>fn6</sup> Yet Shakespeare was not so deeply in love with words but that he could turn and laugh at them. ‘They that do dally with words do quickly make them wanton.’<sup>fn7</sup> There is a roar of laughter and out burst Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Maria. Words on their lips are things that have meaning; that rush and leap out with a whole character packed in a little phrase. When Sir Andrew says ‘I was adored once,’<sup>fn8</sup> we feel that we hold him in the hollow of our hands; a novelist would have taken three volumes to

bring us to that pitch of intimacy. And Viola, Malvolio, Olivia, the Duke – the mind so brims and spills over with all that we know and guess about them as they move in and out among the lights and shadows of the mind's stage that we ask why should we imprison them within the bodies of real men and women? Why exchange this garden for the theatre? The answer is that Shakespeare wrote for the stage and presumably with reason. Since they are acting *Twelfth Night* at the Old Vic, let us compare the two versions.

Many apples might fall without being heard in the Waterloo Road, and as for the shadows, the electric light has consumed them all. The first impression upon entering the Old Vic is overwhelmingly positive and definite. We seem to have issued out from the shadows of the garden upon the bridge of the Parthenon. The metaphor is mixed, but then so is the scenery. The columns of the bridge somehow suggest an Atlantic liner and the austere splendours of a classical temple in combination. But the body is almost as upsetting as the scenery. The actual persons of Malvolio, Sir Toby, Olivia and the rest expand our visionary characters out of all recognition. At first we are inclined to resent it. You are not Malvolio; or Sir Toby either, we want to tell them; but merely impostors. We sit gaping at the ruins of the play, at the travesty of the play. And then by degrees this same body or rather all these bodies together, take our play and remodel it between them. The play gains immensely in robustness, in solidity. The printed word is changed out of all recognition when it is heard by other people. We watch it strike upon this man or woman; we see them laugh or shrug their shoulders, or turn aside to hide their faces. The word is given a body as well as a soul. Then again as the actors pause, or topple over a barrel, or stretch their hands out, the flatness of the print is broken up as by crevasses or precipices; all the proportions are changed. Perhaps the most impressive effect in the play is achieved by the long pause which Sebastian and Viola make as they stand looking at each other in a silent ecstasy of recognition. The reader's eye may have slipped over that moment entirely. Here we are made to pause and think about it; and are reminded that Shakespeare wrote for the body and for the mind simultaneously.

But now that the actors have done their proper work of solidifying and intensifying our impressions, we begin to criticise them more minutely and to compare their version with our own. We make Mr

Quartermaine's Malvolio stand beside our Malvolio. And to tell the truth, wherever the fault may lie, they have very little in common. Mr Quartermaine's Malvolio is a splendid gentleman, courteous, considerate, well bred; a man of parts and humour who has no quarrel with the world. He has never felt a twinge of vanity or a moment's envy in his life. If Sir Toby and Maria fool him he sees through it we may be sure, and only suffers it as a fine gentleman puts up with the games of foolish children. Our Malvolio, on the other hand, was a fantastic complex creature, twitching with vanity, tortured by ambition. There was cruelty in his teasing, and a hint of tragedy in his defeat; his final threat had a momentary terror in it. But when Mr Quartermaine says 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you,' we feel merely that the powers of the law will be soon and effectively invoked. What, then, becomes of Olivia's 'He hath been most notoriously abused'?<sup>fn9</sup> Then there is Olivia. Madame Lopokova has by nature that rare quality which is neither to be had for the asking nor to be subdued by the will – the genius of personality. She has only to float on to the stage and everything round her suffers, not a sea change,<sup>fn10</sup> but a change into light, into gaiety; the birds sing, the sheep are garlanded, the air rings with melody and human beings dance towards each other on the tips of their toes possessed of an exquisite friendliness, sympathy and delight. But our Olivia was a stately lady; of sombre complexion, slow moving, and of few sympathies. She could not love the Duke nor change her feeling. Madame Lopokova loves everybody. She is always changing. Her hands, her face, her feet, the whole of her body, are always quivering in sympathy with the moment. She could make the moment, as she proved when she walked down the stairs with Sebastian, one of intense and moving beauty; but she was not our Olivia. Compared with her the comic group, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Maria, the fool were more than ordinarily English. Coarse, humorous, robust, they trolled out their words, they rolled over their barrels; they acted magnificently. No reader, one may make bold to say, could outpace Miss Seyler's Maria, with its quickness, its inventiveness, its merriment; nor add anything to the humours of Mr Livesey's Sir Toby. And Miss Jeans as Viola was satisfactory; and Mr Hare as Antonio was admirable; and Mr Morland's clown<sup>fn11</sup> was a good clown. What then was lacking in the play as a whole? Perhaps

that it was not a whole. The fault may lie partly with Shakespeare. It is easier to act his comedy than his poetry, one may suppose, for when he wrote as a poet he was apt to write too quick for the human tongue. The prodigality of his metaphors can be flashed over by the eye, but the speaking voice falters in the middle. Hence the comedy was out of proportion to the rest. Then, perhaps, the actors were too highly charged with individuality or too incongruously cast. They broke the play up into separate pieces – now we were in the groves of Arcady, now in some inn at Blackfriars. The mind in reading spins a web from scene to scene, compounds a background from apples falling, and the toll of a church bell, and an owl's fantastic flight which keeps the play together. Here that continuity was sacrificed. We left the theatre possessed of many brilliant fragments but without the sense of all things conspiring and combining together which may be the satisfying culmination of a less brilliant performance. Nevertheless, the play has served its purpose. It has made us compare our Malvolio with Mr Quartermaine's; our Olivia with Madame Lopokova's; our reading of the whole play with Mr Guthrie's; and since they all differ, back we must go to Shakespeare. We must read *Twelfth Night* again. Mr Guthrie has made that necessary and whetted our appetite for the *Cherry Orchard*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Henry the Eighth* that are still to come.<sup>fn12</sup>

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## The Novels of Turgenev

Rather more than fifty years ago Turgenev died in France and was buried in Russia, appropriately it may seem, if we remember how much he owed to France and yet how profoundly he belonged to his own land. The influence of both countries is to be felt if we look at his photograph<sup>fn2</sup> for a moment before reading his books. The magnificent figure in the frock coat of Parisian civilisation seems to be gazing over the houses far away at some wider view. He has the air of a wild beast who is captive but remembers whence he came. 'C'est un colosse charmant, un doux géant aux cheveux blancs, qui a l'air du bienveillant génie d'une montagne ou d'une forêt'<sup>fn3</sup> the brothers Goncourt wrote when they met him at dinner in 1863. 'Il est beau, grandement beau, énormément beau, avec du bleu du ciel dans les yeux, avec le charme du chantonement de l'accent russe, de cette cantilène où il y a un rien de l'enfant et du nègre.'<sup>fn4</sup> And Henry James noted later the great physical splendour, the Slav languor and 'the air of neglected strength, as if it had been part of his modesty never to remind himself that he was strong. He used sometimes to blush like a boy of sixteen.'<sup>fn5</sup> Perhaps something of the same combination of qualities is to be found if we turn to his books.

At first, after years of absence it may be, they seem to us a little thin, slight and sketchlike in texture. Take *Rudin*, for instance – the reader will place it among the French school, among the copies rather than the originals, with the feeling that the writer has set himself an admirable model but in following it has sacrificed something of his own character and force. But the superficial impression deepens and sharpens itself as the pages are turned. The scene has a size out of all proportion to its length. It expands in the mind and lies there giving off fresh ideas, emotions and pictures much as a moment in real life will sometimes only yield its meaning

long after it has passed. We notice that though the people talk in the most natural speaking voices, what they say is always unexpected; the meaning goes on after the sound has stopped. Moreover, they do not have to speak in order to make us feel their presence; 'Volintsev started and raised his head, as though he had just waked up'<sup>fn6</sup> – we had felt him there though he had not spoken. And when in some pause we look out of the window, the emotion is returned to us, deepened, because it is given through another medium, by the trees or the clouds, by the barking of a dog, or the song of a nightingale. Thus we are surrounded on all sides – by the talk, by the silence, by the look of things. The scene is extraordinarily complete.

It is easy to say that in order to gain a simplicity so complex Turgenev has gone through a long struggle of elimination beforehand. He knows all about his people, so that when he writes he chooses only what is most salient without apparent effort. But when we have finished *Rudin*, *Fathers and Children*, *Smoke*, *On the Eve* and the others many questions suggest themselves to which it is not so easy to find an answer. They are so short and yet they hold so much. The emotion is so intense and yet so calm. The form is in one sense so perfect, in another so broken. They are about Russia in the fifties and sixties of the last century, and yet they are about ourselves at the present moment. Can we then find out from Turgenev himself what principles guided him – had he, for all his seeming ease and lightness, some drastic theory of art? A novelist, of course, lives so much deeper down<sup>fn7</sup> than a critic that his statements are apt to be contradictory and confusing; they seem to break in process of coming to the surface, and do not hold together in the light of reason. Still, Turgenev was much interested in the art of fiction, and one or two of his sayings may help us to clarify our impressions of the famous novels. Once, for example, a young writer brought him the manuscript of a novel to criticise. Turgenev objected that he had made his heroine say the wrong thing. 'What then ought she to have said?'<sup>fn8</sup> the author asked. Turgenev exploded. 'Trouver l'expression propre, c'est votre affaire!' But, the youth objected, he could not find it. 'Eh bien! vous devez la trouver.... Ne pensez pas que je sais l'expression et que je ne veux pas vous la dire. Trouver, en la cherchant, une expression *propre* est impossible: elle doit

couler de source. Quelquefois même, il faut créer l'expression ou le mot.' And he advised him to put away his manuscript for a month or so, when the expression might come to him. If not – 'Si vous n'y arrivez pas, cela voudra dire que vous ne ferez jamais rien qui vaille.'<sup>fn9</sup> From this it would seem that Turgenev is among those who hold that the right expression, which is of the utmost importance, is not to be had by observation but comes from the depths unconsciously. You cannot find by looking. But then again he speaks of the novelist's art, and now he lays the greatest emphasis upon the need of observation. The novelist must observe everything exactly, in himself and in others. 'La douleur passera et la page excellente reste.'<sup>fn10</sup> He must observe perpetually, impersonally, impartially. And still he is only at the beginning. '... il faut encore lire, toujours étudier, approfondir tout ce qui entoure, non seulement tâcher de saisir la vie dans toutes les manifestations, mais encore la comprendre, comprendre les lois d'après lesquelles elle se meut et qui ne se montrent pas toujours ...'<sup>fn11</sup> That was how he himself worked before he grew old and lazy, he said. But one has need of strong muscles to do it, he added; nor if we consider what he is asking can we accuse him of exaggeration.

For he is asking the novelist not only to do many things but some that seem incompatible. He has to observe facts impartially, yet he must also interpret them. Many novelists do the one; many do the other – we have the photograph and the poem. But few combine the fact and the vision; and the rare quality that we find in Turgenev is the result of this double process. For in these short chapters he is doing two very different things at the same time. With his infallible eye he observes everything accurately. Solomin picks up a pair of gloves; they were 'white chamois-leather gloves, recently washed, every finger of which had stretched at the tip and looked like a finger-biscuit.'<sup>fn12</sup> But he stops when he has shown us the glove exactly; the interpreter is at his elbow to insist that even a glove must be relevant to the character, or to the idea. But the idea alone is not enough; the interpreter is never allowed to mount unchecked into the realms of imagination; again the observer pulls him back and reminds him of the other truth, the truth of fact. Even Bazarov, the heroic, packed his best trousers at the top of his bag when he wanted to impress a lady. The two partners work in closest alliance.

We look at the same thing from different angles, and that is one reason why the short chapters hold so much; they contain so many contrasts. On one and the same page we have irony and passion; the poetic and the commonplace; a tap drips and a nightingale sings. And yet, though the scene is made up of contrasts, it remains the same scene; our impressions are all relevant to each other.

Such a balance, of course, between two very different faculties is extremely rare, especially in English fiction, and demands some sacrifices. The great characters, with whom we are so familiar in our literature, the Micawbers, the Pecksniffs, the Becky Sharps,<sup>fn13</sup> will not flourish under such supervision; they need, it seems, more licence; they must be allowed to dominate and perhaps to destroy other competitors. With the possible exception of Bazarov<sup>fn14</sup> and of Harlov in *A Lear of the Steppes* no one character in Turgenev's novels stands out above and beyond the rest so that we remember him apart from the book. The Rudins, the Lavretskys, the Litvinovs, the Elenas, the Lisas, the Mariannas shade off into each other, making, with all their variations, one subtle and profound type rather than several distinct and highly individualised men and women. Then, again, the poet novelists, like Emily Brontë, Hardy, or Melville, to whom facts are symbols, certainly give us a more overwhelming and passionate experience in *Wuthering Heights* or *The Return of the Native*, or *Moby Dick*<sup>fn15</sup> than any that Turgenev offers us. And yet what Turgenev offers us not only often affects us as poetry, but his books are perhaps more completely satisfying than the others. They are curiously of our own time, undecayed, and complete in themselves.

For the other quality that Turgenev possesses in so great a degree is the rare gift of symmetry, of balance. He gives us, in comparison with other novelists, a generalised and harmonised picture of life. And this is not only because his scope is wide – he shows us different societies, the peasant's, the intellectual's, the aristocrat's, the merchant's – but we are conscious of some further control and order. Yet such symmetry, as we are reminded, perhaps, by reading *A House of Gentlemen*, is not the result of a supreme gift for storytelling. Turgenev, on the contrary, often tells a story very badly. There are loops and circumlocutions in his narrative – '... we must ask the reader's permission to break off the thread of our story

for a time,<sup>fn16</sup> he will say. And then for fifty pages or so we are involved in great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers, much to our confusion, until we are back with Lavretsky at O— ‘where we parted from him, and whither we will now ask the indulgent reader to return with us.’<sup>fn17</sup> The good storyteller, who sees his book as a succession of events, would never have suffered that interruption. But Turgenev did not see his books as a succession of events; he saw them as a succession of emotions radiating from some character at the centre. A Bazarov, a Harlov seen in the flesh, perhaps, once in the corner of a railway carriage, becomes of paramount importance and acts as a magnet which has the power to draw things mysteriously belonging, though apparently incongruous, together. The connexion is not of events but of emotions, and if at the end of the book we feel a sense of completeness, it must be that in spite of his defects as a storyteller Turgenev’s ear for emotion was so fine that even if he uses an abrupt contrast, or passes away from his people to a description of the sky or of the forest, all is held together by the truth of his insight. He never distracts us with the real incongruity – the introduction of an emotion that is false, or a transition that is arbitrary.

It is for this reason that his novels are not merely symmetrical but make us feel so intensely. His heroes and heroines are among the few fictitious characters of whose love we are convinced. It is a passion of extraordinary purity and intensity. The love of Elena for Insarov,<sup>fn18</sup> her anguish when he fails to come, her despair when she seeks refuge in the chapel in the rain; the death of Bazarov and the sorrow of his old father and mother remain in the mind like actual experiences. And yet, strangely enough, the individual never dominates; many other things seem to be going on at the same time. We hear the hum of life in the fields; a horse champs his bit; a butterfly circles and settles. And as we notice, without seeming to notice, life going on, we feel more intensely for the men and women themselves because they are not the whole of life, but only part of the whole. Something of this, of course, is due to the fact that Turgenev’s people are profoundly conscious of their relation to things outside themselves. ‘What is my youth for, what am I living for, why have I a soul, what is it all for?’<sup>fn19</sup> Elena asks in her diary. The question is always on their lips.

It lends a profundity to talk that is otherwise light, amusing, full of exact observation. Turgenev is never, as in England he might have been, merely the brilliant historian of manners. But not only do they question the aim of their own lives but they brood over the question of Russia. The intellectuals are always working for Russia; they sit up arguing about the future of Russia till the dawn rises over the eternal samovar. 'They worry and worry away at that unlucky subject, as children chew away at a bit of india-rubber,'<sup>fn20</sup> Potugin remarks in *Smoke*. Turgenev, exiled in body, cannot absent himself from Russia – he has the almost morbid sensibility that comes from a feeling of inferiority and suppression. And yet he never allows himself to become a partisan, a mouthpiece. Irony never deserts him; there is always the other side, the contrast. In the midst of political ardour we are shown Fomushka and Fimushka, 'chubby, spruce little things, a perfect pair of little poll-parrots,'<sup>fn21</sup> who manage to exist very happily singing glees in spite of their country. Also it is a difficult business, he reminds us, to know the peasants, not merely to study them. 'I could not *simplify* myself,'<sup>fn22</sup> wrote Nezhdanov, the intellectual, before he killed himself. Moreover though Turgenev could have said with Marianna '... I suffer for all the oppressed, the poor, the wretched in Russia,'<sup>fn23</sup> it was for the good of the cause, just as it was for the good of his art, not to expatiate, not to explain. 'Non, quand tu as énoncé le fait, n'insiste pas. Que le lecteur le discute et le comprenne lui-même. Croyez-moi, c'est mieux dans l'intérêt même des idées qui vous sont chères.'<sup>fn24</sup> He compelled himself to stand outside; he laughed at the intellectuals; he showed up the windiness of their arguments, the sublime folly of their attempts. But his emotion, and their failure, affect us all the more powerfully now because of that aloofness. Yet if this method was partly the result of discipline and theory, no theory, as Turgenev's novels abundantly prove, is able to go to the root of the matter and eliminate the artist himself; his temperament remains ineradicable. Nobody, we say over and over again as we read him, even in a translation, could have written this except Turgenev. His birth, his race, the impressions of his childhood, pervade everything that he wrote.

But, though temperament is fated and inevitable, the writer has a choice, and a very important one, in the use he makes of it. 'I' he must be; but there are many different 'I's' in the same person. Shall he be the 'I' who has suffered this slight, that injury, who desires to impose his own personality, to win popularity and power for himself and his views; or shall he suppress that 'I' in favour of the one who sees as far as he can impartially and honestly, without wishing to plead a cause or to justify himself? Turgenev had no doubt about his choice; he refused to write 'élégamment et chaudement ce que vous ressentez à l'aspect de cette chose ou de cet homme.'<sup>fn25</sup> He used the other self, the self which has been so rid of superfluities that it is almost impersonal in its intense individuality; the self which he defines in speaking of the actress Violetta:

She had thrown aside everything subsidiary, everything superfluous, and *found herself*; a rare, a lofty delight for an artist! She had suddenly crossed the limit, which it is impossible to define, beyond which is the abiding place of beauty.<sup>fn26</sup>

That is why his novels are still so much of our own time; no hot and personal emotion has made them local and transitory; the man who speaks is not a prophet clothed with thunder but a seer who tries to understand. Of course there are weaknesses; one grows old and lazy as he said; sometimes his books are slight, confused, and perhaps sentimental. But they dwell in 'the abiding place of beauty' because he chose to write with the most fundamental part of his being as a writer; nor, for all his irony and aloofness, do we ever doubt the depth of his feeling.

1934

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## Oliver Goldsmith

Most writers, to hear them talk, believe in the existence of a spirit, called, according to the age they live in, the Muse, Genius or Inspiration; and it is at her command that they write. Unfortunately the historian is bound to perceive that the lady is not altogether single and solitary. She conceals behind her robes a whole bevy of under-strappers – great ladies, earls, statesmen, booksellers, editors, publishers and common men and women, who control and guide no less surely than the Muse. Change is of their nature, and as ill-luck will have it they grow steadily less picturesque as time draws on. Sidney's Lady Pembroke, dreaming over her folios in the groves of Wilton,<sup>fn2</sup> was no mean symbol of the goddess of poetry; but her place has been taken not by one man or woman but by a vast miscellaneous crowd, who want – they do not know exactly what. They must be amused and flattered; they must be fed on scraps and scandals and, finally, they must be sent sound asleep. And who is to be blamed if what they want they get?

The patron is always changing, and for the most part imperceptibly. But one such change in the middle of the eighteenth century took place in the full light of day, and has been recorded for us with his usual vivacity by Oliver Goldsmith, who was himself one of its victims:

When the great Somers was at the helm [he wrote] patronage was fashionable among our nobility.... I have heard an old poet of that glorious age say, that a dinner with his lordship had procured him invitations for the whole week following; that an airing in his patron's chariot has supplied him with a citizen's coach on every future occasion....

But this link [he continues] now seems entirely broken. Since the days of a certain prime minister of inglorious memory, the learned have been kept pretty much at a distance. A jockey or a laced player, supplies the place of the scholar, poet, or man of virtue.... He is called an author, and all know that an author is a thing only to be laughed at. His person, not his jest, becomes the mirth of the company. At his approach the most fat unthinking face brightens into malicious

meaning. Even aldermen laugh, and revenge on him the ridicule which was lavished on their forefathers....<sup>fn3</sup>

To be laughed at by aldermen instead of riding in the chariots of statesmen was a chan[g]e clearly not to the liking of a writer in whom we seem to perceive a spirit sensitive to ridicule and susceptible to the seduction of bloom-coloured velvet.

But the evils of the change went deeper. In the old days, he said, the patron was a man of taste and breeding, who could be trusted to see 'that all who deserved fame were in a capacity of attaining it.'<sup>fn4</sup> Now in the mid-eighteenth century young men of brains were thrown to the mercy of the booksellers. Penny-a-lining came into fashion. Men of originality and spirit became docile drudges, voluminous hacks. They stuffed out their pages with platitudes. They 'write through volumes while they do not think through a page.'<sup>fn5</sup> Solemnity and pomposity became the rule. 'On my conscience I believe we have all forgot to laugh in these days.'<sup>fn6</sup> The new public fed greedily upon vast hunks of knowledge. They demanded huge encyclopaedias, soulless compilations, which were 'carried on by different writers, cemented into one body, and concurring in the same design by the mediation of the booksellers.'<sup>fn7</sup> All this was much to the disgust of a man who wrote clearly, shortly and outspokenly by nature; who held that 'Were angels to write books, they never would write folios';<sup>fn8</sup> who felt himself among the angels but knew that the age of the angels was over. The chariots and the earls had winged their way back to Heaven; in their place stood a stout tradesman demanding so many lines of prose to be delivered by Saturday night without fail or the wretched hack would go without dinner on Sunday.

Goldsmith did his share of the work manfully, as a glance at the list of his works shows. But he was to find that the change from the Earl to the bookseller was not without its advantages. A new public had come into existence with new demands. Everybody was turning reader. The writer, if he had ceased to dine with the nobility, had become the friend and instructor of a vast congregation of ordinary men and women. They demanded essays as well as encyclopaedias. They allowed their writers a freedom which the old aristocracy had never permitted. As Goldsmith said, the writer could

now 'refuse invitations to dinner'; he 'could wear just such clothes as men generally wear' and 'he can bravely assert the dignity of independence.'<sup>fn9</sup> Goldsmith by temper and training was peculiarly fitted to take advantage of the new state of things. He was a man of lively intelligence and outspoken good sense. He had the born writer's gift of being in touch with the thing itself and not with the outer husks of words. There was something shrewd and objective in his temper which fitted him admirably to preach little sermons and wing little satires. If he had little education and no learning, he had a large and varied stock of experience to draw on. He had knocked about the world. He had seen Leyden and Paris and Padua as a foot traveller sees famous cities. But his travels, far from plunging him into reverie or giving him a passion for the solitudes and sublimities of nature, had served to make him relish human society better and had proved how slight are the differences between man and man. He preferred to call himself a Citizen of the World rather than an Englishman. 'We are now become so much Englishmen, Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Spaniards or Germans that we are no longer ... members of that grand society which comprehends the whole of human kind.'<sup>fn10</sup> He insisted that we should pool our discoveries and learn from each other.

It is this detached attitude and width of view that give Goldsmith his peculiar flavour as an essayist. Other writers pack their pages fuller and bring us into closer touch with themselves. Goldsmith, on the other hand, keeps just on the edge of the crowd so that we can hear what the common people are saying and note their humours. That is why his essays, even the early ones, in *The Bee*, make such good reading. That is why it is just and fitting that *The Bee* and *The Citizen of the World* should be reprinted again today, at a very modest price; and why Mr Church should once more draw our attention in an excellent introduction to the unfaded merits of a book printed so long ago as 1762. The Citizen is still a most vivacious companion as he takes his walk from Charing Cross to Ludgate Hill. The streets are lit up for the Battle of Minden,<sup>fn11</sup> and he pokes fun at the parochial patriotism of the English. He hears the shoemaker scolding his wife and foreboding what will become of shoemakers 'if Mounseers in wooden shoes come among us ... when perhaps Madam Pompadour herself might have shoes scopped out of an old

pear tree’;<sup>fn12</sup> he hears the waiter at Ashley’s punch house boasting to the company how if he were Secretary of State he would take Paris and plant the English standard on the Bastille.<sup>fn13</sup> He peeps into St Paul’s and marvels at the curious lack of reverence shown by the English at their worship. He reflects that rags ‘which might be valued at half a string of copper money in China’<sup>fn14</sup> yet needed a fleet and an army to win them. He marvels that the French and English are at war simply because people like their muffs edged with fur and must therefore kill each other and seize a country ‘belonging to people who were in possession from time immemorial.’<sup>fn15</sup> Shrewdly and sarcastically he casts his eye, as he saunters on, upon the odd habits and sights that the English are so used to that they no longer see them. Indeed he could scarcely have chosen a method better calculated to make the new public aware of itself or one better suited to the nature of his own genius. If Goldsmith stood still he could be as flat, though not as solemn, as any of the folio makers who were his aversion. Here, however, he must keep moving; he must pass rapidly under review all kinds of men and customs and speak his mind on them. And here his novelist’s gift stood him in good stead. If he thinks he thinks in the round. An idea at once dresses itself up in flesh and blood and becomes a human being. Beau Tibbs<sup>fn16</sup> comes to life: Vauxhall Gardens is bustling with people: the writer’s garret is before us with its broken windows and the spider’s web in the corner. He has a perpetual instinct to make concrete, to bring into being.

Perhaps it was the novelist’s gift that made him a little impatient with essay writing. The shortness of the essay made people think it superficial. ‘I could have made them more metaphysical had I thought fit,’<sup>fn17</sup> he replied. But it is doubtful if he was prevented by circumstances from any depth of speculation. The real trouble was that Beau Tibbs and Vauxhall Gardens asked to be given a longer lease of life, but the end of the column was reached; down came the shears, and a new subject must be broached next week. The natural outlet, as Goldsmith found, was the novel. In those freer pages he had room to give his characters space to walk round and display themselves. Yet *The Vicar of Wakefield* keeps some of the characteristics that distinguish the more static art of the essayist.

The characters are not quite free to go their own ways; they must come back at the tug of the string to illustrate the moral. This necessity is the stranger to us because good and bad are no longer so positively white and black; the art of the moralist is out of fashion in fiction. But Goldsmith not only believed in blackness and whiteness: he believed – perhaps one belief depends upon the other – that goodness will be rewarded, and vice punished. It is a doctrine, it may strike us when we read *The Vicar of Wakefield*, which imposes some restrictions on the novelist. There is no need of the mixed, of the twisted, of the profound. Lightly tinted, broadly shaded, with here a foible, there a peccadillo, the characters of the Primroses are like those tropical fish who seem to have only backbones but no other organs to darken the transparency of their flesh. Our sympathies are not put upon the rack. Daughters may be seduced, houses burnt, and good men sent to prison, yet since the world is a perfectly balanced place, let it lurch as it likes, it is bound to settle into equilibrium in the long run. The most hardened of sinners – here Goldsmith stops characteristically to point out the evils of the prison system – will take to cutting tobacco stoppers if given the chance and thus enter the straight path of virtue again. Such assumptions stopped certain avenues of thought and imagination. But the limitation had its advantages; he could give all his mind to the story. All is clear, related, and uncrowded. He knew precisely what to leave out. Thus, once we begin to read we read on, not to reach the end but to enjoy the present moment. We cannot dismember this small complete world. It hems us in, it surrounds us. We ask nothing better than to sit in the sun on the hawthorn bank and sing ‘Barbara Allen,’ or Johnny Armstrong’s last good night.<sup>fn18</sup> Shades of violence and wrong can scarcely trespass here. But the scene is saved from insipidity by Goldsmith’s tart eighteenth-century humour. One advantage of having a settled code of morals is that you know exactly what to laugh at.

Yet there are passages in the *Vicar* which give us pause. ‘Fudge! fudge! fudge!’ Burchell exclaims,<sup>fn19</sup> and it seems that, in order to get the full effect of the scene, we should see it in the flesh. There is no margin of suggestion in this clear prose; it creates no populous and teeming silence which would be broken by the physical presence of the actors. Indeed, when we turn from Goldsmith’s novel to

Goldsmith's plays his characters seem to gain vigour and identity by standing before us in the round. They can say everything they have to say without the intervention of the novelist. This may be taken, if we choose, as proof that they have nothing of extreme subtlety to say. Yet Goldsmith did himself a wrong when he followed the old habit of labelling his people with names – Croker, Lofty, Richlands<sup>fn20</sup> – which seem to allow them but one quality apiece. His observation, trained in the finer discriminations of fiction, worked much more cunningly than the names suggest. Bodies and hearts are attached to these signboard faces; wit of the true spontaneous sort bubbles from their lips. He stood, of course, at the very point where comedy can flourish, as remote from the tragic violence of the Elizabethans as from the minute maze of modern psychology. The 'humours' of the Elizabethan stage had fined themselves into characters. Convention and conviction and an unquestioned standard of values seem to support the large, airy world of his invention. Nothing could be more amusing than *She Stoops to Conquer*<sup>fn21</sup> – one might even go so far as to say that amusement of so pure a quality will never come our way again. It demands too rare a combination of conditions. Nothing is too far fetched or fantastical to dry up the life blood in the characters themselves; we taste the double pleasure of a comic situation in which living people are the actors. It may be true that the amusement is not of the highest order. We have not gained a deeper understanding of human oddity and frailty when we have laughed to tears over the predicament of a good lady who has been driven round her house for two hours in the darkness. To mistake a private house for an inn is not a disaster that reveals the hidden depths or the highest dignity of human nature. But these are questions that fade out in the enjoyment of reading – an enjoyment which is much more composite than the simple word amusement can cover. When a thing is perfect of its kind we cannot stop, under that spell, to pick our flower to pieces. There is a unity about it which forbids us to dismember it.

Yet even so, in the midst of this harmony and completeness we hear now and again another note. 'But they are dead, and their sorrows are over.'<sup>fn22</sup> 'Life at its greatest and best is but a froward child, that must be humoured and coaxed a little till it falls asleep, and then all the care is over.'<sup>fn23</sup> 'No sounds were heard but of the

shrilling cock, and the deep-mouthed watch-dog at hollow distance.<sup>fn24</sup> A poet seems hidden on the other side of the page anxious to concentrate its good-humoured urbanity into a phrase or two of deeper meaning. And Goldsmith was a true poet, even though he could not afford to entertain the muse for long. 'And thou, sweet Poetry,' he exclaimed,

My shame in crowds, my solitary pride.  
Thou source of all my bliss, and all my woe,  
That found'st me poor at first, and keep'st me so;

– that 'dear charming nymph'<sup>fn25</sup> fluttered her wings about him even if she made no very long stay. It is poetry of course at one remove from prose: poetry using only the greys and browns upon her palette: poetry clicking her heels together at the end of the line as though executing the steps of a courtly dance: poetry with such a sediment of good sense that it naturally crystallises itself into epigram:

And to party gave up what was meant for mankind;<sup>fn26</sup>

or:

How small of all that human hearts endure  
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure.<sup>fn27</sup>

The argument of his poems has already been stated in prose. Kingdoms grow to an unwieldy size; empires spread ruin round them; nothing is more to be valued than 'a happy human face';<sup>fn28</sup> power and independence are to be dreaded. It has all been said before; but here the village is Auburn; the land is Ireland; all is made concrete and visualised, given a voice and a name. The world of Goldsmith's poetry is, of course, a flat and eyeless world; swains sport with nymphs, and the deep is finny. But pathos is the more moving in the midst of reserve, and the poet's sudden emotion tells the more when it is obviously not good manners to talk about oneself. If it is objected that Goldsmith's imagination is too narrowly and purely domestic, that he ignores all the rubs and struggles of life to dwell upon

... the gentler morals, such as play.

Through life's more cultured walks, and charm the way,<sup>fn29</sup>

it is also undeniable that what he loves is not an artificial and foppish refinement. 'Those calm desires that ask'd but little room'<sup>fn30</sup> are the pith of life, the essence that he has pressed out from the turbulent and unsatisfying mass.

Yet Goldsmith has a peculiar reticence which forbids us to dwell with him in complete intimacy. It is partly no doubt that he has no such depths to reveal as some of our essayists – the solitudes and sublimities are not for him, rather the graces and amenities. And also we are kept at arm's length by the urbanity of his style, just as good manners confer impersonality upon the well-bred. But there may be another reason for his reserve. Lamb, Hazlitt, Montaigne<sup>fn31</sup> talk openly about themselves because their faults are not small ones; Goldsmith was reserved because his foibles are the kind that men conceal. Nobody at least can read Goldsmith in the mass without noticing how frequently, yet how indirectly, certain themes recur – dress, ugliness, awkwardness, poverty and the fear of ridicule. It is as if the genial man were haunted by some private dread, as if he were conscious that besides the angel there lived in him a less reputable companion, resembling perhaps Poor Poll.<sup>fn32</sup> It is only necessary to open Boswell to make sure. There, at once, we see our serene and mellifluous writer in the flesh. 'His person was short, his countenance coarse and vulgar, his deportment that of a scholar awkwardly affecting the easy gentleman.'<sup>fn33</sup> With touch upon touch the unprepossessing portrait is built up. We are shown Goldsmith writhing upon the sofa in an agony of jealousy: Goldsmith thrusting himself into the talk and floundering on 'without knowing how to get off'.<sup>fn34</sup> Goldsmith full of vanities and jealousies: Goldsmith dressing up his ugly pock-marked body in a smart bloom-coloured coat. The portrait is painted without sympathy save, indeed, of that inverted kind which comes from knowing from your own experience the sufferings which you describe. Boswell, too, was jealous, and seized upon his sitter's foibles with the malicious insight of a rival.

Yet, like all Boswell's portraits, it has the breath of life in it. He brings the other Goldsmith to the surface – he combines them both. He proves that the silver-tongued writer was no simple soul, gently floating through life from the honeysuckle to the hawthorn hedge. On

the contrary, he was a complex man, a man full of troubles, without 'settled principle';<sup>fn35</sup> who lived from hand to mouth and from day to day; who wrote his loveliest sentences in a garret under pressure of poverty. And yet, so oddly are human faculties combined, he had only to take his pen and he was revenged upon Boswell, upon the fine gentleman who sneered at him, upon his own ugly body and stumbling tongue. He had only to write and all was clear and melodious; he had only to write and he was among the angels, speaking with a silver tongue in a world where all is ordered, rational and serene.

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## Foreword to *Catalogue of Recent Paintings* by Vanessa Bell

As Keats wrote to Haydon, 'I have ever been too sensible of the labyrinthian path to eminence in Art ... to think I understood the emphasis of Painting.'<sup>fn2</sup> Let us leave it to the critics to pursue the exciting adventure which waits them in these rooms; to trace the progress of the artist's brush beginning, shall we say, with the chocolate-faced nursemaid and the monolithic figures of 1920; to note the birth of other sensibilities; how blues and oranges trembled into life; how this mass mated itself with that; how the line grew taut or slack; how with an infinitude of varied touches the finished picture came into being. For us the experience has its excitement too. A meaning is given to familiar things that makes them strange. Not a word sounds and yet the room is full of conversations. What are the people saying who are not sitting on that sofa? What tune is the child playing on her silent violin? Nobody moves and yet the room is full of intimate relationships. People's minds have split out of their bodies and become part of their surroundings. Where does the man end and Buddha begin? Character is colour, and colour is china, and china is music. Greens, blues, reds and purples are here seen making love and war and joining in unexpected combinations of exquisite married bliss. A plant bends its leaves in the jar and we feel that we too have visited the depths of the sea.

Cornfields bask in the sun of man's first summer; the haymakers are primeval men. Everywhere life has been rid of its accidents, shown in its essence. The weight of custom has been lifted from the earth. Hampstead is virginal; Ken Wood ecstatic. The onions and the eggs perform together a solemn music. Flowers toss their heads like proud horses in an Eastern festival. In short, precipitated by the swift strokes of the painter's brush, we have been blown over the boundary to the world where words talk such nonsense that it is best

to silence them. And yet it is a world of glowing serenity and sober truth. Compare it, for example, with Piccadilly Circus or St James's Square.

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# Why?

When the first number of *Lysistrata* appeared, I confess that I was deeply disappointed. It was so well printed, on such good paper. It looked established, prosperous. As I turned the pages it seemed to me that wealth must have descended upon Somerville, and I was about to answer the request of the editor for an article with a negative, when I read, greatly to my relief, that one of the writers was badly dressed, and gathered from another that the women's colleges still lack power and prestige. At this I plucked up heart, and a crowd of questions that have been pressing to be asked rushed to my lips saying: Here is our chance.

I should explain that like so many people nowadays I am pestered with questions. I find it impossible to walk down the street without stopping, it may be in the middle of the road, to ask Why? Churches, public houses, parliaments, shops, loud-speakers, motor cars, the drone of an aeroplane in the clouds, and men and women, all inspire questions. Yet what is the point of asking questions of oneself? They should be asked openly in public. But the great obstacle to asking questions openly in public is, of course, wealth. The little twisted sign that comes at the end of a question has a way of making the rich writhe; power and prestige come down upon it with all their weight. Questions, therefore, being sensitive, impulsive, and often foolish, have a way of picking their asking place with care. They shrivel up in an atmosphere of power, prosperity, and timeworn stone. They die by the dozen on the threshold of great newspaper offices. They slink away to less favoured, less flourishing quarters where people are poor and therefore have nothing to give, where they have no power and therefore have nothing to lose. Now the questions that have been pestering me to ask them decided, whether rightly or wrongly, that they could be asked in *Lysistrata*. They said, 'We do not expect you to ask us in ——' here they named some of our most respectable dailies and weeklies; 'nor in ——' here they named

some of our most venerable institutions. 'But, thank Heaven!' they exclaimed, 'are not women's colleges poor and young? Are they not inventive, adventurous? Are they not out to create a new ——'

'The editor forbids feminism,'<sup>fn2</sup> I interposed severely.

'What is feminism?' they screamed with one accord, and as I did not answer at once, a new question was flung at me, 'Don't you think it high time that a new ——?' But I stopped them by reminding them that they had only two thousand words at their disposal, upon which they consulted together, and finally put forward the request that I should introduce one or two of the simplest, tamest, and most obvious among them. For example, there is the question that always bobs up at the beginning of term when societies issue their invitations and universities open their doors – why lecture, why be lectured?

In order to place this question fairly before you, I will describe, for memory has kept the picture bright, one of those rare but, as Queen Victoria would have put it, never-to-be-sufficiently-lamented<sup>fn3</sup> occasions when in deference to friendship, or in a desperate attempt to acquire information about, perhaps, the French Revolution, it seemed necessary to attend a lecture. The room to begin with had a hybrid look – it was not for sitting in, nor yet for eating in. Perhaps there was a map on the wall; certainly there was a table on a platform, and several rows of rather small, rather hard, comfortless little chairs. These were occupied intermittently, as if they shunned each other's company, by people of both sexes, and some had notebooks and were tapping their fountain pens, and some had none and gazed with the vacancy and placidity of bull frogs at the ceiling. A large clock displayed its cheerless face, and when the hour struck in strode a harried-looking man, a man from whose face nervousness, vanity, or perhaps the depressing and impossible nature of his task had removed all traces of ordinary humanity. There was a momentary stir. He had written a book, and for a moment it is interesting to see people who have written books. Everybody gazed at him. He was bald and not hairy; had a mouth and a chin; in short he was a man like another, although he had written a book. He cleared his throat and the lecture began. Now, the human voice is an instrument of varied power; it can enchant and it can soothe; it can rage and it can despair; but when it lectures

it almost always bores. What he said was sensible enough; there was learning in it and argument and reason; but as the voice went on attention wandered. The face of the clock seemed abnormally pale; the hands too suffered from some infirmity. Had they the gout? Were they swollen? They moved so slowly. They reminded one of the painful progress of a three-legged fly that has survived the winter. How many flies on an average survive the English winter, and what would be the thoughts of such an insect on waking to find itself being lectured on the French Revolution? The enquiry was fatal. A link had been lost – a paragraph dropped. It was useless to ask the lecturer to repeat his words; on he plodded with dogged pertinacity. The origin of the French Revolution was being sought for – also the thoughts of flies. Now there came one of those flat stretches of discourse when minute objects can be seen coming for two or three miles ahead. ‘Skip!’ we entreated him – vainly. He did not skip. He went on. Then there was a joke; then it seemed that the windows wanted washing; then a woman sneezed; then the voice quickened; then there was a peroration; and then – thank Heaven! the lecture was over.

Why, since life holds only so many hours, waste one of them on being lectured? Why, since printing presses have been invented these many centuries, should he not have printed his lecture instead of speaking it? Then, by the fire in winter, or under an apple tree in summer, it could have been read, thought over, discussed; the difficult ideas pondered, the argument debated. It could have been thickened, and stiffened. There would have been no need of those repetitions and dilutions with which lectures have to be watered down and brightened up so as to attract the attention of a miscellaneous audience too apt to think about noses and chins, women sneezing and the longevity of flies.

It may be, I told these questions, that there is some reason, imperceptible to outsiders, which makes lectures an essential part of university discipline. But why – here another rushed to the forefront – why, if lectures are necessary as a form of education should they not be abolished as a form of entertainment? Never does the crocus flower or the beech tree redden but there issues simultaneously from all the universities of England, Scotland and Ireland a shower of notes in which desperate secretaries entreat So-and-so and So-and-

As if to answer her own question she read a passage from the manuscript on the floor. 'And each the spit and image of the other!' she groaned, lifting it wearily to its place with the manuscripts on the shelf.

'But think of all they must know?' I tried to argue. 'Know?' she echoed me. 'Know? What d'you mean by "know"?' As that was a difficult question to answer offhand, I passed it over by saying, 'Well, at any rate, they'll be able to make their livings and teach other people.' Whereupon she lost her temper and, seizing the unfortunate work upon the Elizabethan sonnet, whizzed it across the room. The rest of the visit passed in picking up the fragments of a vase that had belonged to her grandmother.

Now, of course, a dozen other questions clamour to be asked; about Churches and Parliaments and public houses and shops and loudspeakers and men and women; but mercifully time is up; silence falls.

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## Walter Sickert: A Conversation

Though talk is a common habit and much enjoyed, those who try to record it are aware that it runs hither and thither, seldom sticks to the point, abounds in exaggeration and inaccuracy, and has frequent stretches of extreme dullness. Thus when seven or eight people dined together the other night the first ten minutes went in saying how very difficult it is to get about London nowadays; was it quicker to walk or to drive; did the new system of coloured lights help or hinder?<sup>fn2</sup> Just as dinner was announced, somebody asked: 'But when were picture galleries invented?', a question naturally arising, for the discussion about the value of coloured lights had led somebody to say that in the eyes of a motorist red is not a colour but simply a danger signal. We shall very soon lose our sense of colour, another added, exaggerating, of course. Colours are used so much as signals now that they will very soon suggest action merely – that is the worst of living in a highly organised community. Other instances of the change wrought upon our senses by modern conditions were then cited; how buildings are changing their character because no one can stand still to look at them; how statues and mosaics removed from their old stations and confined to the insides of churches and private houses lose the qualities proper to them in the open air. This naturally led to the question when picture galleries were first opened, and as no precise answer was forthcoming the speaker went on to sketch a fancy picture of an inventive youth having to wait his turn to cross Ludgate Circus in the reign of Queen Anne.<sup>fn3</sup> 'Look,' he said to himself, 'how the coaches cut across the corner! That poor old boy,' he said, 'positively had to put his hand to his pig-tail. Nobody any longer stops to look at St Paul's. Soon all these swinging signboards will be dismantled. Let me take time by the forelock,' he said, and, going to his bank, which was near at hand, drew out what remained of his patrimony, and invested it in a neat set of rooms in Bond Street, where he hung the

first show of pictures ever to be displayed to the public. Perhaps that is the origin of the House of Agnews;<sup>fn4</sup> perhaps their gallery stands on the site of the house that was leased, so foreseeingly, by the young man over two hundred years ago. Perhaps, said the others; but nobody troubled to verify the statement, for it was a bitter cold night in December and the soup stood upon the table.

In course of time the talk turned, as talk has a way of turning, back on itself – to colour; how different people see colour differently; how painters are affected by their place of birth, whether in the blue South or the grey North; how colour blazes, unrelated to any object, in the eyes of children; how politicians and business men are blind, days spent in an office leading to atrophy of the eye; and so, by contrast, to those insects, said still to be found in the primeval forests of South America, in whom the eye is so developed that they are all eye, the body a tuft of leather, serving merely to connect the two great chambers of vision. Somebody had met a man whose business it was to explore the wilder parts of the world in search of cactuses, and from him had heard of these insects who are born with the flowers and die when the flowers fade. A hard-headed man, used to roughing it in all parts of the world, yet there was something moving to him in the sight of these little creatures drinking crimson until they became crimson; then flitting on to violet; then to a vivid green, and becoming for the moment the thing they saw – red, green, blue, whatever the colour of the flower might be. At the first breath of winter, he said, when the flowers died, the life went out of them, and you might mistake them as they lay on the grass for shrivelled air-balls.<sup>fn5</sup> Were we once insects like that, too, one of the diners asked; all eye? Do we still preserve the capacity for drinking, eating, indeed becoming colour furled up in us, waiting proper conditions to develop? For as the rocks hide fossils, so we hide tigers, baboons, and perhaps insects, under our coats and hats. On first entering a picture gallery, whose stillness, warmth and seclusion from the perils of the street reproduce the conditions of the primeval forest, it often seems as if we reverted to the insect stage of our long life.

‘On first entering a picture gallery’ – there was silence for a moment. Many pictures were being shown in London at that time. There was the famous Holbein; there were pictures by Picasso and

Matisse; young English painters were holding an exhibition in Burlington Gardens,<sup>fn6</sup> and there was a show of Sickert's pictures at Agnews. When I first went into Sickert's show, said one of the diners, I became completely and solely an insect – all eye. I flew from colour to colour, from red to blue, from yellow to green. Colours went spirally through my body lighting a flare as if a rocket fell through the night and lit up greens and browns, grass and trees, and there in the grass a white bird. Colour warmed, thrilled, chafed, burnt, soothed, fed and finally exhausted me. For though the life of colour is a glorious life it is a short one. Soon the eye can hold no more; it shuts itself in sleep, and if the man who looks for cactuses had come by he would only have seen a shrivelled air-ball on a red plush chair.

That is an exaggeration, a dramatisation, the others said. Nobody, who can walk down Bond Street in the year 1933, without exciting suspicion in the heart of the policeman, can simplify sufficiently to see colour only. One must be a fly in order to die in aromatic pain.<sup>fn7</sup>

And it is many ages now since we lost 'the microscopic eye.'<sup>fn8</sup> Ages ago we left the forest and went into the world, and the eye shrivelled and the heart grew, and the liver and the intestines and the tongue and the hands and the feet. Sickert's show proves the truth of that soon enough. Look at his portraits: Charles Bradlaugh at the Bar of the House of Commons; the Right Honourable Winston Churchill, M.P.; Rear-Admiral Lumsden, C.I.E., C.V.O.; and Dr Cobbledick.<sup>fn9</sup> These gentlemen are by no means simple flowers. In front of Sickert's portraits of them we are reminded of all that we have done with all our organs since we left the jungle. The face of a civilised human being is a summing-up, an epitome of a million acts, thoughts, statements and concealments. Yes, Sickert is a great biographer, said one of them; when he paints a portrait I read a life. Think of his picture of the disillusioned lady in full evening-dress sitting on a balcony in Venice.<sup>fn10</sup> She has seen every sort of sunrise and sunset whether dressed in diamonds or white nightgown; now all is ruin and shipwreck; and yet the tattered ship in the background still floats. For though Sickert is a realist he is by no means a pessimist ... Laughter drowned the last words. The portrait of the lady on the balcony had suggested nothing of the kind to most of the

others. Had she lovers or not – it did not matter; did the ship sail or did it sink – they did not care. And they fetched a book of photographs from Sickert's paintings and began cutting off a hand or a head, and made them connect or separate, not as a hand or a head but as if they had some quite different relationship.

Now they are going into the silent land;<sup>fn11</sup> soon they will be out of reach of the human voice, two of the diners said, watching them. They are seeing things that we cannot see, just as a dog bristles and whines in a dark lane when nothing is visible to human eyes. They are making passes with their hands, to express what they cannot say; what excites them in those photographs is something so deeply sunk that they cannot put words to it. But we, like most English people, have been trained not to see but to talk. Yet it may be, they went on, that there is a zone of silence in the middle of every art. The artists themselves live in it. Coleridge could not explain *Kubla Khan*<sup>fn12</sup> – that he left to the critics. And those who are almost on a par with the artists, like our friends who are looking at the pictures, cannot impart what they feel when they go beyond the outskirts. They can only open and shut their fingers. We must resign ourselves to the fact that we are outsiders, condemned for ever to haunt the borders and margins of this great art. Nevertheless that is a region of very strong sensations. First, on entering a picture gallery, the violent rapture of colour; then, when we have soused our eyes sufficiently in that, there is the complexity and intrigue of character. I repeat, said one of them, that Sickert is among the best of biographers. When he sits a man or woman down in front of him he sees the whole of the life that has been lived to make that face. There it is – stated. None of our biographers make such complete and flawless statements. They are tripped up by those miserable impediments called facts; was he born on such a day; was his mother's name Jane or Mary; then the affair with the barmaid has to be suppressed out of deference to family feeling; and there is always, brooding over him with its dark wings and hooked beak, the Law of Libel. Hence the three or four hundred pages of compromise, evasion, understatement, overstatement, irrelevance and downright falsehood which we call biography. But Sickert takes his brush, squeezes his tube, looks at the face; and then, cloaked in the divine gift of silence, he paints – lies, paltriness, splendour, depravity,

There is a gusto in the spending of the poor; they are very close to what they possess. Hence the intimacy that seems to exist in Sickert's pictures between his people and their rooms. The bed, the chest of drawers, the one picture and the vase on the mantelpiece are all expressive of the owner. Merely by process of use and fitness the cheap furniture has rubbed its varnish off; the grain shows through; it has the expressive quality that expensive furniture always lacks; one must call it beautiful, though outside the room in which it plays its part it would be hideous in the extreme. Diamonds and Sheraton tables<sup>fn18</sup> never submit to use like that. But whatever Sickert paints has to submit; it has to lose its separateness; it has to compose part of his scene. He chooses, therefore, the casual clothes of daily life that have taken the shape of the body; the felt hat with one feather that a girl has bought with sixpence off a barrow in Berwick Market.<sup>fn19</sup> He likes bodies that work, hands that work, faces that have been lined and suppled and seamed by work, because, in working, people take unconscious gestures, and their faces have the expressiveness of unconsciousness – a look that the very rich, the very beautiful and the very sophisticated seldom possess. And of course Sickert composes his picture down to the very castors on the chairs and the fire-irons in the grate just as carefully as Turgenev,<sup>fn20</sup> of whom he sometimes reminds me, composes his scene.

There are many points one could argue in that statement, said the other. But certainly it would seem to be true that Sickert is the novelist of the middle class. At the same time, though he prefers to paint people who use their hands rather than the leisured, he never sinks below a certain level in the social scale. Like most painters, he has a profound love of the good things of life; well-cooked food, good wine, fine cigars. His world abounds in richness and succulence and humour. He could not draw breath in a starved, a stunted or a puritanical universe. His people are always well fed in body and mind; they excel in mother wit and shrewd knowledge of the world. Some of their sayings are really a little broad; I have always wondered that the censor has let them pass. There is always good company in his pictures. Nothing could be more enjoyable than to sit behind the shop with the French innkeeper<sup>fn21</sup> – that formidable man in the frock-coat whose name I forget. He would offer us a very fine cigar; uncork a bottle kept for his private use; and Madame

would join us from the glass-case where she keeps accounts, and we should sit and talk and sing songs and crack jokes.

Yes, and in the middle of our songs we should look up and see red-gold light dripping down into the green waters of the canal. We should suddenly become aware of a grey church looming over us and one pink cloud riding down the bosom of the west. We should see it suddenly over the shoulders of the innkeeper; and then we should go on talking. That is how Sickert makes us aware of beauty – over the shoulders of the innkeeper; for he is a true poet, of course, one in the long line of English poets, and not the least. Think of his Venice, of his landscapes; or of those pictures of music-halls, of circuses, of street markets, where the acute drama of human character is cut off; and we no longer make up stories but behold – is it too much to say a vision? But it would be absurd to class Sickert among the visionaries; he is not a rhapsodist; he does not gaze into the sunset; he does not lead us down glorious vistas to blue horizons and remote ecstasies. He is not a Shelley or a Blake.<sup>fn22</sup> We see his Venice from a little table on the Piazza, just as we are lifting a glass to our lips.<sup>fn23</sup> Then we go on talking. His paint has a tangible quality; it is made not of air and star-dust but of oil and earth. We long to lay hands on his clouds and his pinnacles; to feel his columns round and his pillars hard beneath our touch. One can almost hear his gold and red dripping with a little splash into the waters of the canal. Moreover, human nature is never exiled from his canvas – there is always a woman with a parasol in the foreground, or a man selling cabbages in the shadow of the arch. Even when he paints a formal eighteenth-century town like Bath, he puts a great cartwheel in the middle of the road.<sup>fn24</sup> And those long French streets of pale pink and yellow stucco are all patched and peeled; a child's pink frock hangs out to dry; there are marble-topped tables at the corner. He never goes far from the sound of the human voice, from the mobility and idiosyncrasy of the human figure. As a poet, then, we must liken him to the poets who haunt taverns and sea beaches where the fishermen are tumbling their silver catch into wicker baskets. Crabbe, Wordsworth, Cowper<sup>fn25</sup> are the names that come to mind, the poets who have kept close to the earth, to the house, to the sound of the natural human voice.

But here the speakers fell silent. Perhaps they were thinking that there is a vast distance between any poem and any picture; and that to compare them stretches words too far. At last, said one of them, we have reached the edge where painting breaks off and takes her way into the silent land. We shall have to set foot there soon, and all our words will fold their wings and sit huddled like rooks on the tops of the trees in winter. But since we love words let us dally for a little on the verge, said the other. Let us hold painting by the hand a moment longer, for though they must part in the end, painting and writing have much to tell each other; they have much in common. The novelist after all wants to make us see. Gardens, rivers, skies, clouds changing, the colour of a woman's dress, landscapes that bask beneath lovers, twisted woods that people walk in when they quarrel – novels are full of pictures like these. The novelist is always saying to himself, How<sup>fn26</sup> can I bring the sun on to my page? How can I show the night and the moon rising? And he must often think that to describe a scene is the worst way to show it. It must be done with one word, or with one word in skilful contrast with another. For example, there is Shakespeare's 'Dear as the ruddy drops that visit this sad heart.'<sup>fn27</sup> Does not 'ruddy' shine out partly because 'sad' comes after it; does not 'sad' convey to us a double sense of the gloom of the mind and the dullness of colour? They both speak at once, striking two notes to make one chord, stimulating the eye of the mind and of the body. Then again there is Herrick's

'More white than are the whitest creams,  
Or moonlight tinselling the streams.'<sup>fn28</sup>

where the word 'tinselling' adds to the simplicity of 'white' the glittering, sequined, fluid look of moonlit water. It is a very complex business, the mixing and marrying of words that goes on, probably unconsciously, in the poet's mind to feed the reader's eye. All great writers are great colourists, just as they are musicians into the bargain; they always contrive to make their scenes glow and darken and change to the eye. Each of Shakespeare's plays has its dominant colour. And each writer differs of course as a colourist. Pope has no great range of colours; he is more draughtsman than colourist; clear washes of indigo, discreet blacks and violets best suit his exquisite sharp outlines – save that in the *Elegy to an*

*Unfortunate Lady*<sup>fn29</sup> there is a mass of funeral black; and the great image of the Eastern King glows, fantastically, if you like, dark crimson. Keats<sup>fn30</sup> uses colour lavishly, lusciously, like a Venetian. In the *Eve of St Agnes* he paints for lines at a time, dipping his pen in mounds of pure reds and blues. Tennyson<sup>fn31</sup> on the other hand is never luscious; he uses the hard brush and the pure bright tints of a miniature painter. *The Princess* is illuminated like a monk's manuscript; there are whole landscapes in the curves of the capital letters. You almost need a magnifying glass to see the minuteness of the detail.

Undoubtedly, they agreed, the arts are closely united. What poet sets pen to paper without first hearing a tune in his head? And the prose-writer, though he makes believe to walk soberly, in obedience to the voice of reason, excites us by perpetual changes of rhythm following the emotions with which he deals. The best critics, Dryden, Lamb, Hazlitt,<sup>fn32</sup> were acutely aware of the mixture of elements, and wrote of literature with music and painting in their minds. Nowadays we are all so specialised that critics keep their brains fixed to the print, which accounts for the starved condition of criticism in our time, and the attenuated and partial manner in which it deals with its subject.

But we have gossiped long enough, they said; it is time to make an end. The silent land lies before us. We have come within sight of it many times while we were talking; when, for example, we said that Rose's red petticoat satisfied us; when we said that the chest of drawers and the arm convinced us that all was well with the world as a whole. Why did the red petticoat, the yellow chest of drawers, make us feel something that had nothing to do with the story? We could not say; we could not express in words the effect of those combinations of line and colour. And, thinking back over the show, we have to admit that there is a great stretch of silent territory in Sickert's pictures. Consider once more the picture of the music-hall.<sup>fn33</sup> At first it suggests the husky voice of Marie Lloyd singing a song about the ruins that Cromwell knocked about a bit;<sup>fn34</sup> then the song dies away, and we see a scooped-out space filled curiously with the curves of fiddles, bowler hats, and shirt fronts converging into a pattern with a lemon-coloured splash in the centre. It is

extraordinarily satisfying. Yet the description is so formal, so superficial, that we can hardly force our lips to frame it; while the emotion is distinct, powerful and satisfactory. Yes, said the other, it is not a description at all; it leaves out the meaning. But what sort of meaning is that which cannot be expressed in words?<sup>fn35</sup> What is a picture when it has rid itself of the companionship of language and of music? Let us ask the critics.

But the critics were still talking with their fingers. They were still bristling and shivering like dogs in dark lanes when something passes that we cannot see.

They have gone much farther into the forest than we shall ever go, said one of the talkers, sadly. We only catch a glimpse now and then of what lives there; we try to describe it and we cannot; and then it vanishes, and having seen it and lost it, exhaustion and depression overcome us; we recognise the limitations which Nature has put upon us, and so turn back to the sunny margin where the arts flirt and joke and pay each other compliments.

But do not let us fall into despair, said the other. I once read a letter from Walter Sickert in which he said, 'I have always been a literary painter, thank goodness, like all the decent painters.'<sup>fn36</sup> Perhaps then he would not altogether despise us. When we talk of his biographies, his novels, and his poems we may not be so foolish as it seems. Among the many kinds of artists, it may be that there are some who are hybrid. Some, that is to say, bore deeper and deeper into the stuff of their own art; others are always making raids into the lands of others. Sickert it may be is among the hybrids, the raiders. His name itself suggests that he is of mixed birth. I have read that he is part German, part English, part Scandinavian perhaps; he was born in Munich, was educated at Reading, and lived in France.<sup>fn37</sup> What more likely than that his mind is also cosmopolitan; that he sings a good song, writes a fine style, and reads enormously in four or five different languages? All this filters down into his brush. That is why he draws so many different people to look at his pictures. From his photograph you might take him for a highly distinguished lawyer with a nautical bent; the sort of man who settles a complicated case at the Law Courts, then changes into an old serge suit, pulls a yachting-cap with a green peak over his eyes and buffets about the North Sea with a volume of Æschylus<sup>fn38</sup> in his

of burnt skin'<sup>fn5</sup> on the pudding at Windsor; Queen Victoria's teeth were 'small like those of a mouse';<sup>fn6</sup> she had a way of shrugging her shoulders when she laughed; when they rode on the sands at evening 'the shadows become so long that it is as though our horses were walking on stilts';<sup>fn7</sup> there was a marvellous stone in the museum, like a large piece of shortbread, that 'swayed slightly up and down when held at one end.'<sup>fn8</sup> This little girl, in short, smelt, touched and saw as other children do; but she had an unusual power of following her feeling until she had coined the word for it. That is to say, she can write.

If we want an example of the difference between writing and non-writing we have only to compare a page of Queen Marie with a page of Queen Victoria. The old Queen was, of course, an author. She was forced by the exigencies of her profession to fill an immense number of pages, and some of these have been printed and bound between covers. But between the old Queen and the English language lay an abyss which no depth of passion and no strength of character could cross. Her works make very painful reading on that account. She has to express herself in words; but words will not come to her call. When she feels strongly and tries to say so, it is like hearing an old savage beating with a wooden spoon on a drum. '... this last refusal of Servia ... almost *forces us* to SEE *that* there is *no* false play.'<sup>fn9</sup> Rhythm is broken; the few poverty stricken words are bruised and battered; now hooked together with hyphens, now desperately distended with italics and capital letters – it is all no good. In the same way her descriptions of celebrated people slip through the fingers like water. 'I waited a moment in the Drawing-room to speak to Irving and Ellen Terry. He is very gentleman-like, and she, very pleasing and handsome.'<sup>fn10</sup> This primitive little machine is all that she has with which to register some of the most extraordinary experiences that ever fell to a woman's lot. But probably she owed much of her prestige to her inability to express herself. The majority of her subjects, knowing her through her writing, came to feel that only a woman immune from the usual frailties and passions of human nature could write as Queen Victoria wrote. It added to her royalty.

But now by some freak of fate, which Queen Victoria would have been the first to deplore, her granddaughter, the eldest child of the late Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh, has been born with a pen in her hand. Words do her bidding. Her own account of it is illuminating: ‘Even as a child,’ she says, ‘I possessed a vivid imagination and I liked telling stories to my sisters.... Then one of my children said to me: “Mama, you ought to write all this down, it is a pity to allow so many beautiful pictures to fade away.[”] ... I knew nothing whatever about writing, about style or composition, or about the “rules of the game,” but I did know how to conjure up beauty, also at times, emotion. I also had a vast store of words.’<sup>fn11</sup> It is true; she knows nothing about ‘the rules of the game’; words descend and bury whole cities under them; sights that should have been seen once and for all are distracted and dissipated; she ruins her effects and muffs her chances; but still because she feels abundantly, because she rides after her emotion fearlessly and takes her fences without caring for falls, she conjures up beauty and conveys emotion. Nor is it merely that by a happy fluke she is able to hit off a moment’s impression, a vivid detail; she has the rarer power of sweeping these figures along in a torrent of language; lives grow and change beneath our eyes; scenes form themselves; details arrange themselves; all the actors come alive. Her most remarkable achievement in this way is her portrait of ‘Aunty’ – that Queen Elizabeth of Roumania who called herself Carmen Sylva.<sup>fn12</sup> As it happened, Queen Victoria also tried her hand at a portrait of this lady. ‘The dear charming Queen [she writes] came to luncheon.... She spoke with resignation and courage of her many trials and difficulties.... I gave her a Celtic brooch and Balmoral shawl, also some books ... the Queen read to us one of her plays, an ancient Greek story, very tragic. She read it to us most wonderfully and beautifully, and had quite an inspired look as she did so.... Many could, of course, not understand, as she read it in German, but all were interested.’<sup>fn13</sup>

In Queen Marie’s hands this ‘dear charming Queen’ develops out of all recognition. She becomes a complex, contradictory human being, wearing floating veils and a motoring cap, at once ‘splendid and absurd.’<sup>fn14</sup> We see her posing in bed under a top light; dramatising herself melodramatically; luxuriating in the flattery of

sycophants; declaiming poetry through a megaphone to ships at sea; waving a napkin to grazing cows whom she mistakes for loyal subjects – deluded and fantastic, but at the same time generous and sincere. So the picture shapes itself, until all the different elements are shown in action. Two scenes stand out with genuine vitality – one where the romantic impulsive old lady seeks to enchant an ancient flame – the late Duke of Edinburgh – by dragging him to a hill top where hidden minstrels spring out from behind rocks and bawl native melodies into his disgusted ears;<sup>fn15</sup> the other where Queen Elizabeth of Roumania and Queen Emma of Holland sit at their needle-work while the Italian secretary reads aloud. He chose Maeterlinck, and as he declaimed the famous passage where the Queen bee soars higher and higher in her nuptial ecstasy till at last the male insect, ravaged by passion, drops dismembered to the ground,<sup>fn16</sup> Carmen Sylva raised her beautiful white hands in rapture. But Queen Emma gave one look at the reader and went on hemming her duster.

Vivid as it all is, nobody is going to claim that Queen Marie ranks with Saint Simon or with Proust.<sup>fn17</sup> Yet it would be equally absurd to deny that by virtue of her pen she has won her freedom. She is no longer a royal queen in a cage. She ranges the world, free like any other human being to laugh, to scold, to say what she likes, to be what she is. And if she has escaped, so too, thanks to her, have we. Royalty is no longer quite royal. Uncle Bertie, Onkel, Auntie, Nando,<sup>fn18</sup> and the rest are not mere effigies bowing and smiling, opening bazaars, expressing exalted sentiments and remembering faces always with the same sweet smile. They are violent and eccentric; charming and ill-tempered; some have bloodshot eyes; others handle flowers with a peculiar tenderness. In short, they are very like ourselves. They live as we do. And the effect is surprising. A month or two ago, the late Duke of Edinburgh was as dead as the Dodo. Now, thanks to his daughter, we know that he liked beer; that he liked to sip it while he read his paper; that he hated music; that he loathed Roumanian melodies; and that he sat on a rock in a rage.

But what will be the consequences if this familiarity between them and us increases? Can we go on bowing and curtseying to people who are just like ourselves? Are we not already a little ashamed of the pushing and the staring now that we know from these two stout

volumes that one at least of the animals can talk? We begin to wish that the Zoo should be abolished; that the royal animals should be given the run of some wider pasturage – a royal Whipsnade.<sup>fn19</sup> And another question suggests itself. When a gift for writing lodges in a family, it often persists and improves; and if Queen Marie's descendants improve upon her gift as much as she has improved upon Queen Victoria's is it not quite possible that a real poet will be King of England in a hundred years' time? And suppose that among the autumn books of 2034 is *Prometheus Unbound*, by George the Sixth, or *Wuthering Heights*, by Elizabeth the Second,<sup>fn20</sup> what will be the effect upon their loyal subjects? Will the British Empire survive? Will Buckingham Palace look as solid then as it does now? Words are dangerous things let us remember. A republic might be brought into being by a poem.

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was seeing he was reasoning. He was acutely sensitive, but at the same time he was uncompromisingly honest. Was this integrity, this honesty, a quality that he owed in part to his Quaker blood? He came, as you know, of a great Quaker family, and I have sometimes thought that this clarity, this sobriety of judgement, this determination to get beneath the appearance to the bedrock beneath are qualities that go with a Quaker upbringing. At any rate he never allowed himself merely to feel; he always checked and verified his impressions. Whether he upset other people's views (as he did) or changed his own (and he did) he always used his brain to correct his sensibility. And what was of equal importance he always allowed his sensibility to correct his brain.

Here I come to a point in speaking of him where I doubt if he would let me go on. For I want to say that his understanding of art owed much to his understanding of life, and yet I know that he disliked the mingling and mixing of different things. He wanted art to be art; literature to be literature; and life to be life. He was an undaunted enemy of the sloppiness, the vagueness, the sentimentality which has filled so many academies with anecdotes of dogs and duchesses. He detested the story-telling spirit which has clouded our painting and confused our criticism. But I will venture to say that one of the reasons why his criticism always grew, always went deeper, always included more, and never froze into the rigidity of death was that he himself breathed so many different currents of the stream of life. He was a man of many interests and many sympathies. As a young man he had been trained as a scientist. Science interested him profoundly. Poetry was one of his perpetual delights. He was deeply versed in French literature. He was a great lover of music. Anything that he could touch and handle and fashion with his fingers fascinated him. He made plates and pots with his own hands; he dyed stuffs; he designed furniture; he would come into the kitchen and teach the cook how to make an omelette; he would come into the drawing-room and teach the mistress how to arrange a bunch of flowers. And just as connoisseurs would bring him a picture for his opinion, so people of all kinds – and he had friends of all kinds – would bring him their lives – those canvases upon which we paint so many queer designs – and he would bring to bear upon their muddles and misfortunes the same rare mixture of logic and sympathy that made him so invigorating as a critic. He

onlookers and, we may guess, to the admiration of her father, who remarked that his daughters were 'true game.'<sup>fn5</sup> Then, again, what was Langham? Langham was an estate in Norfolk for which Captain Marryat had exchanged Sussex House over a glass of champagne. And Sussex House was a house at Hammersmith in which he lived while he was equerry to the Duke of Sussex.<sup>fn6</sup> But here certainty begins to falter. Why he quarrelled with the Duke of Sussex and ceased to be his equerry; why, after an apparently pacific interview with Lord Auckland at the Admiralty he was in such a rage that he broke a blood vessel;<sup>fn7</sup> why, after having eleven children by his wife, he left her; why, being possessed of a house in the country, he lived in London; why, being the centre of a gay and brilliant society he suddenly shut himself up in the country and refused to budge; why Mrs B—— refused his love<sup>fn8</sup> and what were his relations with Mrs S——; these are questions that we may ask, but that we must ask in vain. For the two little volumes with very large print and very small pages in which his daughter Florence wrote his life refuse to tell us. One of the most active, odd and adventurous lives that any English novelist has ever lived is also one of the most obscure.

Some of the reasons for this obscurity lie on the surface. In the first place there was too much to tell. The Captain began his life as a midshipman in Lord Cochrane's ship the *Impérieuse* in the year 1806.<sup>fn9</sup> He was then aged fourteen. And here are a few extracts from a private log that he kept in July, 1808, when he was sixteen:

- 24th. Taking guns from the batteries.
- 25th. Burning bridges and dismantling batteries to impede the French.
- August 1st. Taking the brass guns from the batteries.
- 15th. Took a French despatch boat off Cette.
- 18th. Took and destroyed a signal post.
- 19th. Blew up a signal post.<sup>fn10</sup>

So it goes on. Every other day he was cutting out<sup>fn11</sup> a brig, taking a tower, engaging gunboats, seizing prize ships or being chased by the French. In the first three years of his life at sea he had been in fifty fights; times out of number he jumped into the sea and rescued a drowning man. Once much against his will, for he could swim like a fish, he was rescued by an old bumboat woman who could also swim like a fish. Later he engaged with so much success in the

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