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Adeline's (bankrupt) education fund:¹ Woolf, women, and education in the short fiction

Ann K. McClellan

- 1 In undertaking an analysis of the woman scholar figure in twentieth-century British women's fiction, Adeline Virginia Woolf provides the most logical and illuminating point of origin. Woolf's life and career directly parallel the political and cultural institutionalization of British women's education at the beginning of this century. The disparity between her own privileged experiences and the harsh realities of women's exclusion from higher education and, more importantly, British culture, led Woolf to the determination that women's lack of education is the direct cause of all gender inequality: intellectual, professional, political, or otherwise.
- 2 While Woolf could easily have been caught between her idealism, on the one hand, and her frustration, on the other, she instead deals creatively with these questions through her writing.
- 3 That is, her unique position as both an "insider" (an intellectual, a college teacher, and a writer) and an "outsider" (one not formally educated in a university, and, more importantly, a woman) allowed her to present innovative solutions to the problem of women's education and gender inequality at the same time she analyzed and critiqued the academic system. Employing cultural studies and feminist methodologies, this essay examines five short stories in the context of Woolf's biography, her essays, and the history of women's higher education in Great Britain to evaluate how Woolf both articulated the problem of women intellectuals as well as anticipated contemporary theorization of these issues.

Woolf's Childhood and Education

- 4 Raised in a traditional, conservative Victorian household, young Adeline Virginia Stephen and her sisters were taught reading, writing, basic arithmetic, and Latin at

home by their parents and private tutoring in classical languages from Clara Pater and Janet Case.² Woolf's diaries depict her voracious adolescent appetite for reading, but this appetite put her in an awkward position. Woolf's mother, Julia Stephen, had rather strict and traditional ideas about the kinds of education young women should receive (Stemerick 55). She "signed an anti-suffrage manifesto, holding that women had enough to do in their own homes without a vote" (Woolf 1990: 12), and promoted "womanly" aspects of education like philanthropy and nursing (Woolf 1990: 68).

- 5 Perhaps the strongest familial opponent to women's higher education was Woolf's father. When Cambridge was voting on women's membership in the university in 1897, Leslie Stephen refused to go up and place his vote. Leslie Stephen was a dynamic father figure for Woolf and gaining his approval was one of the most important aims in her life, but the only way she could get his attention was by pursuing abnormally difficult reading projects and exceeding his expectations.³ Such a split between pleasing her mother and her father seems to have divided Woolf's identity into a weak, invalid daughter seeking a mother's love and the sexless, academic writer who desired, above all else, the father's approval.
- 6 While the majority of Woolf's family supported the traditional arguments against women's education, this by no means implies that Woolf was unfamiliar with the university system or prominent thinkers of the period. As Melba Cuddy-Keane notes, Woolf interacted with many Cambridge and Oxford academics throughout her life. She was also closely acquainted with many influential women scholars of the period like Jane Harrison, a well known classical scholar and one of the first female graduates of Girton. Her cousin, Katherine Fisher, was one of the first Vice-Principals of Newnham College, and her friend, Pernel Strachey, was also appointed to Newnham in 1905 (Woolf 1990: 243). Later in her life, Woolf had several women friends who attended college like her friend Ka Cox, a "young Newnhamite" (Bell 173). Her brother Adrian's two daughters, Ann and Judith Stephen, also attended Cambridge (Christ 9). But such an education was not for her.
- 7 Woolf did attend classes in Greek and History at King's College in 1897 (Woolf 1990: 132; Daugherty 1998: 127) and had hopes of becoming eligible for "the first B.A. degree—if the ladies succeed" (Woolf 1990: 87); however, these classes were infrequent and often interrupted by illness and family needs, and some contemporary scholars doubt whether she could have passed the qualifying exams for Cambridge had she the chance (Daugherty 1998: 127). While Woolf later stated that there were some advantages to being educated at home rather than at a university, she was very sensitive of its shortcomings as well. She missed the camaraderie and community of a university education, and she described her own self-education as "delv[ing] into books, painfully and alone" (Woolf 1975: 77). When writing *A Room of One's Own*, she told Smyth, "I forced myself to keep my own figure fictitious, legendary. If I had said, 'Look here, I am uneducated because my brothers used all the family funds'—which is the fact—'Well,' they'd have said, 'she has an axe to grind'" (qtd. in Meyerowitz 242). Near the end of her life, however, Woolf seems much clearer about who was to blame. In a letter to Ben Nicholson, Woolf wrote: "I never went to school or college. My father spent perhaps 100 pounds on my education" (Woolf 1982: 419-20). While in the first example, Woolf blames money rather than her father's will or patriarchy as a whole, in the latter Woolf combines economics *with* patriarchy in order to illustrate how the two work together to exclude women from society.

Women and Higher Education

- 8 Woolf's exclusion from university was not unique for her time period. As historian Deborah Thom explains, although this period was considered the "heyday" of equal opportunities for schooling, gender was virtually excluded from all conversations and educational policy making. The few times gender was discussed it was only as a "general social question" regarding the issue of whether boys and girls should receive the same kind of education, not whether one specific girl should receive a different education from another (Thom 125). Another historian, Felicity Hunt, continues that it is remarkable that during the period between the two great Education Acts of 1902 and 1944, when so much of Britain's educational policy was formed, that the central authorities on education seemed so entirely unclear about their missions, goals, and policies. The central authority never seemed to know the number, gender, or identity of its pupils at any given time let alone whether these children had similar or divergent reasons in undergoing schooling (Hunt 12). The debate over class versus gender would continue until late in the twentieth century. It was only in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s that gender, as a specific category, was seriously considered by educationalists as a "legitimate" discriminatory classification.
- 9 There were several important education reforms during the first half of the twentieth century that directly related to women's access to education. The 1902 Education Act, for example, provided publicly funded secondary schooling for girls and brought the chance of a university education within reach for many women, including those from disparate backgrounds (Heward 13; Ollerenshaw 31; Anderson 11). The Fisher Education Act of 1918 offered free compulsory education to the age of fourteen for both genders. While the act was never fully realized due to the depression and budgetary cutbacks, public spending on education still rose approximately 65 per cent between 1920 and 1939, and by 1938 over two-thirds of all children between the ages of eleven and fourteen were in secondary schools (Heyck 185). Even though educational provision widened a great deal by the turn of the century, it is important to remain realistic about the relatively low numbers of students, in general, who went to university at this time. As late as 1912, the percentage of women going on to higher education was only two per cent of the entire population (Anderson 12), and regardless of class consciousness and intent, the majority of these were from middle- to upper-middle class backgrounds.
- 10 Perhaps most significant was the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 which abolished legal barriers to women's participation in the civil services and the professions (Heyck 155). While the act appeared to give women a legal precedent from which to battle sexual discrimination, it did little to put an end to unequal treatment and unlawful practices (Rendel 1975: 72). This act was viewed by many educationalists as the gateway for women's higher education. Oxford University responded to the passing of the act by admitting women to degrees in 1920; however, Cambridge continued to deny women membership until mid-century (McWilliams-Tullberg 165).
- 11 Although Cambridge University—and Oxford, to some extent—still resented women's inclusion, attitudes toward women students and academics in the 1920s were generally positive, perhaps due to the war propaganda promoting women in the workforce. By 1914 there were over 14 colleges and universities in the United Kingdom offering

degrees to women. Women finally received degree honors from Oxford and Cambridge in the 1920s, although Cambridge refused to extend full membership to the university to these graduates until 1948. Women were gaining considerable ground in the education sector, although it is difficult to determine how many women were actually going to university before the 1920s.

Woolf and Morley College

- 12 Virginia Woolf was one of these new women university teachers. From 1905-7, Woolf taught history, literature, and composition at Morley College, a working class college admitting both men and women (Cuddy-Keane 81-2).⁴ While Woolf was originally very excited about the prospect of teaching (Woolf 1990: 217)—she rapidly became disillusioned with the patriarchal practice of lecturing. When she first began, she was uncomfortable with impromptu speech, so she wrote her lectures and read them aloud to her students (Woolf 1990: 223). However, this took a long time and she began to resent this distraction from her writing (Woolf 1990: 237). She came to realize during this time that lecturing was not the best method by which to transmit or share material. Woolf quickly noticed that “directly [she began] to read, their attention wanders” (Woolf 1990: 249). As a result, she developed a more comfortable speaking style, using only “short notes, which [she]...put into words on the spur of the moment” (Woolf 1990: 249).
- 13 Lecturing was viewed as a method of intellectual posturing particularly abhorrent to Woolf.⁵ She criticized the “idiocy of lectures”, “the whole hierarchy of professor, system, & so on” (qtd. in Cuddy-Keane 72). Throughout her career, she was concerned with the “vain and vicious” effects of a lecturer upon his audience (Woolf 1938: 155). Lecturing, for Woolf, was a form of fascism. It incites the most debased of human passions—vanity, ostentation, self-assertion, and the desire to convert [...] why not bring people together so that they can talk, without mounting platforms reading papers” (qtd. in Marcus 145). Woolf anticipates Foucault’s power/knowledge dialectic in her determination that lecturing allows for a hierarchical power structure which objectifies the students. Rather than teaching students engagement, typical colleges create students who are “so anxious to keep their possession and their ‘grandeur and power’ [...] in their own hands that they will not use force but much subtler methods than force when they are asked to share them” (Woolf 1938: 29-30). Woolf’s position as a woman scholar both inside and outside of the system allowed her to imagine a more responsible and imaginative ideology. For instance, if women become professors, Woolf argued, “we can pour mild scorn upon chapels, upon degrees, and upon the value of examinations [...] If we are asked to lecture we can refuse to bolster the vain and vicious system of lecturing by refusing to lecture” (Woolf 1938: 43).
- 14 For Woolf, the British education system not only furthers male interest through nepotism and circular systems of power, but its awarding of degrees and honors similarly encourages the kind of vanity and egotism Woolf names as the source of patriarchy. During her lifetime, Woolf turned down several offers of public approbation including honorary degrees from Manchester University and the University of Liverpool (Bell 172); similarly, she refused to deliver the prestigious Clark Lectures at Cambridge University or to write a book for the Home University Series on Post-Victorian literature (Bell 172; Woolf 1954: 81). Woolf describes these literary awards as

a “bore” (Woolf 1954: 189). While Woolf could easily have been caught between her desire to accept the honors she deserved and her anger at the patriarchal culture which rejected and denied her contributions as a woman, she instead dealt creatively with her own frustration in order to think beyond the already existing structures of domination and women’s oppression.

- 15 Woolf believed that to accept honors from the system that excluded one half of humanity, namely, *her* half, would be to become complicit with the gender/power hierarchy. Although she theorizes a futuristic college in *Three Guineas* where men and women would learn together and share their labors, Woolf realizes that, until that utopia is attained, women are held at a disadvantage in society. Their only way to fight is to resist:

But to sacrifice a hair of the head of your vision, a shade of its color, in deference to some Headmaster with a silver pot in his hand or to some professor with a measuring rod up his sleeve, is the most abject treachery, and the sacrifice of wealth and chastity which used to be said to be the greatest of all human disasters, a mere flea-bite in comparison. (Woolf 1928: 110)

- 16 Later in *Three Guineas*, Woolf labels this restraint “mental chastity” (Woolf 1938: 82). Once women bow to the male egotistical structure of lectures, prizes, and competition, then there is no hope for change. Allowing their intellectual and scholarly efforts to be “sold” propels women back into the realm of capitalism. Thus, if women conform to the economic rules of patriarchy they are in danger of perpetuating the very system that excludes them, yet if they do not challenge its structure and become independent they risk being continually denied access.

The Short Stories

- 17 In (re)writing her own histories of the women’s education movement, Woolf explored several different genres: the short story, the essay, and the novel. In all of these forms, however, Woolf takes a political focus on women’s oppression. After her visit to Cambridge in 1904, for example, Woolf’s diary reveals her decision to write a history of her own, “say of Newnham or the women’s movement” (Woolf 1954: 134). Similarly, her journal depicts the following notes: “W’s oppression... Legal status of women in 18th cent...Tenigrove [?] suggestion of womens colleges—put into practice by Miss Clough along with others at Newnham, 1860. Began in Cambridge—Girton?—spread to Oxford, Lady Margaret’s, Somerville &c” (Woolf 1990: 279). Woolf’s notes illustrate her knowledge of the pioneering work of Anne Clough and Emily Davies in the establishing of the first women’s colleges at Oxbridge; she even wrote a review of *The Life of Emily Davies*, written by her cousin, Lady Barbara Stephen. Clearly, many of these notes and some of Woolf’s early work culminated in *A Room of One’s Own*, *Three Guineas*, and short stories such as “A Women’s College from the Outside”, “The Introduction”, and “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn”. More importantly, however, they illustrate the cultural understanding Woolf brought to her interest in women’s education and gender inequality. From an early age, Woolf used her writing to explore the link between politics, culture, and women’s education by working through different theories, fantasies, and frustrations over her own, as well as other women’s, exclusion from academia.

- 18 Woolf's short fiction explores her fantasies about what it would have been like to attend a college like Girton or Newnham. Before she was forced to face the harsh realities of the prejudice aimed at women's intellectual labors, women's colleges were originally an ideal source of wish-fulfillment for her. Describing a visit to Cambridge in 1923, Woolf remarked: "I had romanced so much about Cambridge that to find myself sitting there was an anti-climax" (Woolf 1978: 230). Woolf works through these fantasies by focusing on three groups of women in her early short fiction: independent intellectuals (as in "A Society" and "Slater's Pins Have No Points"), women college students (as in "A Woman's College from the Outside" and "The Introduction"), and women academics (as in "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn"). In each group, Woolf provides both a utopian and dystopian vision.
- 19 In the first group, Woolf attempts to imagine what it would be like for women to live independently as scholars and intellectuals. We see this in "Slater's Pins Have No Points" when Fanny Wilmot fantasizes about her music tutor, Julia Craye. For Fanny, Miss Craye "knew nothing of pins," i.e., the minutiae of 'real'/domestic life, because she "had not sacrificed her right to go and look at things when they are at their best [...] She had not sacrificed her independence" (Woolf 1989: 219). Fanny imagines Miss Craye "steadily, blissfully [...] happy" (220). Julia Craye lives in an ivory tower of her own making and does not have to deal with the conflicts, prejudice, or limitations of 'average' women. Fanny projects her own idealism onto Miss Craye—including her lesbian fantasies—in order to protect the idea that there must be alternative outlets for women's talents in society. By maintaining this fantasy, Fanny creates a psychological and emotional space through which to live the reality of her life.
- 20 In "A Society", Woolf uses the independent scholar motif once again, but with a much more pessimistic conclusion.⁶ In this story, Woolf constructs a women's group much like the Cambridge Apostle's whose mission it is to discover whether men's works are of equal merit to women's childbearing and rearing responsibilities. Castalia, who goes to Oxbridge and spies on a don, quickly recognizes the privileged life an Oxbridge don leads. When asked whether these men "helped produce good people and good books" (128), Castalia can only burst into tears, explaining, "You can't imagine [...] how exciting, how beautiful, how satisfying [it is] to—to—answer questions" (129). While Woolf is clearly mocking the privilege of the male dons, Castalia's tearful response also recognizes how much Woolf's women characters want that privilege for their own. In response, Castalia and her peers determine to set up their own "Society of the Future" whereby, albeit unhappily, they will try to create an alternative system of value. Unlike "Slater's Pins," which provides an optimistic envisioning of this future, "A Society" recognizes the difficulty women will face in trying to change cultural attitudes toward their abilities, intellect, and opportunities.
- 21 In the second group, Woolf imagines women's students and colleges themselves as forms of wish-fulfillment.⁷ Prior to her visit to Girton in 1928, Woolf composed a short story entitled, "A Woman's College from the Outside" which depicts a mystical evening at Newnham College, Cambridge.⁸ The college grounds are described as a protected "garden," where the women students may "unveil" their faces and wander unmolested in the moonlight (Woolf 1989: 145). The young students are watched over by—and themselves guard—the elderly women dons who, upon waking, will "immediately grasp the ivory rod of office" (147). Angela Williams, the protagonist of the story, reflects on the economic sacrifices her family has made in order for her to attend college. After

spending a night watching all the other girls gossiping and communing with each other, Angela is convinced of the “rightness” of women’s education and the place of scholarly women within the world (139). Woolf ends her description of this women’s college as if it were a new, fantastical world, discovered for the first time, full of possibilities yet still precarious:

Sucking her thumb like a child (her age nineteen last November), she [Angela Williams] lay in this good world, this new world, this world at the end of the tunnel, until a desire to see it or forestall it drove her, tossing her blankets, to guide herself to the window, and there, looking out upon the garden, where the mist lay, all the windows open, one fiery-bluish, something murmuring in the distance, the world of course, and the morning coming, ‘Oh,’ she cried, as if in pain. (Woolf 1989: 142)

- 22 Angela seems to read the oncoming morning as a sign of society’s intrusion into her pristine new world, both painful and dreaded. There is a sense of suspension, of a prelapsarian society where young women commune together in the night, giggling and whispering. However, the coming threat of daylight seems to illustrate for both Angela and Woolf the fact that such a world only exists in the short, brief moments between night and dawn. At this early stage in her writing, Woolf’s utopian vision can be interpreted as a form of denial. Admitting that inclusion in academia will not remedy women’s over-arching oppression is still too damaging psychologically for her. To protect herself from disillusionment and despair, she must believe that education will provide women with the liberty they so desperately desire.
- 23 As she grew older, however, Woolf soon began to realize how far her fantasies were from the realities of women’s education in the early twentieth century. Rather than seeing education as liberating as she did in “A Women’s College from the Outside”, once Woolf went *inside* a college she realized that women’s situation was much graver. Much of Woolf’s criticism arose out of her visit to Girton College, Cambridge, in 1928 to deliver the two lectures on “Women and Fiction” which later became *A Room of One’s Own*. The reality of the women’s colleges was quite different from Woolf’s expectations. In her diary, she describes the corridors of Girton as being “like vaults in some horrid high church cathedral—on and on they go, cold and shiny, with a light burning. High Gothic rooms; acres of bright brown wood; here and there a photograph” (Woolf 1954: 132). Woolf’s depressing description more closely links the college dormitories to a hospital or prison than the Eden-like atmosphere in “A Woman’s College from the Outside” where the students’ name cards call forth an army prepared to “extinguish a fire, suppress an insurrection or pass an examination” (Woolf 1989: 146). There, name cards resemble a “dairy or nunnery, a place of seclusion or discipline, where the bowl of milk stands cool and pure and there’s a great washing of linen” (146). By contrast, the young women at Girton are “starved but valiant [...] Intelligent, eager, poor; and destined to become schoolmistresses in shoals” (Woolf 1954: 132). Muriel Bradbook, a student present at Woolf’s lecture, did not appreciate Woolf’s depiction of her contemporaries: “She saw us as painfully deprived creatures from the midlands preparing to teach those with the same background”, she remarked in 1989 (qtd. in Stewart 69). Q. D. Leavis, another contemporary, refused to accept Woolf’s lecture since she had “no first-hand knowledge” of university having been educated at home (qtd. in Stewart 79). The fact that Woolf thinks women’s education leads to further subjection of women—they are destined to become “schoolmistresses in shoals”—illustrates her realization of the circular and adulterated nature of patriarchal culture (as well as her

own class snobbery). She sees women's position as much more dire than she originally anticipated.

- 24 Just as "Slater's Pins have no Points" and "A Society" provide contrasting views of independent women intellectuals, so, too, does Woolf provide us with contrasting visions of women students and colleges. While "A Woman's College from the Outside" represents an idealized portrayal of college life for women, "The Introduction" explains what happens to women students when they leave the protected walls of academia and are faced with the blatant hostility of patriarchy. Much like Woolf who felt she had to divide herself between her mother's feminine expectations and her father's intellectualism, Lily Everit separates life into "fact" and "fiction" (Woolf 1989: 184). But for her, the academic life is the 'reality' rather than society. She first describes her essay on Swift as "a lump of growing metal," a "rock," and "this hard lump" (184).⁹ Intellectualism is solid and real for Lily; it is the foundation on which she builds her character. She cherishes this (self) knowledge as something "to hug to herself, [...] to sup, like a glass of wine" (184). This certainty about meaning, interpretation, and the value of academic thought becomes complicated when gender is taken into account, however.
- 25 As Lily begins to put on another identity—that is, the identity of a young woman getting dressed for a party—she is confronted with her gendered self in the mirror and in the eyes of those around her. It is only after she sees herself in "the long glass being finished off (a pat here, a dab there) by her sister and Mildred, the housemaid" that Lily begins to sense the essay "growing weaker" (184). Similarly, once she enters Mrs. Dalloway's house, "she accepted the part which was now laid on her" (185) and her essay "wobbled, began melting, she could not keep hold of it, and all her being (no longer sharp as a diamond cleaving the heart of life asunder) turned to a mist of alarm, apprehension, and defense, as she stood at bay in her corner" (184). Once exposed to the world, Lily realizes that she is not, in fact, a scholar but "a woman": "all made her feel that she had come out of her chrysalis and was being proclaimed what in the comfortable darkness of childhood she had never been—this frail beautiful creature who could not do what she liked" (185). Of course, in coming out of her chrysalis of adolescence and academia, Lily risks the kind of disfiguring Bob Brinsley enacts on the helpless fly near the end of the story. Outside of college, Lily feels the weight of civilization—"the towers of Westminster, the high and formal buildings; talk; this civilization [...] this regulated way of life"—like a "yoke about her neck" (186) and feels she has no choice but to sacrifice herself—and her essay—to the superiority and power of patriarchy.
- 26 What is perhaps most troubling about "The Introduction" is Lily's seeming willingness to bow down to Bob Brinsley and patriarchy. When she asks herself, "What had she to oppose this masculine achievement? An essay on the character of Dean Swift!" (186), she seems to readily "lay her essay, oh and the whole of her being, on the floor as a cloak for [Brinsley] to trample on, as a rose for him to rifle" (186). She does not think she has anything to offer civilization in comparison; in fact, it is man's duty to "be worshipped" while it was woman's "to worship, to adorn, to embellish" (187). The only thing that seems to keep Lily from total self-abnegation is the thought of her essay on Swift. Even though Brinsley's fly mutilation makes Lily's red stars "bloodstained", the essay itself keeps jutting into her mind, becoming "more and more obtrusive" until she begins to see civilization and all its glories "with horror" (187-8). She leaves the party

feeling “like a naked wretch who having sought shelter in a shady garden is turned out and told—no, that there are no sanctuaries, or butterflies, in this world” (187-8). Rather than the safe garden of “A Woman’s College from the Outside”, this is a cold, dark place that expels Lily and thrusts her into the horror of a patriarchal world. Even though the story seems to end with an apocalyptic vision, I read Mrs. Bromley’s final comment that Lily “looked as if she had the weight of the world on her shoulders” (187-8) as a newfound sense of the responsibility educated women will face in the new millennium, much like “A Society’s” “Society for the Future”.¹⁰ Once again, Woolf dispels women’s fantasies surrounding the possible liberation offered by education by illuminating the battles and responsibilities these women will face in their futures.

- 27 While Woolf includes women teachers in many texts, Rosamond Merridew in “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” is the only professional woman scholar—although this ‘professionalism’ is questioned by some critics.¹¹ Perhaps one reason this story is so complicated is that, unlike the other stories addressed here, there is no companion piece to “The Journal” to help the reader determine whether Rosamond is supposed to be an idealized figure or a parody.¹² Perhaps another reason is that it is a fragment, unrevised, and never published in Woolf’s lifetime. As the earliest of Woolf’s ‘academic’ stories—composed in 1906 while she was a professor at Morley College—it is the most important because it represents the beginning of her theorization about gender, education, and academia.
- 28 “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” is broken into two components. The first half of the essay relays Rosamond Merridew’s background and the discovery of the manuscript, and the second half is the manuscript itself, in the voice of Joan Martyn, the fifteenth-century daughter of a Norfolk land owner. The majority of Merridew’s portion is spent establishing her credentials as a historian. She realizes that while many readers may not know who she is, she is, in fact, a well-known and respected historian of medieval land tenure systems. She is forty-five years old, unmarried, and an independent scholar (whether by choice or circumstance, we do not know). She tells her readers: “I have won considerable fame among my profession [...] Berlin has heard my name; Frankfurt would give a soiree in my honour; and I am not absolutely unknown in one or two secluded rooms in Oxford and Cambridge” (Woolf 1989: 33). While some critics accuse Merridew of arrogance and conceit (Engler 12, Skrbic 109-10), her comments can also be read as an attempt to establish her authority as a historian and scholar. Particularly interesting are the different ways she represents her scholarly reputation in Europe as compared to England. In Europe, Merridew explains, her peers would “give a soiree in her honor”, but she is only known in “one or two secluded rooms” in Oxbridge. European universities, like those in Berlin and Frankfurt, accepted women as students and academics much earlier than those in England, so perhaps rather than reading Merridew’s comments as “declamatory” (Skrbic 110), they establish a scholarly authority that is well recognized in other advanced, parts of the world.
- 29 As an independent scholar, Merridew is particularly prey to attacks by her peers. Often when she is out scouting for historic documents she is denied access because “some official [...] has promised to come down and inspect their documents, and the favour of the ‘State’ which such a promise carries with it, robs [her] poor private voice of all its persuasion” (Woolf 1989: 33). Bernd Engler takes this to indicate that Merridew is “not willing to work with publicly accessible historical documents, but tries, instead, to

build her reputation on the evidence of privately owned, and thus publicly undebatable material"; therefore, she "has no genuine academic interests at all" (12-3). This accusation ignores two important points: first, as a woman academic, Merridew has few, if any, opportunities for full-time, academic employment within a British university. Without such sponsorship, Merridew lacks access to university libraries, manuscript materials, and other scholarly documents that other professional male historians would have in the period. Rather than being "unwilling" to work with such documents, her sex excluded her from those realms where she would have had this opportunity. Second, as Merridew's comments clearly indicate, she is not alone in seeking out original, privately owned documents for her research. Rather, she is in competition with 'State' officials who have more power and prestige by association than she does as an independent woman scholar. Without access to the university system, Merridew has to fight not only for her right to research, but also for the kind of research she chooses to do: the ideological and economic relationships between medieval land tenure and women's lives.

- 30 Merridew admits that her theories of combining historical fact with personal narrative have also "taken many shrewd blows" (34). Describing this scholarly debate in distinctly phallic terms, Merridew explains: "The critics have always threatened me with two rods: first, they say, such digressions are all very well in a history of the time, but they have nothing to do with the system [of] medieval land tenure; secondly, they complain that I have no materials at my side to stiffen these words into any semblance of truth" (35). She is told by her (male) peers that storytelling has no part in history. But this kind of word stiffening is antithetical to Merridew's feminist methodology and research. She wants to move beyond traditional divisions between "truth and fiction" (35) in order to imagine a new genre of scholarship. Engler criticizes Merridew for imagining the entire historical discipline as a vast conspiracy (Engler11). However, this is exactly what contemporary feminist epistemologists argue happens in scientific and historical research, especially. No knowledge is objective; everything is influenced by our standpoints and perspectives on the world. So what Engler—and Merridew's critics in the story—complain about in her methodology is exactly the direction in which feminist research studies has gone in the future, thus reinforcing Merridew as a positive representation of women scholars.
- 31 Another striking aspect to Merridew's character is her self-awareness of what her academic career has cost her, personally. Not only has she had to defend her scholarly interests, methodology, and publications from her peers, but she has also had to give up more traditional aspects of a woman's life like marriage and children (33). Merridew has replaced biological children with her work, but she is clearly conflicted about this. She has a "maternal passion" for her publications but sees them as "shriveled and colourless little gnomes" (33). While they have "the fire of genius in their eyes" (33), her work has been deformed by society's problematic expectations for women in the home and the academy. Although Woolf's contemporary, Q. D. Leavis, criticized her for assuming that educated women could not have both an intellectual life and a family (276-7), such sacrifices continue to challenge contemporary women academics who want to 'have it all', and this is a common theme in 20th century British women's fiction.¹³
- 32 When studied in their socio-historical context, these neglected short stories reveal Woolf's continuing exploration of the conflicting influences pervading women and

education in the first half of the 20th century. Woolf recognized that the liberating, wish-fulfilling fantasy of women's higher education was at odds with the harsh reality of living as an independent woman intellectual. While she was unable to imagine a time when her theories of women's intellectualism and independence would be culturally acceptable or even feasible, it is exciting to see her innovative ideas regarding women, education, and gender equality coming to fruition in contemporary feminist epistemology and interdisciplinary learning. Woolf's affiliation with both intellectualism and women's oppression may have thwarted a less determined woman, yet this double bind provided the impetus to imagine creative alternatives to culture's traditional prescriptions for women.

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NOTES

1. The title of the article is in reference to Woolf's use of the "Arthur's Education Fund" motif throughout *Three Guineas*. For those unfamiliar with the text, Arthur's Education Fund is a reference to William Thackeray's nineteenth century novel, *Pendennis*.
2. For more information regarding Woolf's education, see the extensive work of Beth Rigel Daugherty, Carol T. Christ, and Nicholas Midgley.
3. Beth Rigel Daugherty's essay, "Learning Virginia Woolf: Of Leslie, Libraries, and Letters" provides an excellent analysis Woolf's conflicted relationship with her father.
4. Along with Melba Cuddy-Keane, Beth Rigel Daugherty has published extensively on Woolf's experiences at Morley College.
5. Jane Marcus deals extensively with Woolf's abhorrence of lecturing in *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy*.
6. Jean Guiguet goes so far as to describe "A Society" as "a failed venture into militant literature" (qtd. in Meyerowitz 238-9).
7. While Dean Baldwin reads "A Woman's College" as an optimistic "hope for a new generation of young women" (29), Jane Marcus is much less forgiving. Labeling the story a "failure," Marcus accuses Woolf of romanticizing women's education and "valorizing" virginity (172).
8. Originally developed as a chapter in *Jacob's Room* (1922), "A Woman's College from the Outside" was first published in *Atalanta's Garden* in 1926.
9. Continuing with this phallic imagery, Jennifer Kightlinger and Ann DiGregorio describe Lily's essay as a "performance of masculinity" (119).
10. Jane Marcus has a similarly positive reading of the ending with Lily "emerg[ing] triumphantly to insist that 'this civilization depends on me'" (1).
11. Engler's accusations of "gender-bias" (14) in Merridew's research are striking when faced with the harsh language of his own essay, which describes Merridew as "an embarrassingly incompetent woman" (9), "conceited" (12), and "an amateur and a bungler" (12).
12. Nena Skrbic provides a neat summary of the conflicting attitudes scholars have applied to Merridew (109-10).
13. For further examples of women academics in 20th century British fiction, see my work on Dorothy L. Sayers and Jeanette Winterson published in *LIT* and *Women's Studies*, respectively.

RÉSUMÉS

Convoquant les outils de la critique féministe et des "cultural studies", cet article analyse cinq nouvelles en les plaçant dans le cadre de la biographie de Woolf, de ses essais ainsi que de l'histoire de l'enseignement supérieur et des femmes en Grande Bretagne afin de voir comment Woolf a posé le problème des intellectuelles tout en anticipant sur sa théorisation actuelle. Dans les nouvelles, le monde fictionnel contrasté, utopique ou dystopique, des étudiantes, universités et universitaires montre que Woolf croyait fermement à la capacité de l'éducation universitaire à

libérer les femmes alors même qu'elle souffrait de n'avoir pu accéder à une telle éducation et à une véritable carrière. L'écart entre sa situation privilégiée et la situation difficile des femmes exclues du système universitaire et de la culture britannique amena Woolf à penser que le manque d'éducation des femmes était la cause directe de toutes les inégalités entre les sexes. Parce qu'elle était à la fois dans le système en tant qu'intellectuelle, enseignante et écrivaine, et hors du système—parce que n'ayant pas eu accès à l'enseignement universitaire et surtout parce que femme—elle put présenter des solutions innovantes au problème de l'éducation des femmes et de l'inégalité entre sexes tout en analysant et critiquant le système universitaire.

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