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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

VIRGINIA WOOLF AND MURASAKI SHIKIBU:
A QUESTION OF PERCEPTION

BY

CATHERINE A. NELSON-McDERMOTT

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

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SUBMITTED BY

CATHERINE A. NELSON-McDERMOTT

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DR. JOANN WALLACE

DR. EDWARD BISHOP

DR. SONJA ARNTZEN

Date: April 18, 1990

This text is dedicated to:

JoAnn, Sonja, and my own --

three of the mothers I think back through.

ABSTRACT OF

VIRGINIA WOOLF AND MURASAKI SHIKIBU:

A QUESTION OF PERCEPTION

This thesis investigates biographic, cultural, literary, and aesthetic similarities in the lives of Murasaki Shikibu (973?-1014+) and Virginia Woolf (1882-1941). The refined and semi-insular worlds of the Heian court and the Bloomsbury Group both produced women authors who wrote as an act of subversion. It is possible that Woolf was influenced by her reading of Murasaki's "novel," Genji Monogatari (she reviewed Arthur Waley's translation of the first volume in 1925 and spoke highly of the text). This contention is supported by an in-depth comparative analysis of the first book of the Genji and Orlando. It is certain that reading Woolf's works through the Heian Buddhist philosophy of radical nondualism encourages a move away from the very confining emphasis on G.E. Moore and the Post-Impressionists currently fashionable and towards an emphasis on what Woolf's own aesthetics might be. This thesis attempts to articulate some of the possibilities attendant on viewing Woolf's works as part of a non-restrictive, cross-cultural tradition of women's literature.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

> Ultimately, man finds in things nothing but what he himself has imported into them. ------- Nietzsche

> Question: It's remarkable to me that you were able to find in Chinese poetry qualities which are obviously native to yourself. The irony, the relative avoidance of metaphor, the non-romanticism behind most of the poems--all this you've obviously found congenial.
>
> Answer: Yes. Only, you see, I chose the Chinese poems I translated out of thousands and thousands of others, so that naturally makes the approximation still closer.
> BBC Interview of Arthur Waley (1963)

The genesis of this thesis comes from a tutorial entitled something like "The Influence of Feminist Literary Theory on Contemporary Literature." My tutorial advisor and I, rather unfortunately for the sake of animated early morning discussion, held much the same views on feminist theory and its influence. This meant that we were often stuck in the uncomfortable situation of trying to generate discussion topics. Four months into this course, we were reading Woolf. In my rather blithe way of filling in embarrassing moments of silence I came out with "Don't you think the Japanese influence on Virginia Woolf is very interesting?" Dead silence. "Tell me a little more about this." So out came a primitive version of the thoughts which were eventually to coalesce into this text. "A very interesting topic," said my advisor, "I don't think anyone's done work on this yet." And here I am. Unfortunately, the doing proves less easy than coming up with off-the-cuff comments.

To begin, how do I get around the fact that much of the research on the Heian period is, rather naturally, in Japanese, a language which I have not yet "mastered?" The standard "early" work in English, Morris' 1964 text, is both well-informed and misinformed[1] by the authors' own research and by the previous research in Japanese.[2] Part of the problem here is that previous Japanese research into Heian culture and history seems occasionally to have been guided more by the authors' wish to find "support" for their contentions about Heian literature than by unbiased documentation. Not surprising in a discipline in which information is always at a premium. For instance, there is a continual lack of accurate dating in Heian literature and chronicles. The structure of classical Japanese can lead to doubts about whether the subject in one sentence is the same person as the subject in the next. Individuals are often called only by their titles (which change), or by some reference to their fathers or husbands or sons if they are female, or by a reference to the place in which they live. Classical Japanese also bears about as much resemblance to modern Japanese as Old English does to modern English. And thus, in a language in which the speakers preferred to be

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[1] Earlier commentaries such as Waley's are sympathetic to the period because they read the culture through the literature. These studies are not well researched.

[2] All references to either Japanese or English refer to the language only.

imprecise and never to refer openly to that which might be left "understood," complications arise. Merely describing this system leads, I fear, to confusion. W. McCullough's article, "Japanese Marriage Institutions in the Heian Period," which discusses some of the critical "slips" in the previous research in Japanese caused by this lack of precise information (and which contains 20 and a half pages of footnotes citing sources), is the standard English correction (addition) to Morris on the subject of Heian marriage and property rights as practised (rather than as perceived via the literature). These two works, taken together, make up the basic canonical discussion in English of the historical background to Heian literature. As well, recent texts on the Genji and Murasaki Shikibu by Haruo Shirane, Norma Field, and Richard Bowring all make use of the many Japanese historical and literary investigations to support their own contentions which are informed by current feminist and post-structuralist theory.[3]

A more serious problem (at least as I perceive it) is

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[3] As one reviewer of an earlier version of chapter 4 of this thesis (who appeared to be an American specialist in East Asian Studies) puts it, "Japanese scholars have unearthed a tremendous amount of data on the background of Genji and its historical significance. There is a very exhaustive and well-researched book available in English on this very subject. Haruo Shirane owes his The Bridge of Dreams: A Poetics of 'The Tale of Genji'...to this treasure trove [the Japanese research mentioned earlier]." Though the comment was not particularly pertinent to the issue I was addressing at the time, it does point out the validity of English scholarship as it applies to the Heian period and I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer.

that it is almost impossible to find a text in English (I can't make an informed judgement about the Japanese critical discourse) which does not discuss the society and culture of the Heian period more or less exclusively in terms of its literature. Not only is the literature used extensively to support anthropological "findings" about the period, but the anthropological "findings" are often merely a way in to the literature and not an end in themselves. I'll quote W. McCullough here to illustrate my point: "My own researches stem not from sociological interests, but from the practical problem of attempting to understand Heian texts in which references to marriage practices pose serious problems of interpretation" (104). The title of Morris' central text (The World of the Shining Prince) is, after all, a specific allusion to the fictional Genji, and the titles of many other English texts about the Heian period allude to Murasaki Shikibu's work. This is clearly a tribute to the power of Heian literature and not necessarily a problem. It is, however, something I, as a reader, and as the lens through which my own reader is (perhaps) being introduced to this discipline, keep constantly in mind. To do otherwise would be to read as does the author of Contemporary Literary Theory. Raman Selden reads Woolf's life solely through her literature and, because she wrote an article entitled "On Not Knowing Greek," declares, "she knew no Greek" (136). The article in question reveals that what Virginia Woolf did not

know about Greek was "how the words sounded, or where precisely we ought to laugh, or how the actors acted." In her ignorance, she says, she "would be at the bottom of any class of schoolboys" (Reader I 23). Her "ignorance" did not prevent her from reproducing the original Greek in her text and then translating it for us.

Another difficulty which plagues me in coming to terms with the act of writing this work is the fact that recent critical analysis of what has come to be termed cultural (literary) anthropology has focused almost solely on the appropriative damage done cultures by cultural anthropologists and "Orientalists." The possibility of inter-cultural discussion and inter-play does not seem to arise. I wonder if this is because the discipline of cultural anthropological theory is still relatively new and, like the feminism of 20 or 30 years ago, focusing on the necessary investigation of past injustices rather than on creating theories which might step outside of what sometimes become confining dialectics. Such critics as Edward Said (Orientalism, "Orientalism Revisited"), R.W. Dasenbrock ("Intelligibility and Meaningfulness in Multicultural Literature in English"), and Christopher Miller ("Theories of Africans: The Question of Literary Anthropology") castigate past literary and cultural interpreters for presumptively "reading" other cultures and literatures, for constructing autonomous cultures as "Other" and interpreting

them through Western, resolutely geno-centric, ideologies. And one need only reach as far as the recent plague of films recounting The Vietnamese War Experience solely from the perspective of American troops to confirm the empiric validity of the belief that Western interpreters, working from an "Imperialist" background, have imposed their own readings onto the presumed silence of an/Other culture(s): "Knowledge...far from being simply lux et veritas, can most often be revealed as a corrosive project of appropriation, wherein the Western reader projects desires onto the Other" (Miller 284). Current post-structuralist criticism would, as well, seem to indicate that all communication is merely appropriation and misinterpretation: "criticism is not an 'homage' to the truth of the past or to the truth of 'others'--it is a construction of the intelligibility of our own time" (Barthes, "What" 85). While this is clearly an important caveat, I find very disturbing the tendency among post-structuralist theorists to merely explore the "infinite deferral" of meaning rather than deal with the facts that imbalances of power must be factored into "communication" and that, whether or not the words translate precisely from speaker to perceiver, power always manages to make its message understood.[4] With Clifford, I believe that

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[4] I am here excerpting Said from the post-structuralist cannon precisely because he does deal with materialist issues, something the canonical post-structuralist does not do.

"intervening in an interconnected world, one is always, to varying degrees, 'inauthentic': caught between cultures, implicated in others" (11). Therefore, for the transmission of my ideas and perceptions to be valid, for me to work in the area of cross-cultural literary (as well as historical and political) analysis, I must continually foreground my own methods and biases while attempting an exploration of the way in which cultures enrich each other via their co-mingling. So, for instance, though all the dates in this text are given using the Western, Christian dating system, this is because these equivalents are the only referents provided by most of my sources. While giving the Western reader a helpful time-frame, this exclusivity tends to create a false feeling of familiarity with the Japanese past. Thus, while useful, this technique actually encourages appropriation via a false sense of symmetry. One method of coping with this problem is Bowring's use of both dating systems (the Western year in brackets). Unfortunately, Bowring consistently dates only specific, textually important dates in this manner and gives Western dates in general introductions and explanatory texts. And, though there is a system for translating Western dates to the lunar-Era dating system used during the Heian period, the translation is difficult and the results likely to be "off" by a greater or lesser amount depending on the specificity of the Western date. This is the sort of methodological

question, however, which, if not foregrounded, can very easily lead to, rather than avoid, a reinforcement of cultural imperialism.

Fascinated by the possibility of a juncture between and amongst three separate historical moments (the golden age of the Heian Court, Bloomsbury, and late twentieth-century Canada), I want to write about two cultures which are not my own. Woolf's Bloomsbury and the Heian court are not fixed entities simply because most of the participants are dead. Though there is much factual (and not so factual) documentation about Bloomsbury, I feel I would be making a mistake to assume that this documentation makes me "master" of a Bloomsbury narration, that I "know" these people and their texts any more profoundly than I "know" the less well documented individuals and texts of the time of Murasaki. Research and interpretation of another does not lead to a re-creation of the essence of that other. I wish fervently to avoid a prescriptive and deductive approach to the lives, cultures, and texts which I am engaged in investigating. How do I, then, write (which is, of course, a process of inscribing thought into fixed states) about these cultures and persons? How do I present my own findings as an avoidance of prescriptive inscription? How do I do this in an institutional setting which might well view my actions as lacking in critical acumen?

I also want to read as though it were possible for

literature to be read as an abrogation of the Master Narrative (His-story) which prescribes that time goes forward and that the further forward one moves in time, the more the inhabitants (read philosophers, historians, and critics) "know" in an absolute sense. I certainly do not want to fall into the trap of reading anachronistically or in the absence of context. What I want to do is to write with the freedom of the possibility that it is a liberating truth "that even so relatively inert an object as a literary text is commonly supposed to gain some of its identity from its historical moment interacting with the attentions, judgements, scholarship, and performances of its readers" (Said 92). I want to read as though the works of the past and the works of the present were equally valid in terms of world-view. A comparison of two cultures should throw light on both cultures. Call it creative anachronism if you like, but I would like to explore a concept of a cross-cultural, cross-temporal existence of art, without approaching the mysticism of some sort of Jungian over-soul. In what ways are the cultures of Heian Japan and British Bloomsbury similar? How does a comparative analysis of these two cultures broaden an understanding of both of them? How do the lives and works of Murasaki and Woolf reverberate against each other, opening new areas of perception?

That last question leads to others. There is an concept in Zen philosophy which is sometimes referred to as non-

duality of being. It is much the same, as I perceive it, as the concept which informs feminist theoretical re-interpretations of de-centring arguments, theories, systems of interpretations, the value of subjectivity etc. There is no either/or, right/wrong, is/not split to reality. Reality, whether it exists or not, is amorphous and non-hierarchical. This includes the "reality" of literary criticism. What happens if one looks at the interactions of written systems (literary texts and the texts of history) not as sometimes interpenetrating discrete disciplines but as concurrent systems which interact on the plastic (read changing and changeable) substance of human perception?

With questions in lieu of a methodological background I wish to address some specifics. How are the Heian court and Bloomsbury cultures similar? How is the experience of women in these cultures similar? How do these similarities influence my perceptions of both the cultures and the two women I am researching? How are these women's novels similar and why might this be so? Why does the Heian philosophic and aesthetic background seem so congenial to an analysis of Woolf? Though I'm sure others will arise, these seem questions enough with which to begin my investigation.

THE HEIAN SETTING

The following discussion focuses on the Heian court for two reasons. The first is that the court is the only social stratum about which records are currently available because "the civilization was defined in terms of its relation to the court and was the product of courtiers" (Miner 4). The second is that Heian literature proceeded exclusively from the court. The Heian Japanese court culture is generally dated from 794 AD, when, due to a series of power struggles amongst the nobles themselves and between the nobles and the Buddhist hierarchy, the capital was moved from Nara to Heian Kyo. The new capital was the highly insular home of what was in actuality an extended kinship group ruled over by a Regent (Sesshō, Kampaku, or Sekkan depending on the age and competence of the Emperor[5]) who acted (supposedly) in the name of the Emperor. The Fujiwara clan, the most influential family group at court, had followed the policy, originally instituted by a rival family at approximately the beginning of the Heian period, of marrying their daughters to the Emperor, raising the future emperors in their homes (thus gaining tremendous emotional influence), and acting as Regent to these child emperors. Emperors were, politely or not so politely, encouraged to retire before they became old

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[5] Some of the Emperors appear to have been psychologically unstable due to imperial in-breeding.

enough and/or politically strong enough to mount any opposition to the Regent. Thus, political power remained in the hands of the Fujiwara rather than being handed from Emperor to Emperor. Shortly before the time of Murasaki Shikibu, the ex-Emperor Suzaku had attempted to break the Fujiwara hold on the court, but by the time of the Genji Monogatari the most successful of the Fujiwara was in control:

> Michinaga (966-1027)...dominated the Court from 995 until his death, acting for many years as principal minister, and wielding de facto power, through marital and family connections, as the father-in-law of three Emperors, one Crown Prince, and one Retired Emperor; the grandfather of an Emperor and a Crown Prince; and the father of a Regent. (H. McCullough 3-4)[6]

All the truly important people lived in the capital, which seemed the centre of the world. "Going away" implicitly meant going away from the capital. It was in this atmosphere that the wealthy nobles, whose money generally came from the labour of peasants on estates the nobles would never see, created one of the most literate, aesthetically sensitive cultures to be found in world history. It is of course the insularity of this group which led to its eventual defeat by the warrior culture in the latter half of the twelfth century. Insular or not, the Heian court is

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[6] Another ex-Emperor was later to regain control of the court temporarily (Insei politics) but to no avail, as a Regent structure was in place, with the military Shōgun replacing the courtier Sekkan, until very recently (comparatively speaking).

considered to be the "golden age" of Japanese culture. The period truly reached its height, however, in the late tenth and early eleventh-centuries at the courts of two rival Empresses, Akiko (or Shōshi), the daughter of Michinaga, and Teishi, the daughter of a rival for control of the Emperor. The courts were the appreciative "public" of a number of their female members who were writing innovative, cross and mixed-genre work in Japanese: "the great mid-Heian period of feminine [sic] vernacular literature...produced not only the world's first psychological novel, The Tale of Genji, but vast quantities of poetry and a series of diaries" (Morris, Pillow 10). This period also saw the beginnings of the indigenous art of emaki (picture scrolls) or Yamato-e (Japanese pictures), which art combined paintings of the scenes being described with the calligraphy describing the scene (all of course on exquisitely tasteful paper[7]).

Within the court group itself a semi-rigid class structure ordered the lives of all concerned. Some upward mobility was possible (generally through marriage politics which treated daughters as an exchangeable commodity). Downward motion was also always a possibility. The court hierarchy was originally divided into eight ranks:

> When the court rank system first came into being

---

[7] Like almost any aesthetic aspect of Heian court life, the choice of the "right" paper was an essential element of social success. Paper had to be of a quality and type which reflected the feeling of its contents or the relationship of the sender and receiver.

> at the beginning of the Nara period, the cream of the nobility occupied the first five of the eight court ranks. But by the mid-Heian period a substantial social, political, and economic gap had opened up between those who attained the first three court ranks...and those who ended their careers at the Fourth or Fifth ranks....The "middle rank" was made up of aristocrats who were either provincial governors...or private retainers...to royalty...or both. (Shirane, 51)

This rank system meant that, in terms of Heian thought, there were at least two distinctly different social classes, what are now sometimes referred to as the upper and middle classes. The upper class, the first three ranks, produced little literature (other than the all-important poetry) or art of consequence, while the "middle class" seems to have produced most of what has survived to date. Because the nobility engaged in an aristocratic version of conspicuous consumption based on the acquisition of exquisite works of art and architecture, (border-line) lower-middle class artisan work predominates in the areas of decorative arts, sculpture, architecture, sutra copying, and religious painting. Consumption of aesthetically correct articles by the Heian nobility and court was important because, along with providing objects of luck or beauty, it was indicative of one's social position. Thus, "in 651 Emperor Kōtoku commissioned at great expense the copying of the whole canon of Mahāyāna Buddhism (issai-kyō). Two thousand one hundred monks and nuns worked on the opus of more than 2,000 texts" (Hempel 120). In 1026, "for the confinement of the empress: twenty-seven life-size figures [of the gods]" (Hempel 230)

were commissioned from the important artisan Jocho. Aesthetics, power, and consumption were almost always linked in the Heian setting. Murasaki Shikibu was herself a "purchased" political asset in Michinaga's campaign to win the Emperor's favour. In contrast to the body of plastic and decorative art works commissioned from temple workshops and the Palace Bureau (which was staffed with hired artisans), all the Heian prose works of literary interest[8] (with the one exception of Ki no Tsurayuki) were written by women whose origins were in the "middle" rank:

> Lady Sarashina, like most other famous women writers of the time, belonged to the so-called Heian middle class....a category of officials and their families, themselves often of aristocratic descent, who occupied ranks below the ruling stratum of High Court Nobles and above the mass of petty functionaries and commoners. (Morris, Bridge 12)

These women were the "daughters of educated men." Forbidden the government university, their education (often of an extremely impressive level) came from "self-study" (see the coming quotation from Shirane, which gives a fair example of the wide range of literature with which Heian women often managed to make themselves familiar). The fortunate Murasaki Shikibu was able to sit in on her brother's lessons:

> Of her childhood Murasaki tells us the following anecdote: 'When my brother Nobunori (the one who is now in the Board of Rites) was a boy my father was very anxious to make a good Chinese scholar of him, and often came himself to hear Nobunori read

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[8] In the appendix to this work, I attempt to give an overview of the important prose works of the period.

> his lessons. On these occasions I was always present, and so quick was I at picking up the language that I was soon able to prompt my brother whenever he got stuck. At this my father used to sigh and say to me: "If only you were a boy how proud and happy I should be."' (Waley, Intro. vii)

Murasaki Shikibu later had access to her husband's library of Chinese classics: "We know from the diary that Murasaki's interest in Chinese literature was no youthful whim. Her husband was a specialist in the subject and at his death he appears to have left a substantial Chinese library" (Morris, World 256-7). Chinese, at this time, was the "scholarly" language of Japan, holding a position much like that of Latin or French in relation to vernacular English in the time before Chaucer. Knowledge of Chinese was considered highly erudite and masculine; women were not encouraged to cultivate or display knowledge of this sort:

> As one might expect, written Chinese was jealously guarded and from its inception became the exclusive domain of the male. Indeed, in the public arena men were under considerable pressure not to use Japanese, to prove their fitness for office, and ultimately their masculinity, by their command of Chinese poetry and prose. Women were not taught Chinese and were thereby effectively excluded from participating in the power structure, and in order to perpetuate this state of affairs the useful fiction was generated that it was 'unbecoming' for the female to learn Chinese. We know from their diaries [and their literature] that by the end of the tenth century women did not always acquiesce in this fiction, but there were nevertheless powerful cultural constraints laid upon them. There can be no doubt that the acquisition of Chinese by women was seen as a threat, a subversive act of considerable, if undefined, moment. (Bowring, Tale 9-10)

Murasaki's long, complex, and sophisticated "novel" (54

chapters in all), for instance, draws heavily on an already extant poetic tradition and on an "educated" knowledge of Chinese:

> The Genji alludes to, cites, and draws upon a staggering body of literary and religious texts: Chinese literature, including the Shih chi (Records of the Grand Historian), the Wen hsüan (Anthology of Literature), and Po Chu-i's collected works; a wide range of Buddhist scriptures; waka from a multitude of collections; and a variety of tales (monogatari), poetic diaries (nikki), songs (kayō), poetry contests (uta awase), and histories. (Shirane xvii)

Clearly some women managed to work their way around the restrictions placed on knowledge and language. In all areas, however, not just that of education, the lives of the women of the Heian Japanese court were highly circumscribed and vulnerable. The houses of the period appear to have consisted of what were essentially large rooms subdivided by hanging curtains and sliding screens. Little privacy was possible and, as the literature of the time attests, the opportunities for intrigue and violation were numerous. Women seldom ventured out of the house, living in a state of almost complete seclusion:

> As a rule a Heian woman of the upper class would not let herself be seen by a man unless she was actually having an affair with him - and not always then. They were usually protected by curtains of state, screens, fans, etc., and above all by the darkness of the rooms. (Morris, Pillow 289)

To be caught in the gaze of a male intruder was equated with allowing him sexual congress:

> [Women] live indoors, behind screens that are

> there to be penetrated. A move through a curtain signifies capitulation. The very act of seeing in such a haremlike environment becomes identified with violation....this topos of visual rape [is] known as kaimami or "seeing through a gap in the hedge."[9] (Bowring, "Hand" 52)

The legal and matrimonial positions of the time also tended to make women vulnerable. Though it was possible for women to own property, their hold over this property could be abrogated for lack of support:

> Heian women, as we have seen, had the right to inherit and retain property. Yet it appears that they needed the support of their family or of some influential man to keep and administer this property effectively....For matters like these, and also for controlling any refractory retainers or estate officials, she had to rely on some guardian or protector. (Morris, World 242)

In marriage women were equally vulnerable. A loose system of primarily matrilocal marriage (followed sometimes by movement of the couple to a neolocal home),[10] in which a man might have one principle wife, a secondary wife, and any number of unofficial wives, and in which marriage was

---

[9] Bowring here shows how difficult it is to talk of how "women textualize themselves" (51), especially as one of the "givens" of Western culture is the "normality" of the male gaze. The "penetration" and moving in this passage are done by the male; the "act of seeing" is associated with the violator, not the violated -- things Bowring never quite makes (grammatically) clear. I'm not sure that "capitulation" is the right word here either. One of the main "themes" of the Genji is the lack of a right to capitulate. In other words, Heian women heroines often had no "choice" at all, and using rape and "capitulation" thus interchangeably negates much of what was written into Heian texts by Heian women.

[10] W. McCullough is the authority on this subject and anyone interested is encouraged to consult "Japanese Marriage Institutions in the Heian Period."

accomplished by sleeping together three nights in a row (though officially arranged marriages of convenience appear to have been somewhat more closely regulated), seems to have left women in insecure positions more often than not. Because familial social movement could be tied to the social movement of daughters, the world of the court followed the example of the Fujiwara and "marriage politics" prevailed.[11] Although marriage for love was possible, the system of polygamy in place often meant that when love died, so did the relationship, which situation left the woman feeling terribly jealous and betrayed. It also left her without support if her parents and immediate family were for some reason unwilling or unable to support her (though the woman's family does usually appear to have been strongly present). Ironically, one of the legal reasons for divorce was female jealously. Not only was a woman without legal recourse in the situation (unless she was a well-placed principle wife) but expression of her anger was prohibited as pathological.

In a situation like this, expression itself is protest. And these women do seem to have protested. After the death

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[11] The woman's (or her family's) responsibilities in a marriage consisted of sexual congress and reproduction, child-care, and the provision of clothes (appropriately dyed or patterned, cut, and stitched) for the man. The latter task was important because it was necessary for clothes to be matched to the time, situation, and position of their wearer. Anything else could make one appear ridiculous, which might have political consequences.

of her Emperor, a certain Nagako, who wished to remain in mourning rather than returning to court duties, wrote the following:

> My elder brother, who had heard the foregoing conversation, exclaimed, 'Ah, how I, as a man, should like to receive such an imperial order. I am green with envy that the Retired Emperor should hold you in such esteem. Being a woman, you could do without such favours. I think it rather strange that, when people who had spent long years in court service during the reign of the late Emperor Horikawa, and also his foster-brothers and such-like people, were given mourning clothes to wear, you were included in that number, even though you had not been long at court, and that now in the reign of this Emperor, you are again regarded as being so indispensable that an imperial order comes saying, "Discard your mourning clothes," even before the end of the mourning period.'
>
> I was filled with disgust and shame at this outburst. (Brewster 84)

Most commentators prefer to deny (often strenuously) that Heian women's literature is in any sense to be taken as political protest. Seeking to explain the "curiously patchy impression we get from reading" Heian women's texts, Morris says,

> These rumblings [from the provinces] presaged the collapse of the centralized political and social structure on which Heian culture was based; yet there is not the faintest reverberation in Lady Sarashina's book. Nor do any of the other Court ladies, however gifted and observant, evince the slightest interest in the world that lay beyond their direct emotional and aesthetic ken. Shōnagon, Murasaki, Izumi and the others represent almost the entire gamut of feminine character and temperament; yet they are alike in concentrating on a limited range of human experience. (Bridge 18)

Part of the problem here is, of course, the definition of

politics. Even if one's definition is the highly narrow one of "government," women appear to have written and acted in this area. Nagako was an Assistant Attendant:

> The official duties of the Chief Attendants [women courtiers], who originally held lower fifth rank, were presenting petitions to the Emperor and transmitting his orders, together with supervising Palace ceremonial and servants. The Assistant Attendants [again, female attendants to the Emperor], who originally held lower sixth rank, performed these same functions in the absence of their superiors, and were responsible for serving the Emperor's meals and for supervising the Sacred Treasures when the Emperor changed residence. (Brewster 35)

It does seem as though such acts as presenting petitions and transmitting orders might be expected to have some political impact. Also, it appears that Murasaki Shikibu may have advanced her family's position in court:

> In Kankō 3(1006).12.29. Fujiwara no Tokitaka, brother of Murasaki's former husband Nobutaka, was allowed back into court after some misdemeanor, and in Kankō 4(1007).1.13. Murasaki's brother Nobunori was promoted to Sixth Secretary. Both of these suggest that Michinaga might have been rewarding Murasaki on her entrance into service. (Bowring, Diary 11)

Though he admits, in a footnote, that "some Heian women (especially Dowager Empresses like Higashi Sanjo no In and Jotomon In) wielded great political power," Morris reminds us that "they were exceptions. Most women of the time, including all the writers with whose work we are familiar, were uninvolved in politics, though many of them took a keen interest in palace intrigues, state marriages, and promotions" (World 142). "Palace intrigues, state marriages,

and promotions" were, though, the basis of Heian court governmental politics as practised by the Fujiwara and other influential families.

A disturbing refrain recurs in the works of some commentators. This refrain can be (irreverently) summarized as a pronouncement that "Heian women had it ever so good." Morris again:

> the fact remains that the women at this time were far from being the unfortunate down-trodden creatures that some modern writers have suggested in their effort to represent The Tale of Genji as a work of feminine protest and Murasaki Shikibu as the champion of an exploited class and sex....On the whole, Heian women were remarkably well off, and it is only since the Second World War that the position of Japanese women has become better than that of their ancestors a thousand years ago. (World 208-9)

Although women clearly felt privileged on occasion, the privilege may have more to do with class concerns than those of gender. Whatever the case, the women who wrote were not acquiescent about their lot, though sometimes misinterpreted as being so. See, for instance, Morris' interpretation of a passage from the Genji:

> when Ukifune's mother enumerates the many difficulties that confront her daughter, she ends by saying that her greatest misfortune is to have been born a woman; for, 'Whatever their station may be, women are bound to have a hard lot, not only in this life but in the world to come.' There is not the slightest evidence that Murasaki herself questioned this gloomy assessment of her own sex. (Morris, World 121-2)

I wonder whether the critics are so dogmatic about Heian women's "acceptance" of their "privileged" place in life

because the very subtlety of Heian female expression often "hides" the frustration which these women were articulating and leaves meaning open to misinterpretation. H. McCullough discusses the approach to women in a male-dominated genre:

> The brief interlude ends when Shigeki says [to his wife], "Do you mean you can't remember who [the author of that poem] was? How could anyone forget a thing like that? Her one redeeming feature is that she has a wonderful head for practical matters. That's why I can't divorce her." His jocular comment, with its overtones of affectionate contempt, reminds us that women, in the masculine world of the setsuwa, are not always viewed through the sympathetic eyes of a Murasaki Shikibu, but, rather, are often treated as they are in the folk anecdotes of Europe, in which, as Stith Thompson points out, "perhaps [through the influence of] fabliaux and novelle with their medieval bias against women, the woman usually appears as wicked, overbearing, and faithless, or at best unutterably stupid." (27)

As well, such comments as Morris' ("it is only since the Second World War..." (World 208-9)) indicate that the writer is dealing with the relative "equality" or importance of Heian women. This is the approach taken by a very recent history text:

> The "Nun Shogun," it might be noted, was a part of the line of important women in Japanese history that stretched from the sun goddess to Pimiko, and from the empresses of the Nara period to the literary women of the late Heian court. Their importance continued during the Kamakura. There was only one Nun Shogun but the daughters of warrior families, as well as the sons, often trained in archery or other military arts, and women occasionally inherited the position of military steward. Only beginning in the fourteenth century did women's roles become more circumscribed. (Craig 326)

Unfortunately, dealing with the relative position of women

in Japanese history leaves a vast leeway of possible "better" treatment than that received by women in the medieval and post-medieval periods when a woman was often the much abused near-slave of both her husband and her mother-in-law (whom societal mores encouraged to replicate, often in a very vicious manner, the oppression to which she had earlier been subjected by her husband and mother-in-law).

Recent critics are less certain of the "privileged" position of women in the Heian court. Presentation of the way in which the Heian court's (and therefore life's) structure affected women is a major impulse of much of the literature. The Genji and Kagerō nikki are the most obvious examples, but the diaries of women of the times clearly discuss the authors' reactions to the strictures imposed upon them by their society. And the women just as clearly felt these strictures. Bowring sees Murasaki's writing as "an act of covert opposition" to the Fujiwara and the court (Diary 34) and Shirane discusses the fact that the Genji's

> themes are overwhelmingly personal and private in nature....Even those rare passages that depict Genji's public life do so through the eyes of a woman narrator....As in the kana diaries by women, we view the impact of political change not on the world at large but rather on the private lives of women who are ostensibly removed from that public sphere. And yet in highly allusive, poetic, aesthetic, and less than apparent ways, the Genji dilates on the question of political power. (22-3)

Certainly any reading of the texts which I have undertaken

(though in translation) gives me entrance into a world where women know they are living lives circumscribed by politics, of every nature, and are generally writing in order to break that circumscription (though I doubt very much a Heian woman would have put it in these terms, hers being those of circumlocution, allusion, and elision). Examples of the negative effect of this circumscription are everywhere. Why does the fictional Murasaki die? Because, though Genji loves her, he makes a woman of higher rank his official wife and Murasaki no longer feels secure. Ukifune attempts suicide because of a similar lack of security. In the Genji passage quoted by Morris to support Murasaki Shikibu's lack of protest, "Whatever their station may be, women are bound to have a hard lot, not only in this life but in the world to come" (World 121-2), I see more than a hint of bitterness about the "inevitability" of this fate. The "Mother of Michitsuna" (the only historical designation by which the poor woman is known) wrote specifically, she tells the reader, because she wished to correct the impression which feckless romances had given of even a fortunate woman's position (she was writing before the time of Murasaki Shikibu):

> In the course of living, lying down, getting up, dawn to dusk, when she looked at the odds and ends of old tales, there was so much falsity in them that she thought perhaps if a record were to be written of an ordinary person's life like hers, it might be something novel and one could even let it stand as an example should anyone inquire what it was like to be the wife of a high ranking man.

(Arntzen 1)

Even Sei Shōnagon, not the most pensive of writers, wrote passages describing the unfortunate effects of the cessation of a husband's visits (see "A Family Has Finally Arranged the Marriage"). Certainly, in the case of Heian women (perhaps because of misreadings of the literature and the lives), the public (critical) construction appears to have been, until recently, radically different from the private reality as the women themselves presented it.

Very little, publicly or privately, is known about Murasaki Shikibu. Her family, which included a number of poets of note but no particularly effective politicians, came from the northern branch of the Fujiwara (Shirane 215) and was thus distantly related to the ruling Fujiwara Regent, Michinaga. Murasaki herself lived from approximately 973 A.D. to somewhere between 1014 and 1031 A.D. In 996, her father, who appears (contrary to custom) to have raised her, was appointed to the governorship of Echizen and Murasaki probably went with him. She returned to be married in 998 A.D., had a daughter (Kenshi) in 999, and was widowed in 1001 A.D. In 1005 or 1006, she was hired by Michinaga (as a "private lady-in-waiting" rather than as an official courtier (Bowring, Diary 166)) to entertain and instruct the young Empress Akiko (or Shōshi) whom Michinaga had married to Emperor Ichijō (one of his many moves to consolidate power) in 1002. It is during the years prior to her entry

into court service that Murasaki is believed to have begun the Genji Monogatari (it may have been this text which called her to Michinaga's attention). It continued to be produced in a serial manner until 1021 A.D. at the latest.[12] Murasaki's daughter appears to have carried on her mother's tradition. Kenshi was successful both politically (she became wet-nurse to a future Emperor) and artistically (she also became a well-known waka poet).

As a final (and most important) note, I wish to discuss Murasaki's literary legacy. It is not an exaggeration to say that Murasaki Shikibu's erudite Genji Monogatari holds a position in the Japanese literary tradition comparable to a combination of the positions held by both Chaucer and Shakespeare in the English traditional canon.[13] Indeed, as I have noted, almost all the classical Japanese texts are written by women, an amazing anomaly when one views the majority of the world's literary canons. The immediate reasons for this are complex, having to do with the position

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[12] I have used Richard Bowring as my source for dates; Waley is wildly out in spots and other scholars are divided (often virulently) on the subject of when Murasaki did what, perhaps because there is so little written evidence about the lives of Heian women. Bowring gives a good survey of the critical arguments in his introduction to Murasaki Shikibu: Her Diary and Poetic Memoirs.

[13] Attention is often drawn to the fact that Murasaki Shikibu and the women of Heian Japan could be the "Shakespeare's sisters" for whom Woolf was searching. See, for example, the conclusion to Norma Field's The Splendour of Longing in the Tale of Genji.

of Japanese as a secondary, or women's, language in Heian Japan, and the later veneration of vernacular texts for patriotic reasons. This does not account, however, for the fact that these works were seen as seminal almost from the moment of their conception, due partly to the way in which they seemed to capture the courtly sentiment and sensibility of the period. Why these "women's texts" should have been the basis of what was to become, for a time, a purely and resolutely male tradition of writing has not been explored in any depth, and the genesis and theoretics of this astonishing situation seem generally to be addressed on a very pragmatic and functional level (i.e. Was it perhaps because of boredom that the women wrote so prolifically while the men did not?). The answer to this question of why the texts are only written by women is usually something like Morris':

> Significantly this [new] literature in the phonetic script was sometimes known as 'women's writing'. For, although both sexes used kanabun to record the native language, most men were still so overawed by the prestige of Chinese writing that they preferred to circumscribe their literary efforts by a foreign idiom, even though the results were almost bound to be derivative and jejune. This put women, who were theoretically debarred from Chinese studies, at a considerable advantage and is the main reason that their sex produced most of the important writers of the time. (World 12-13)

What, one wonders, is the effect of writing in a "woman's hand," if the author is male. Does it "break the tongue?":

> As Monique Wittig has shown, the pronoun I conceals the sexual identity of the

> speaker/writer. The I makes the speaker/writer deceptively feel at home in a male-controlled language....The fact is that the female saying "I" is alien at every moment to her own speaking and writing. She is broken by the fact that she must enter this language in order to speak or to write. (Daly 18-9)

Or is the effect rather to create the crystalline, momentary vision of the early Japanese canon and of the Japanese poetic tradition? Does it create the rather schizophrenic split evident between and within the works of say Kawabata (a sense of modernist alienation with classical leanings) and Mishima (a resolute, gory, and yet lyric description of the dissolution of the self through a quixotic identification with the virile warrior culture)? Shirane, Field, and Bowring have begun to discuss the question of writing as protest, but a thorough analysis of how a tradition of writing in the "feminine" affects the current writing and perceptions of the one culture where we know it to have occurred would be fascinating.[14]

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[14] Such an undertaking would be particularly fascinating if the investigator were to discuss Levi-Strauss' theories of women as "both signs and objects of exchange, both signs and producers of signs, both words spoken in the so-called language of kinship (the kinship system) and speakers of (natural?) language(s)" (de Lauretis 262) and Grosz' discussion of (self) representational practices in art: "It seems that, with rare exceptions, [art] is an index of women's cultural position(s), a kind of symptom of what woman means, not for herself or in her own terms, but for culture" (1).

THE BLOOMSBURY SETTING

The potential for the development of the Bloomsbury Group came into being when the four Stephen siblings moved, at the beginning of the twentieth century, into a house in the part of London, England known as Bloomsbury. The Bloomsbury period, a term denoting the period of time when the group which was to grow out of this initial potential was active and personally (rather than historically) influential, is dated from as early as 1905, when Thursday night meetings for Thoby Stephen's friends and Vanessa Stephen's Friday Club were initiated, to as late as 1956, when the last meeting of the Memoir Club occurred.[15] The Bloomsbury Group was, if anything, more insular and exclusive than the Heian Court, though, like the Court, its influence was and is immense: "By [1929, Bloomsbury's] influence had been extended from fiction, biography, economics, and painting through literary, social, and art criticism to publishing and journalism" (Rosenbaum, Bloomsbury ix). Bloomsbury (for convenience of address) was composed of such persons as Virginia Woolf (novelist, diarist, playwright, essayist, feminist theorist,

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[15] Here again dates are a difficulty, this time because of the many conflicting voices of biographers, auto-biographers, and critics as well as the fact that the period under discussion is perhaps still too close in time to our own for "objectivity" to reign supreme. Another difficulty is the well-known insistence of the participants that there was no such group.

publisher), Maynard Keynes (economist), Vanessa Bell (visual artist), Morgan Forster (novelist), Lytton Strachey ("historical" novelist), Duncan Grant (visual artist), Clive Bell (art critic, essayist), Roger Fry (art critic, visual artist), Leonard Woolf (social critic, novelist, publisher), Saxon Sydney Turner (Treasury worker), Desmond MacCarthy (editor and essayist), Molly MacCarthy (novelist), Adrian and Karin Stephen (psychiatrists), Arthur Waley (orientalist and translator, poet, short story writer), and Lady Ottoline Morrell (social and literary "salon" host). I have here distilled different lists compiled by such persons as Virginia Woolf, S.P. Rosenbaum, Leonard Woolf and Christopher Isherwood in order to give an idea of the full range of Bloomsbury. The list is in no way complete, merely representative. Like others, I am sure to have missed or added personages vehemently ignored or included elsewhere. For instance, almost all Bloomsberries and critics deny that Ottoline Morrell was a member. Everyone that is, except Virginia Woolf: "When the history of Bloomsbury is written...there will have to be a chapter, even if it is only in the appendix, devoted to Ottoline" (Moments 204).

Essentially a kin-ship based "in-group,"[16] Bloomsbury

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[16] I am well aware that my use of this term is rather fast and loose, but the fact remains that many of these people were related and/or felt themselves to be "kindred spirits." Christopher Isherwood maintains that "the 'Group' was not a group at all, in the self-conscious sense, but a kind of clan; one of those 'natural' families which form themselves" (Noble 176).

was

> a group of friends and relations who included some people whose work would be widely respected if the group itself were not remembered, others of whom this is quite clearly not the case, and others again in whom it is difficult to distinguish between independent reputation and the effect of group association and group memoirs. (Williams 151)

Bloomsbury was a loosely associated group which circulated around a "core" of artistically gifted persons such as Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, and Roger Fry. Indeed, some critics go so far as to say, "It is, I think, clear enough that it is Virginia and Vanessa who must be regarded as the mother-goddesses [of Bloomsbury]" (Gadd 3).[17] Entrance to Bloomsbury was a function of acquaintance and similarity of outlook and thus predicated on class. Williams calls Bloomsbury "a true fraction of the existing English upper class" (156) and Prince Dmitri Mirsky, a less objective contemporary Marxist critic, wrote in 1935 that

> The basic trait of Bloomsbury is a mixture of philosophic rationalism, political rationalism, aestheticism, and a cult of the individuality [sic]. Their radicalism is definitely bourgeois, a product of...the old bourgeois radicalism and utilitarianism....Bloomsbury liberalism can be defined as a thin-skinned humanism for enlightened and sensitive members of the capitalist class who do not desire the outer world to be such as might be prone to cause them any displeasing impression. (Rosenbaum, Bloomsbury 384)

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[17] Unfortunately, Gadd does not here seem to be dealing with their artistic impact but with their provision of a "feminine element."

Of a social class loosely comparable to that of the Heian "family of the provincial governor," these people were either from families related to nobility, marrying into families related to this upper class, moving up into the governing classes, or part of the "in-group" through "special dispensation." The fact that almost all of the male members of Bloomsbury attended Cambridge and were there invited to join the very elite secret society of the "Apostles"[18] testifies to the upper-middle class/low-upper class background of the group. This rather rarefied atmosphere produced an "intellectual aristocracy" -- a group responsible, during the early part of the twentieth-century, for another "golden age" of culture in the areas of literature and the visual arts. Bloomsbury and the London literary scene were the appreciative (and sometimes not so appreciative) intended public of women authors such as Woolf and Katherine Mansfield who wrote innovative, cross and mixed-genre work highlighting the importance of perception and recounting life as perceived from an "everyday" (often female) point-of-view. "Psychological" and "stream-of-conscious" works became the hallmark of these writers. In painting, post-impressionist techniques were explored by such artists as Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, and Roger Fry.

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[18] "Apostles, The; The Cambridge Conversazione Society, known also simply as The Society - a secret Cambridge undergraduate discussion club founded in the early nineteenth century" (Rosenbaum, Bloomsbury 437).

Interestingly enough, Vanessa Bell's concentration on altered forms of representation in pictures which depict the Otherness (alienation?) of female figures made her work much closer in structure to the works of Virginia Woolf (and vice versa) than has generally been acknowledged.[19]

I find it interesting that, while the social system which housed Bloomsbury would, on the face of it, appear to be radically different from that of the Heian court, there are many points of similarity. The British working-class was largely lacking in self awareness and direction (for instance, the political movements of the "masses" were still guided by members of the elite, ie the Fabian movement, which was created and dominated by the Webbs), while their labour supported a privileged non-labouring class. And despite Bloomsbury's political Socialism, the distinction Williams (and Dmitri Mirsky before him) makes about their concern stemming from a social conscience rather than a social consciousness is clearly valid. The Bloomsbury Group was willing to show the ruling parties how to better treat the lower classes, but was not, on the whole (though Virginia Woolf was an exception), willing to instigate rebellion amongst the ranks. The upper classes in this system produced little or no art of consequence. It was again the middle classes and those on the very fringes of

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[19] For a discussion of both the background to this area and the similarities between the works of the two women, see Diane Gillespie's The Sisters' Arts.

the upper class who produced art of lasting value. A vast difference, however, lies between the inscriptions of the elite male members of this group, "The values and habits which brought them so closely together soon gave them a (self-regarding) sense of being different from others, and these others, in turn could identify them as a clique" (Williams 153), and the women artists of Bloomsbury who felt compelled by their marginality to express themselves, to write themselves as marginal beings into "history": "a persistent sexual asymmetry was an important element in the composition of the Bloomsbury Group....The effects of this asymmetry were ironically and at times indignantly noted by Virginia Woolf, in A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas" (Williams 162).

While I could hardly attempt to convince the reader that all the enduring writers of Bloomsbury were female, I can make the argument that the most important and influential writer was both female and the "daughter of an educated man." Prevented by convention and law, during her formative years, from attending the prestigious university her brothers attended as a matter of course, Virginia Woolf was privately tutored at home, but she culled most of the learning which she would later consider important from her father's large private library:

> Virginia Woolf['s] higher education took place in the library of the eminent Victorian man of letters who happened to be her father (15); she ate her way through eighteenth- and

> nineteenth-century English history, biography, and fiction, and sampled the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as well (99). (Rosenbaum, Victorian)

Though she was later to have the "advantage" of being able to discuss her brothers' educational discoveries with both her brothers and their friends, she regretted all her life her lack of formal education (especially in such traditionally prestigious areas as Greek and Latin) and lived experience:

> [Charlotte Brontë] knew, no one better, how enormously her genius would have profited if it had not spent itself in solitary visions over distant fields; if experience and intercourse and travel had been granted her....Had Tolstoi lived at the Priory in seclusion with a married lady 'cut off from what is called the world', however edifying the moral lesson, he could scarcely, I thought, have written War and Peace. (Room 67-8)

Like that of Murasaki, however, Virginia Woolf's writing drew heavily on a whole range of classics and a vast amount of historical knowledge she seems to have absorbed in passing.

Though Virginia Woolf was to live through the "progressive" period when women achieved the vote and some measure of legal control over their own lives, she grew up in a household very much a part of a former time. And, though the latter part of her life was one of perceived "freedom," she too lived in a period of relative rather than absolute equality. At the tail-end of the Victorian era and into the Edwardian, women were what the male gaze dictated, were there only for the male gaze. Their social construction

was dependent on male desires. Thus, "good" women did not move to Bloomsbury because of its association in the patriarchal mind with "loose" morals. BBC interviews for the television film A Night's Darkness. A Day's Sail (see the five reproduced in Noble's Recollections of Virginia Woolf), with their inevitable discussion of what Virginia Woolf looked like, were only one manifestation of this reality. The house (typical of its time) in which Virginia Woolf grew up offered little privacy and numerous opportunities for intrigue and violation:

> As I have said, the drawing room at Hyde Park Gate was divided by black folding doors picked out with thin lines of raspberry red...Mounds of plush, Watts' portraits, busts shrined in crimson velvet, enriched the gloom of a room naturally dark and thickly shaded in summer by showers of Virginia Creeper. But it is of the folding doors that I wish to speak...As soon dispense with water-closets or bathrooms as with folding doors in a family of nine men and women. (Woolf, Moments 165)

The opening to "22 Hyde Park Gate" reinforces the claustrophobic, frightening atmosphere of the ending:

> Sleep had almost come to me. The room was dark. The house silent. Then, creaking stealthily, the door opened; treading gingerly, someone entered. "Who?" I cried. "Don't be frightened", George whispered. "And don't turn on the light, oh beloved. Beloved--" and he flung himself on my bed, and took me in his arms. (Woolf, Moments 180)

Virginia Woolf's sexual violation by her two half-brothers was indicative of the dangers attendant on the Victorian pater familas system; Virginia and Vanessa Bell's

experiences were not in any way anomalous.[20] Legal and matrimonial practices changed drastically during Woolf's life-time; in 1880 a law was passed which gave married women the opportunity to possess property in their own persons (their property, including money, no longer belonged to their husbands), in 1919 women could legally vote, and (at about the same time as the vote) the professions were finally opened to women. "Marriage politics," once the norm, slowly gave way to "love-matches," matches which were not carefully supervised by the families of the participants. A double standard of male prerogative still prevailed, however, and custom dictated that male activities were still the important ones. As Marcus states, "Apologists for Bloomsbury's pacifist ethos of friendship have ignored its rampant anti-feminism" (137). Vanessa Bell, for instance, sacrificed much artistic energy to home-making and child-rearing. Gillespie quotes a letter from Vanessa Bell to her daughter Angelica: "It's so terribly difficult to paint seriously when one is responsible for other things and hasn't room and space to oneself and we females have to struggle for it all our lives" (72). When the clear-phrased political commentator Virginia Woolf wrote the theoretically impeccable Three Guineas, she was greeted with disbelief and

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[20] For a portrait of the Victorian family system (painted with appalling clarity) see Louise DeSalvo's book Virginia Woolf: the impact of childhood sexual abuse on her life and work.

ridicule: "Three Guineas...was dismissed as shrill, naive, misinformed, offensive" (Trombley 207); she was considered always, and was indeed led to consider herself, as "the least political animal that has lived since Aristotle invented the definition" (L. Woolf 27). Like women's literature of the Heian period, the covertly and overtly political nature of women's writings of the period has only recently been seriously addressed: "recent feminist criticism has shown the incompleteness of older critical interpretations that failed to see how [Woolf's] significant forms [in the novels] expressed deeply felt cognitive contents" (Rosenbaum, Victorian 8-9). Contemporary re-assessment (Shirane and Field) of the political nature of Heian women's literature is, perhaps, due in a large part to the re-assessment of Woolf's (and others') arguments about the nature of political reality, arguments commonly interpolated as "the personal is the political."

Virginia Woolf herself, about whom a great deal has been written, was born in 1882, the daughter of the literarily (though not politically) successful Stephen family which had ties to British aristocracy. After the early death of her mother and the later death of her father, she moved out of the Victorian household and world which they had created. With her two brothers (Thoby and Adrian) and her sister (Vanessa), she formed the nucleus of what was later to be identified as the Bloomsbury Group. She married

the former colonial government official, Leonard Woolf, in 1912, and in 1917 they began the Hogarth Press, a press which was to print works by many avant-garde and influential "modernist" writers. Woolf's first novel was printed in 1915 and she was, over her lifetime, to produce many short stories, 2 extended political "pamphlets," 2 "common readers," 10 novels, 1 play, 1 biography, 3 translations (with S.S. Koteliansky), 5 diary volumes (as presently in print, the early diaries are yet unpublished), copious letters, and innumerable critical articles.[21] She declined many "institutional" honours for political reasons and was active in a number of women's groups. Her influence, and the influence of the Hogarth Press, on literature was to be strong and lasting; T.S. Eliot said of Virginia Woolf that she "was the centre, not merely of an esoteric group, but of the literary life of London" (Rosenbaum, Bloomsbury 203). Her influence on feminist theory was to be, if possible, even more important. Fearing a combination of a possible German invasion of England, a period of stress-produced psychic instability,[22] and the threat of incarceration

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[21] These distinctions are almost entirely arbitrary. Woolf's work, as with Heian women's, does not fall readily into one category or another.

[22] For chilling accounts of the genesis and propagation of Woolf's instability, especially in such areas as early sexual abuse, Leonard Woolf's insistence on Virginia Woolf's mad lack of rationality (especially bad, it seems, because she would disagree with him about her mental state), and the moral (rather than physical) bases of diagnosis used by Woolf's physicians, see Louise DeSalvo's Virginia Woolf,

accompanied by a "rest-cure," Virginia Woolf drowned herself in 1941.

Unlike Murasaki's, Woolf's works had mixed receptions initially[23] and those of her works which are taken seriously have continued to be considered perhaps brilliant but certainly difficult and eccentric. As late as 1970, Robson felt secure in stating,

> It is not yet clear whether VIRGINIA WOOLF...will be classed among that select company of writers who outlive their time....She belongs to the company of Henry James and Conrad, of Joyce and Lawrence. But the range and scale of her work is so much smaller that comparison is difficult. (98-9)

This type of dismissive personal opinion/response disguised as objective criticism seems to be becoming less prevalent as time passes and the artistic visions of such "difficult" writers as H.D., Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, and Katherine Mansfield are resurrected and their importance to the varying artistic movements initiated during the beginning of the twentieth-century investigated. Vanessa Bell's contributions to the post-impressionist movement also

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Roger Poole's The Unknown Virginia Woolf, and Stephen Trombley's 'All That Summer She Was Mad.' The reader is, however, cautioned that all of these authors fill out very well-articulated arguments with unnecessary (and critically "dicey") psychoanalytic readings of Woolf's life through her works.

[23] See discussions of the critical trivializations of Three Guineas earlier in this chapter and of Orlando in chapter 4. I do not, however, mean to suggest that the less "difficult" works were not well received by the public; Orlando itself was something of a best-seller.

seem to fit into this "neglected importance" category. To date I have yet to see any wide recognition, other than by feminist theorists, that these movements were often largely driven by women, both as authors and as small-press publishers. Feminist theorists,[24] however, are currently engaged in recuperating these women's texts from obscurity. These critics lay the groundwork for a text which would discuss, in detail, the implications of the fact that "in invoking a 'women's modernism' we also invoke the question of whether or not we can understand modernism in its traditional, canonical terms when gender is considered" (Wallace, "Modernist" 2). Such a study[25] is far more necessary than yet another discussion of the influence of T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound on literature of the twentieth-century:

> Even a great-woman theory of literary history would be an improvement on these simplifications: the failure of historians and anthologists of modernism to recognise until quite recently the movement for the emancipation of women as a fundamental characteristic of modernism shows what can happen when historical contexts are ignored. (Rosenbaum, Victorian 17)

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[24] See Shari Benstock (Women of the Left Bank), Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia Smyers (Writing for their Lives), and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (No Man's Land). "Significantly," however," none of these examines the Bloomsbury Group in any detail" (Wallace, "Modernist" 17).

[25] In fact, as I learned while writing this, Bridget Elliott and JoAnn Wallace's current work in progress, Modernist (Im)Positionings, will be such a text.

AN AESTHETIC SIMILARITY

facts are a very inferior form of fiction
Virginia Woolf -- "How Should We Read a Book?"

How do we read Woolf's texts? Traditionally and often mutually exclusively, for content (what is the "hidden" meaning?), for biography (how does it relate to Woolf's life?), and for structure (is its controlling structure entirely lacking, musical, or post-impressionist?). And, to a certain extent, such investigations are helpful. Digging for "hidden" allusions and connections has taught us that Woolf was anything but a failed feminist who denied "any earnest or subversive intent" (Showalter 283). Rereading Woolf's life, we no longer dismiss her literature as "mad" when we are unable to fully comprehend the breadth of her vision. We have, to a large extent, passed by such readings. It is at structure that I stop, however. A concentration on structure has given us many interesting ideas about Woolf's texts (what do early drafts tell us about final versions, what does word structure imply, how is Woolf's structure related to that of other women artists?). Critical emphasis on Woolf's structure, however, has also given us constricting and programmatic readings of her texts. It leads Perry Meisel to say that <u>To the Lighthouse</u> is "Woolf's consummate achievement" (182) because its structure is mimetic of the thematic concern of "deferred action" or "belatedness" (184). It leads S.P. Rosenbaum to say that "it

is Moore's dualistic account of awareness and sense-data, rather than William James's, Bergson's, Husserl's or Freud's theories of consciousness, that underlies the preoccupation with perception in her writing" (Victorian 224). It leads Vijay Kapur, though she stresses the fact that "the dichotomy of form and content does not exist for an artist like Virginia Woolf" (22), to say, "Virginia Woolf's aesthetics of fiction was strongly influenced by Roger Fry and Clive Bell, and through them by the philosophy and aesthetics of G.E. Moore" (14). And it leads David Dowling to say that "Woolf followed Fry's ideal of poetic language and avoided what he called that 'hybrid art' of sense and illustration which refers to the everyday world" (223) and that "the selective evidence assembled [in Bloomsbury Aesthetics] suggests...Woolf's aesthetics [comprised of "significant form, unity, wholeness, psychological volumes, and the reading process] were both the inspiration and goal of her successive canvasses" (107). It leads to exclusivity. It leads, ultimately, to unhappy comparisons with "the student who has been trained in research at Oxbridge [and] has no doubt some method of shepherding his question past all distractions till it runs into his answer as a sheep runs into its pen" (Woolf, Room 28).

Reading these critical texts, reading Woolf's own texts, and reading Heian literature, I found myself asking "what if?" What if these concepts "fuse" and we find that

the radical nondualism (funi) of esoteric Buddhism[26] gives us the possibility of viewing Woolf's works as something beyond a response (whether for or against) to Cambridge philosophy and significant form. In the rest of this chapter, I will explore the backgrounds (Bloomsbury and Buddhist) to this question and then attempt to draw the two close enough for the possibilities to make themselves apparent. This is not the way I originally envisioned this chapter, and this imposition of structure is something of a betrayal of nondualist ideology, but clearly if I essay the equivalent of a kōan, (a short, seemingly pointless "story" intended to aid the perceiver to achieve a satori, an enlightenment), I will have moved myself outside of the discourse with which I have currently contracted, a betrayal of another sort.

To turn to Bloomsbury, then. Many critics (Johnstone, Rosenbaum, Robson etc.) have noted that the Cambridge philosopher G.E. Moore and his Principia Ethica were the original and continuing forces governing Bloomsbury's aesthetics. Many presentations of Moore make his philosophy

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[26] Woolf may or may not have been familiar with the concepts of Buddhism. Leonard certainly was aware of the basic tenets of Indian Buddhism: "I am essentially and fundamentally irreligious...but, if one must have a religion, Buddhism seems to me superior to all other religions" (quoted in Poole 76), Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant "had once even given a party where the honored guest had been a Buddha statue...from the Cave of the Ten Thousand Buddhas in China" (Henig 421), and "Julian Bell went to Wu Han University in Central China [in the mid-thirties] to teach English Literature" (Henig 423).

seem congenial to even a group of mystics, and Principia Ethica itself might seem to support this:

> What attracted Bloomsbury to Moore was [that]...In Principia Ethica (1903) Moore had arrived at the conclusion that the only ultimate sources of value in the universe are the appreciation of art and beauty and the enjoyment of sensitive personal relationships. (Robson 102-3)

The philosophical and historical background of Cambridge, however, ensured that the text was, in fact, a "rational" presentation of the good of beauty and friendship: "It is the book that caused Lytton Strachey to declare, 'The age of reason has come!'" (Johnstone 20). In Principia Ethica, "Moore sets out...to enunciate what he believes to be 'a scientific Ethics'" (Johnstone 21). When the males who had been to Cambridge visited the Stephen house in Bloomsbury, Moore's "influence was apparently all-pervasive. Leonard recalls 'the ghostly echoes of Principia Ethica, the catechism which always begins with the terrifying words: What exactly do you mean by that?'"[27] (Poole 66). Moore's philosophy was based on a rationalist tradition descended from Plato and his Republic. Western medieval literature, following from Plato, had developed

> a rich and creative use of symbol and allegory...in which allegories, like parables, were understood to be "earthly stories with heavenly meanings."...In the implicit hierarchy, the relationship between what I.A. Richards has called "vehicle" and "tenor" was one of lower to higher or of servant to master. The directional

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[27] I have omitted a pair of quotation marks here for the sake of readability.

> flow was from the literal, earthly, and temporary to the spiritual, heavenly, and eternal. (LaFleur 86)

Using this schematic, the higher order of the aesthetic response, "the appreciation of beauty," leads to "good." The good of the response is, however, contingent on the rightness of the event which creates it, an event which must be divorced from debasing everyday realities.

Similarly, though Roger Fry expressed reservations about the value of denying representational forces entirely, his aesthetic theories emphasized the divorce of art from everyday historical life:

> But in all this no element of curiosity, no reference to actual life, comes in; our apprehension is unconditioned by considerations of space or time; it is irrelevant to us to know whether the bowl was made seven hundred years ago in China, or in New York yesterday. (Fry 35)

Johnstone synthesizes Fry's position: "Art, then, according to Fry, is distinct from ordinary life, and to appreciate rightly a work of art we must, while contemplating it, cut ourselves off completely from the affairs of life" (48). In 1914, Clive Bell, working with Roger Fry's series of critical essays and perceptions, came up with the term "significant form":

> Clive Bell had advertised the aesthetic base of all good art, more or less plausibly, as "significant form." In his book with the swaggering title Art, Bell argues that the true artist perceives objects "as pure forms in certain relations to each other and feels emotion for them as such." The achieved work of art is "a passionate apprehension of form...behind which we catch a sense of ultimate reality." (Quick 564)

Though critics contend that the theories of Fry and Bell are (sometimes radically) different, my contention here is that these theories are more similar than different and that the two worked together to dignify one certain type of visual art.[28] The theoretical works of both Fry and Bell belong more to the school of formalism than to any other, and as Twitchell states, "Strict formalism reduces content to virtual insignificance in art. It assumes that form and content can be separated despite their traditional role as partners--if not equals--in visual and literary forms" (7). Bell's theory of significant form "is ahistorical and anti-concept except in terms of the elements of design" (Dowling 12). Bell's Cambridge background likely contributed to the appeal of such a "logical" formalist stance. As I see it, Clive Bell's formalistic insistence on significant form, even granted that it was a rebellion against "the Victorian emphases on story-telling, didacticism, verisimilitude, sentiment, and solemnity" (Gillespie 63), is to some extent another tenor and vehicle issue in which a (prescribed) type of vehicle (the form of the concrete artwork) leads to the tenor (the aesthetic feeling/response). The "insubstantial phenomena" of the painting leads to the "substantial, absolute noumena" (LaFleur 90) of the response elicited by the painting's form. The point is that significant form,

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[28] I feel that I should here add that I am talking only of theory, not of Fry's art.

like Moore's theories, was based on a divorce of good from bad, art from plain life, beauty from representation: "Bell alluded to art for art's sake, always negatively, in many essays...In reality his philosophy of art--and of life--is a refined aestheticism close to art for art's sake" (Twitchell 98).

As I indicated in the opening to this chapter, a number of critics draw the conclusion that Woolf, because of her association with the Cambridge via the male members of Bloomsbury, held Moore's philosophy in the same regard as did they. To the contrary, however, in a perhaps self-reflexively ironic passage, Clive Bell himself wrote, "I doubt whether either of the Miss Stephens gave much thought to the all important distinction between 'Good on the whole' and 'Good as a whole'" (Rosenbaum, Bloomsbury 89). Some of the critical difficulties with Moore and his influence on Woolf come (inevitably?) from psycho-biographic misreadings of Jacob's Room:

> Thoby's death is the death of an ideal....Thoby may be considered as Virginia's ideal of a complete man...Thoby is celebrated for his completeness in Jacob's Room, and for his ideality in The Waves. For Virginia, from thenceforth, all men were to be a poor substitute for Thoby. (Poole 107)[29]

Such readings are also a result of a remarkable critical refusal to deal with Woolf's truly wicked, sardonic, and

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[29] This quotation is indicative of psycho-biographic criticism only; Poole emphatically dissociates himself from those who would read Moore's influence in Woolf's works.

black sense of humour. Perhaps an Aristotelian insistance on the nobility and importance of tragic or "serious" literature in contrast to the baseness and unimportance of comic works has something to do with this refusal. Whatever the reason, and whether or not Jacob "is" Thoby, the portrait of Thoby, like that of the student making notes in A Room of One's Own, is sarcastic to a very large degree:

> 'Damned swine!' he said, rather too extravagantly; but the praise had gone to his head. Professor Bulteel, of Leeds [ie not Cambridge], had issued an edition of Wycherley without stating that he had left out, disembowelled, or indicated only by asterisks, several indecent words and some indecent phrases. An outrage, Jacob said; a breach of faith; sheer prudery; token of a lewd mind and a disgusting nature. Aristophanes and Shakespeare were cited. Modern life was repudiated[.] Great play was made with the professional title, and Leeds as a seat of learning was laughed to scorn. (Woolf, Jacob 67)

Denials (or assertions of the non-existence) of rationalism and the importance of abstract, Platonic theories are the rule, rather than the exception, in Woolf's oeuvre.[30] Mr. Ramsay is a rationalist philosopher:

> [His] was a splendid mind. For if thought is like the key-board of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, than his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q. He reached Q. Very few people in the whole of England ever reach

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[30] Three Guineas, in which Woolf discusses the harm and oppression caused by the "rational" system of education and government, is perhaps Woolf's most extended piece of exquisite ridicule on the subject. I suspect this is because her own (alternate) theoretical argument is so well developed.

> Q....But after Q? What comes next? After Q there are a number of letters the last of which is scarcely visible to mortal eyes, but glimmers red in the distance. Z is only reached once by one man in a generation. Still, if he could reach R it would be something. Here at least was Q. He dug his heels in at Q. Q he was sure of. Q he could demonstrate. If Q then is Q - R--...
> (Woolf, Lighthouse 35-6)[31]

Thus, to say that Bloomsbury's

> preoccupations with states of consciousness, with analytic methods of reasoning, with what is real, unreal, and ideal, with love and beauty, with means and ends in themselves, with mystical experiences, with the meanings of time and history, with the psychology of patriarchs and matriarchs, with the interactions of the human and the natural - all were shaped by Cambridge philosophy (Rosenbaum Victorian 162 -- emphasis mine),

is true only in so far as the Cambridge atmosphere and philosophy was part of Woolf's desire to act and write outside/beyond its rigid philosophic dictations: "'The worst of art,' she had written in 1917, implicitly rejecting Bell's position, 'is that it appeals solely to the aesthetic faculties'" (Quick 564-5). Poole, who discusses Woolf's antipathy to rationalism at length, says in his discussion of "The Mark on the Wall" that

> Virginia was trying to draw attention, however, not to what the mark in fact empirically was, so much as to the process of human vision which allows such enormous and radical imprecisions. In doing so, she was working in the opposite direction to Moore. She was not so much interested in what such and such a thing is, as in how many

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[31] This passage goes on for another page, and Ramsay's single-minded inability to see that he is really looking for himself is made poignant by the fact that he is ignoring and intimidating his family in the process.

> different ways it could be seen or experienced. (67)

Having briefly discussed Virginia Woolf's relationship to Moore, Cambridge, and post-impressionist theory, I will now turn to an explanation of the theory of non-dualism and then again to Woolf. One of the controlling forces of Heian aesthetics was Tendai (or, more generally, esoteric Buddhism). Both esoteric and the later Zen manifestations of Buddhism articulated many aspects of perception evident in Heian Japanese culture:

> It is an oft-repeated statement that classical Japan knew no real sense of self and had no use for the concept of individuality. Buddhism, which expressly denied the self, combined with native Shinto attitudes to produce a culture where the world was not seen in terms of subject and object. (Bowering, Diary 35)

Thus the "depth in the verse and aesthetic taste of the end of the Heian period did not arise out of a dualist distinction between insubstantial phenomena and substantial, absolute noumena" (LaFleur 89-90). The influential Tendai sect was based on the Lotus sutra, and

> within the sutra there is an unmistakeable philosophical move opposite to that in Plato's Republic, a move to affirm the complete reality of the world of concrete phenomena in spite of the fact that they are impermanent...In my reading of the Lotus, the sutra radically relativizes our customary projection of an implicit hierarchy of value onto the relationship of means to end....Emptiness [the codependence of all phenomena] disallows an ontological hierarchy and makes the abstract just as dependent on the concrete as the concrete is dependent on the abstract. (LaFleur 87-8)

It is the Lotus on which the apparently paradoxic "Buddhist

claim of the emptiness of phenomena" is based, but that claim

> is not the positing of a nihil but simply the insistence that nowhere can there be found an entity that has existence in and of itself. This is to say that the ancient Buddhists found no evidence of any being or phenomenon having what in Western philosophy was once called aseity, the status of being unconditioned and beyond influence or causation by any other thing....The corollary of the doctrine of the void is that all things are radically related....[and it is necessary to forsake] our ordinary way of perceiving phenomena as having independent being and [accept] the correct view of them as void of such independence. (LaFleur 92)

In Woolf's works, as in Tendai theory, form seems an inseparable part of a text which re-presents "everyday" realities -- especially women's everyday realities. The text, via its form, is not something solely there for the purpose of eliciting an aesthetic response. It would seem to me very rudimentary to state this (as form and content usually come together), but that criticism of Woolf's work has radically dissociated the two:

> Since literature is basically informative and cognitive in content, it was perhaps for that reason that Clive Bell considered it a less pure art as compared to painting and music. He complained in 1911 that "no English novelist...took his art seriously". "Why", he asked, "were they all engrossed in childish problems of photographic representation?" Virginia Woolf must have taken this charge seriously, for, during the whole of her literary career, she continued striving to free fiction from alloy, from the hackneyed business of describing the common pursuits from lunch to dinner. (Kapur 19)

My argument here is that, for Woolf, the description of "common pursuits" is part of formal aesthetics, is part of

the mystic response, is the mystic response:

> Things become very familiar to me, so that I sometimes think humanity is a vast wave, undulating: the same, I mean: the same emotions here that there were at Richmond. Please have some tea--we shall be hurt if you don't accept our hospitality. Accordingly we do; & the same queer brew of human fellowship, is brewed; & people look the same; & joke in the same way, & come to these odd superficial agreements, wh. if you think of them persisting & wide spread--in jungles, storms, birth & death--are not superficial; but rather profound, I think. (Woolf, Diary 3 22)

The progress of the writer is away from a concentration on form toward a creation of the wholeness of the item in question. And, oddly enough for a woman whom many critics suppose to have relied on a post-impressionist concentration on form as opposed to content, wholeness in a rather mystic sense seems to have been Woolf's perception of what one might achieve with paint:

> It struck me tho' that I have now reached a further stage in my writers advance. I see that there are 4? dimensions; all to be produced; in human life; & that leads to a far richer grouping & proportion: I mean: I: & the not I: & the outer & the inner--no I'm too tired to say: but I see it: & this will affect my book on Roger. Very exciting: to grope on like this. New combinations in psychology & body--rather like painting. This will be the next novel, after The Years. (Woolf, Diary 4 353)

Gillespie, investigating the "sisters' arts"[32] finds that

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[32] "To change the traditional metaphorical label, "the sister arts," into "the sisters' arts" has political, metaphysical, and aesthetic implications. "Sisters' arts" operates on a literal level. Woolf and Bell formed an artistic sisterhood and practiced in art media conceived of, metaphorically, as sisters. "Sisters" in my title is also plural and possessive. Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell are two among many often unrecognized women who, over the

the "direction of Woolf's art and thought...is to dissolve the false and transcend even the true dichotomies between men and women, solitude and society, the human and the natural worlds, permanence and change, reason and emotion, life and art" (6) and that

> Windows and flowers--with their suggestions of interpenetrating interiors and exteriors, of human individuality asserted in domestic surroundings and lost beyond those artificial boundaries, and of the beauty and fragility of human life--recur in both Vanessa Bell's visual art and in Virginia Woolf's verbal creations. (255)

This is the type of finding made more readily by one who is not looking solely at form. For instance, Bishop's article on Woolf's style discusses the subversiveness (intent and accomplishment) of her metaphors:

> Woolf is conscious of the difficulty of communication...and thus provides a shower of images, in part to capture the complexity of the thing under consideration, but also to provide a number of possible points of connection...one need only apprehend one image fully for the others to become instantly intelligible as well. (Bishop 584)

Like the Buddhist koan then, Woolf's form, in conjunction with her content, was part of an attempt to create an opening up of the reader's mind to possibilities of reality, to create the possibility of a satori. Like the haiku poet

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centuries, were active in one art medium or the other. If "sister arts" suggests the family resemblance between two different art media, "sisters' arts" suggests, in addition, that women artists often have something in common, as Woolf recognized: a set of experiences, related values, and a desire to embody their perceptions in appropriate artistic forms" (Gillespie 4).

Bashō (1644-94), Woolf asked the perceptive to

> Come, see real
> flowers
> of this painful world
> (Stryk 54)

that they might achieve enlightened perception.

Where leads this rather abstract discussion? Certainly to a belief that the philosophies of Moore and others trained at the "rational" institute of Cambridge, while important in a historical sense, are not the main theoretic impulses behind Woolf's works. To a conviction that, though Woolf incorporated the philosophies of others, her incorporation was, like the creation of a patchwork quilt, as part of the creation of a greater artistic/philosophic whole of her own. To a certainty that a holistic, everyday (though not mundane) perception of reality is something that is not achievable through a concentration on abstraction or formalistic concerns. To the enmeshed immanence and transcendence of the old woman next Regent's Park Tube Station who sings "with an absence of all human meaning" and becomes herself, in all her concrete female humanity, the fecundity of reality as it is created in the text:

> As the ancient song bubbled up opposite Regent's Park Tube Station, still the earth seemed green and flowery; still, though it issued from so rude a mouth, a mere hole in the earth, muddy too, matted with root fibres and tangled grasses, still the old bubbling burbling song, soaking through the knotted roots of infinite ages, and skeletons and treasure, streamed away in rivulets over the pavement and all along the Marylebone Road, and down towards Euston, fertilising, leaving a damp stain. (Woolf, Dalloway 73-4)

It may be (though I hesitate lest I be misunderstood as deterministic) that, because women artists are always caught uncomfortably in the (male) dialectic of real vs. abstract and personal vs. political that their realizations about the nature of reality concentrate on the sameness of these entities, rather than on the elevation of one over another. What takes the place of plot and preaching in Woolf's work is not form but, through form, the momentary appreciation and creation of reality through means other than dualism. Perhaps if we read Woolf often enough and through enough differing modes of perception, and perhaps as our historical distance from Bloomsbury increases, we may come to see the whole of the pattern created by her own aesthetics:

> Now is life very solid, or very shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions. This has gone on for ever: will last for ever; goes down to the bottom of the world--this moment I stand on. Also it is transitory, flying, diaphanous. I shall pass like a cloud on the waves. Perhaps it may be that though we change; one flying after another, so quick so quick, yet we are somehow successive, & continuous--we human being; & show the light through. But what is the light? I am impressed by the transitoriness of human life to such an extent that I am often saying a farewell--
>
> (Woolf, Diary 3 218)

TEXTUAL COMPARISONS

In her essay "Women and Fiction" Virginia Woolf speaks of the history of women as writers:

> Strange spaces of silence seem to separate one period of activity from another. There was Sappho and a little group of women all writing poetry on a Greek island six hundred years before the birth of Christ. They fall silent. Then about the year 1000 we find a certain court lady, the lady Murasaki, writing a very long and beautiful novel in Japan. (Essays 2: 142)

In A Room of One's Own this becomes:

> If you consider any great figure of the past, like Sappho, like the Lady Murasaki, like Emily Bronte, you will find that she is an inheritor as well as an originator, and has come into existence because women have come to have the habit of writing naturally. (104)

Virginia Woolf, whatever her other, rather daunting, talents, was not a Japanese scholar.[33] She comes to Murasaki Shikibu and the Genji Monogatari through the auspices of Arthur Waley, a well-respected Orientalist and translator who existed rather on the outskirts of the Bloomsbury Group.[34] Waley pops in and out of Woolf's

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[33] Neither was Vanessa Bell, but when she and Duncan Grant "decorated a dinner service for Lord Kenneth Clark in the thirties using the theme of famous women, their designs for the forty-eight white Wedgewood plates formed four groups, each identified by a different design for the outer edge. The plates included...twelve writers" among which were "Lady Murasaki, Jane Austen, and Charlotte Bronte....also... Virginia Woolf" (Gillespie 198).

[34] For an enchanting introduction to the figure of Arthur Waley see Ivan Morris' Madly Singing in the Mountains: an appreciation and anthology of Arthur Waley.

diaries and letters but is generally ignored by her biographers. Indeed, with the exception of scholars of East Asian Studies, few seem to recall his impressive output of works and translations. His connection with Woolf is easily passed over. She, however, seems to have read and been influenced by his translations.[35] Woolf's preface to Orlando is suggestive of this tie. For the reader who blithely skips appreciatory prefaces, the appropriate section is here repeated: "I have had the advantage - how great I alone can estimate - of Mr Arthur Waley's knowledge of Chinese" (7) (and Japanese, I presume, as Waley had published fewer "Chinese" works than "Japanese" prior to 1928, the year in which Orlando was published). Woolf reviewed the first book of the Genji for Vogue in 1925, and, as late as May 18, 1929, writes to Vanessa Bell:

> In duty to you I went off to Chelsea the other day, first to Mauron's lecture at Argyll House. Then to sit with the MacCarthy's, then back to dine at Argyll House, then home to bed with Waley. (Letters 4: 59)

As something so "noteworthy" as an affair between the two would not have gone unremarked, I think we may safely assume

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[35] Waley, in turn, seems to have been influenced by Woolf's style to some extent: "The Waley translation provoked a flurry of comparisons with various European writers, the more plausible among them being Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust, given Waley's Bloomsbury ties and above all the style he adopted for his translation" (Field 8). As well, some current translators of Heian literature, with a view to reproducing the feel and diction of the original, are turning to the freedom of Woolf's style with enthusiasm.

that Woolf was reading one of Waley's translations, quite likely another of the books of the Genji, on which Waley worked from 1925 to 1933. If, as Woolf states, "a woman writing thinks back through her mothers" (Room 93), this possible influence is of more than cursory interest. The similarities between the two writers highlight the possibility of cross-cultural similarities in the ways in which women write their experiences and perceptions into literature. The following is an attempt, in the form of speculation and correlation, to etch in the lines of a link between Murasaki Shikibu's Genji Monogatari (with an emphasis on the first book) and Virginia Woolf's Orlando.

Orlando is a vastly underrated and misapprehended book. Critical reception has virtually ignored its literary impetus (the fact that Woolf wished to create a new form of biographic fiction) in favour of its more titillating biographic references. The unfavourable reception of this work begins at its publication:

> The very night before the party a review of one of my books by Arnold Bennet appeared in the Evening Standard. It was Orlando, I think. He attacked it violently. He said it was a worthless book, which had dashed every hope he might have had of me as a writer. His whole column was devoted to trouncing me. (Moments 219)

Critical overemphasis on the non-literary value and aspects of Orlando continues to this day. In a most interesting and provocative article, Sherron Knopp reviews the novel's reception, takes the reviewers to task for neglecting

Orlando's significance in Woolf's literary oeuvre, and yet, ultimately, fails herself to deal with its literary significance:

> The few critics who treat the novel sympathetically and at any length locate its claim to serious consideration elsewhere than in the sexual politics that are its raison d'etre--in its genre as antinovel, for example (Wilson), or in its revisionary treatment of English history and literature (Harper). Thus, like the relationship that inspired it, the book is ignored, dismissed as an anomaly, or explained as something other than it is. (Knopp 25)

Erasures of certain texts from Woolf's "literary" oeuvre, however, can be traced to attitudes held by contemporaries of Woolf whose influence continues to guide certain aspects of the literary criticism:

> In December, 1968, during the research for this dissertation, Leonard Woolf received the writer at his Sussex home. He was asked to specify the nature of the debt to Waley which Mrs. Woolf mentions among others in her preamble to Orlando. Mr. Woolf laughingly explained that the preface was meant to be a burlesque of all such acknowledgments. Like the whole book, in fact, it was a jeu d'esprit. "There is your original fact," he stated. "Now go home and write your dissertation." (Perlmutter 368)

The parodic nature of Orlando is well known but widely misunderstood, as Leonard Woolf's comment shows. An unwillingness to acknowledge the deeply serious and subversive nature of Woolf's parody and ridicule is, I think, what lies behind those misreadings which emphasize Woolf's lack of committed feminism or the unimportance of texts such as Orlando and Flush. I hope that the following chapter, with its concentration on the "literariness" of

Orlando, especially in comparison with a classically canonized work, will lead toward more work on Orlando's literary influences, background, and aspects.

The tales of Orlando and Genji have many similarities of action, incident, and description. An emphasis found in the Genji Monogatari is, as Woolf realizes, on "poems that break the surface of silence with silver fins" ("Genji" 53). The Japanese written and courtly tradition being so firmly based on poetry, it is hard to imagine this founding work without its poetically referential interjections. As the life of the Heian courtier revolved around aesthetic displays of carefully unprofessional artistic skills (as opposed to "lower-middle class" professionalism in the area), poetic interchanges, even on a very mundane level, were of enormous importance. They helped to create the highly rarefied atmosphere on which the Emperor's court thrived. Poetic allusive knowledge and artistic aptitude were highly valued skills. Indeed, some courtiers seem to have been retained at court almost solely because of their skill in these areas. Examples of "poetic drive" abound in the Genji; one of the most famous instances is from the Chinese philosopher and poet Po Chü-i:

> In the eighth month and ninth month when the
> nights are growing long
> A thousand times, ten thousand times the
> fuller's stick beats
> (Genji 77)

Murasaki herself seems to have been endlessly inventive in

producing the poetry she attributes to her characters. Both exquisite poetry, such as the doomed heroine Yūgao's opening verse to Genji: "The flower that puzzled you was but the Yugao, strange beyond knowing in its dress of shining dew" (Genji 56), and totally ludicrous poetry, such as the "masterpiece" of the minor heroine Suyetsumuhana (her of the red nose): "Because of your hard heart, your hard heart only, the sleeves of this my Chinese dress are drenched with tears" (Genji 124), are carefully represented. The structure of the Genji itself sounds suspiciously like the solution to what E.M. Forster has described as Virginia Woolf's "problem": "She is a poet, who wants to write something as near to a novel as possible" (258).[36] Orlando too is a poet whose "book" (the greater text of Orlando) is occasionally penetrated by poetry, both his own and that of others. Along with quotations which are set off from the main text (see Orlando's insipid "I am myself but a vile link/ Amid life's weary chain" [Orlando 149]), the text itself is interjected with poetic phrases: "'Life and a lover' - a line which did not scan and made no sense with what had gone before" (Orlando 115). This move replicates the printed face of Waley's translation, in which Murasaki's original poetry is not set off from the text, while extra-textual poetic

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[36] This essay, while displaying considerable critical insight, is fatally marred by the condescending tone with which Forster refers to Woolf's works.

allusions (such as the lines from Po Chü-i and excerpts from songs) are distinguished in this way.[37] Woolf's style, breaking into descriptive poetic prose, is close to that of Murasaki. Compare:

> What woman would not have kindled to see what Orlando saw then burning in the snow - for all about the looking-glass were snowy lawns, and she was like a fire, a burning bush, and the candle flames about her head were silver leaves; or again, the glass was green water, and she a mermaid, slung with pearls, a siren in a cave, singing so that oarsmen leant from their boats and fell down, down to embrace her (Orlando 115-6)

with:

> No one could see him without pleasure. He was like the flowering tree under whose shade even the rude mountain peasant delights to rest. And so great was the fascination he exercised that those who knew him longed to offer him whatever was dearest to them. (Genji 59)

This is Orlando: "No human being, since the world began, has ever looked more ravishing. His form combined in one the strength of a man and a woman's grace" (Orlando 86). He has "a pair of the finest legs that a young nobleman has ever stood upright upon; and violet eyes; and a heart of gold; and loyalty and manly charm" (Orlando 15). Genji is known as "Hikaru Genji, or Genji the Shining One" (18); "his beauty astonished everyone" (Genji 19). The use of the superlative and the lauding of the protagonist by the narrator is a technique used by both authors in presenting

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[37] This is in distinct contrast to the recent translation of the Genji in which Edward Seidensticker sets all poems off from the text proper.

their respective creations. "Never was there a woman more fitted for that calling....a beautiful woman, and a woman in the prime of life..." (Orlando 168), describes Orlando's aptitude for love and relationships. Murasaki says that, on the occasion of a celebration, "in particular the young noblemen chosen by the Emperor cut so brilliant a figure that only the lustre of Genji's beauty could have eclipsed their splendour" (Genji 158).

Genji and Orlando are both related to, and beloved of, at least one reigning monarch. Genji is the son of the Emperor. He is given the rank of "commoner" to protect him from jealous factions at court. His father favours him above all others:

> He had grown up to be a child of unrivalled beauty and the Emperor was delighted with him. In the spring an heir to the Throne was to be proclaimed and the Emperor was sorely tempted to pass over the first-born prince in favour of the young child. (Genji 15)

Orlando is the great Queen's "young cousin (for they had blood in common)" (Orlando 15). She "loved him. And...plotted for him a splendid ambitious career. Lands were given him, houses assigned him. He was to be the son of her old age..." (Orlando 17). The two heroes are groomed for political success and, interestingly enough, both lose their initial political impact because of an indiscreet moment. Genji (we now encroach on the second book of the "novel") realizes that:

> The intrigue against him was becoming everyday

> more formidable. It was evident that he could not in any case go on living much longer where he was, and by a voluntary withdrawal he might well get off more lightly than if he merely allowed events to take their course. (Genji 229)

This event occurs (after having been foreshadowed a number of times in the first book) because Genji is impolitic enough to be caught in bed with the sister of the Empress Mother. Orlando falls from the Queen's favour because he is discovered "kissing a girl" (Orlando 17). He later voluntarily exiles himself because he is tormented by lust for a rabbity (both in feature and amorous proclivity) Archduchess:

> Thus realizing that his home was uninhabitable, and that steps must be taken to end the matter instantly, he did what any other young man would have done in his place, and asked King Charles to send him as Ambassador Extra-ordinary to Constantinople. (Orlando 73-4)

Both heroes return to their central locations (Knole/London and the Capital) as the result of catastrophic events coupled with an intervention by Nature. Orlando's return is due to the Turkish revolution and a vision of her "great monastic house" vouchsafed her by the god "Nature" (Orlando 94). Genji, whose world has a more supernatural understructure, is recalled to the Capital because of "a succession of disquieting portents and apparitions" (Genji 270) which are linked to his banishment.

The character of the Archduchess, who persists in forcing inappropriate attentions on Orlando, has a counterpart in a minor character of the Genji. The

Archduchess is as follows:

> This hare, moreover, was six feet high and wore a head-dress into the bargain of some antiquated kind which made her look still taller...First, she asked him, with a proper, but somewhat clumsy curtsey, to forgive her intrusion. Then, rising to her full height again, which must have been something over six feet two, she went on...with such a cackle of nervous laughter, so much tee-heeing and haw-hawing that Orlando thought she must have escaped from a lunatic asylum. (Orlando 71)

The complete inappropriateness of this figure is reflected in that of an elderly lady-in-waiting at the Emperor's court:

> There was an elderly lady-of-the-bedchamber who, though she was an excellent creature in every other way and was very much liked and respected, was an outrageous flirt. It astonished Genji that despite her advancing years she showed no sign of reforming her reckless and fantastic behaviour....[She] counted him as an admirer....[She eyed] him above the rim of a marvellously painted summer-fan. The eyelids beneath which she ogled at him were blackened and sunken; wisps of hair projected untidily around her forehead. There was something particularly inappropriate about this gawdy, coquettish fan. (Genji 140)

The spatial relationships of the characters in these two incidents mirror each other.

> [The] lady crying 'Gentlemen! Gentlemen!' flung herself between them in an attitude of romantic supplication....But now this woman of fifty-seven or eight, disturbed by a sudden brawl in the midst of her amours, created the most astonishing spectacle as she knelt at the feet of two young men in their 'teens beseeching them not to die for her. (Genji 143)

is as ridiculous a spatial construction, the old suitor on his/her knees to the object of his/her lust, as the one

which occurs at Orlando's house:

> Falling on his knees, the Archduke Harry made the most passionate declaration of his suit....As he spoke, enormous tears formed in his rather prominent eyes and ran down the sandy tracts of his long and lanky cheeks. (Orlando 112)

Orlando's desperate solution of tossing the toad down the Archduke's back is as appropriately amusing as the above scene from the Genji, in which Genji's friend and rival is playing a practical joke on the Prince.

The cold, wet, concrete frog which conclusively punctures the Duke's unrealistic idealization of Orlando shows how Woolf's works experience a constant grounding in the senses. To again quote Forster on Woolf:

> Food with her was not a literary device put in to make the book seem real. She put it in because she tasted it, because she saw pictures, because she smelt flowers, because she heard Bach, because her senses were both exquisite and catholic...Our debt to her is in part this: she reminds us of the importance of sensation. (259)

Woolf speaks of sensation recall and the process of writing in Moments of Being:

> all these colour-and-sound memories hang together...much more robust...highly sensual.... [They still make] me feel warm; as if everything were ripe; humming; sunny; smelling so many smells at once; and all making a whole that even now makes me stop...The buzz, the croon, the smell all seemed to press voluptuously against some membrane. (77)

It is an aspect of this feeling which, Woolf states, makes her believe that sometimes when she writes, "the pen gets on the scent" (Moments 108). Orlando speaks in this language of physical sensation. One actually feels the chill of the

Great Frost, the anger of Rustum el Sadi's eyes, and the gluey oppression of the Victorian era. Woolf's talent for creating the sensual feeling of the moment for the reader can be found in such passages as the following, in which Orlando waits in vain for the traitorous Sasha:

> So he waited in the darkness. Suddenly he was struck in the face by a blow, soft, yet heavy, on the side of his cheek. So strung with expectation was he, that he started and put his hand to his cheek....The dry frost had lasted so long that it took him a minute to realize that these were raindrops falling...It was as if the hard and consolidated sky poured itself forth in one profuse fountain. In the space of five minutes Orlando was soaked to the skin. (Orlando 37)

Speaking of the "great cloud" hanging over the nineteenth century, Woolf intensifies and particularizes the feeling of the era through an insistence on the concrete and sensual:

> The chill which he felt in his legs the country gentleman soon transferred to his house...Then a change of diet became essential. The muffin was invented and the crumpet. Coffee supplanted the after dinner port...ivy grew in unparalleled profusion....What light penetrated to the bedrooms where children were born was naturally of an obfusc green, and what light penetrated to the drawing-rooms where grown men and women lived came through curtains of brown and purple plush. (Orlando 142-3)

These passages are examples of Woolf's use of the technique of "'pathetic fallacy,' [which she carries] to well-known fantastic lengths in Orlando when she identifies changes in the landscape with changes in Orlando's state of mind, literary style, and way of life in general" (Gillespie 274). The personal realization of the integration of self and nature (or external reality) lends itself to this type of

description. Murasaki speaks in the sensual languages of "dress, of calligraphy, of floral and musical preference, of incense concoction" (Field 16). The heightened senses of the Heian courtier enable the sensitive reader to see the dew on the yūgao, to actually smell the incense used by the characters and judge of its flavour, to live in the world of the Imperial court and to gaze at the figure of Genji with the same admiration as does Murasaki. In the Genji, "landscape becomes a state of mind....The facial and physical description that modern readers associate with character delineation is absent...in the narrative" (Shirane 121). This may be because Murasaki, too, creates the sensual feeling of the moment and the juxtaposition of the moment and the character becomes more important than the description of a character's mere physical being. Genji embarks on the fatal elopement with Yugao:

> They drove to an untenanted mansion...While he waited for the steward to come out Genji noticed that the gates were crumbling away; dense shinobu-grass grew around them. So sombre an entrance he had never seen. There was a thick mist and the dew was so heavy that when he raised the carriage-blind his sleeve was drenched. (Genji 64)

Sights and smells intermingle to accent the action of the Genji, much of which seems to occur in semi-darkness (due, no doubt, to the erratic sleeping habits of the Heian

court[38]). Genji dresses for a party given by Kokiden's father:

> It was very late indeed when at last he made his appearance at the party. He was dressed in a cloak of thin Chinese fabric, white outside but lined with yellow. His robe was of a deep wine-red colour with a very long train. The dignity and grace with which he carried this fanciful regal attire in a company where all were dressed in plain official robes were indeed remarkable, and in the end his presence perhaps contributed more to the success of the party than did the fragrance of the Minister's boasted flowers. (Genji, 152)

In connection with this last, it must be noted that Genji himself is always recognized by the distinctively impressive scent which continually wafts from his incensed robes.

The Genji Monogatari gives a carefully structured, unabashed portrayal of a character of ambiguous sexuality who indulges in disguise and intrigue. Genji is often seen clothed as someone he is not. After a brief tryst, he emerges from a lover's room only to be accosted by:

> an old woman who worked in the house....Seeing a grown man's figure appear in the doorway, 'Whom have you got with you?' [she] asked [Genji's servant], and then answering her own question, 'Why it is Mimbu! what an outrageous height that girl has grown to!' (Genji 51-2)

He enters into a relationship with a "lower-class" woman:

> She for her part was very uneasy to see him come to her thus in shabby old hunting-clothes, trying always to hide his face...He seemed like some demon-lover in an old ghost-tale. (Genji 62)

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[38] "It is noticeable that much of the action in this literature takes place at night, often in the very early hours,...[which] has to do with geomancy and the decisions as to when a ceremony be best held" (Bowring, Tale 104).

His friends view him in the lamp-light:

> He was dressed in a suit of soft white silk, with a rough cloak carelessly slung over his shoulders, with belt and fastenings untied. In the light of the lamp against which he was leaning he looked so lovely that one might have wished he were a girl. (Genji 24)

Indeed, throughout the work, the sheer perfection of Genji's beauty seems "feminine." This is intensified by the fact that he casts himself as a mother-figure to the orphaned Murasaki, whom he later makes his wife. Even his sexual orientation is ambiguous:

> 'So be it,' said Genji, 'but you at least must not abandon me,' and he laid the boy beside him on his bed. He was well contented to find himself lying by this handsome young Prince's side, and Genji, we must record, found the boy no bad substitute for his ungracious sister. (Genji 46)

These traits of ambiguity are easily recognized in the figure of Orlando, the male writer who wakes up female one fine Augustan morning. Orlando, no matter the designated sex of the moment, fluctuates between male and female: "For it was this mixture in her of man and woman, one being uppermost and then the other, that often gave her conduct an unexpected turn" (Orlando 118). Orlando's perceived change of gender (as opposed to the actual process of changing from male to female which occupies a discrete moment in the text) often amounts to little more than a change of clothes:

> Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what is above. (Orlando 118 -- see also 138)

Orlando goes to Leicester Square disguised in the clothing of a young nobleman. She offers her arm to one of the occupants: "To feel her hanging lightly yet like a suppliant on her arm, roused in Orlando all the feelings which become a man" (Orlando 135). This gender ambiguity is present from the second page (notice the "drenched violets" of Orlando's eyes) and continues in the figure of Shelmerdine, whose most bewitching point is his femaleness (see Orlando 157).

The question of male/female relationship leads, through a lateral sidestep, to a telling structural feature of both two works. Here is a current critic, writing with elegance and insight, on the subject of Genji's relationship to women:

> The eponymous hero, far from being the controlling centre of the work, is as much constituted by his heroines as they are by him. Yet, for reasons to be seen, he is curiously absent by comparison to his ladies. (Field 17)

Genji's "constancy" ties him to the women in his text. The reader is continuously being reminded of these women because Genji holds them in his memory and affection for chapters past their nominal disappearance from the text:

> if by any chance anyone resented this kind of treatment and cooled towards him, Genji was never in the least surprised; for though, as far as feeling went, perfectly constant himself, he had long ago learnt that such constancy was very unusual. (Genji 228)

Here is a critic of some sixty-five years ago, a critic even more elegant than the last:

> To light up the many facets of his mind, Lady

> Murasaki, being herself a woman, naturally chose the medium of other women's minds. Aoi, Asagao, Fujitsubo, Murasaki, Yugao, Suyetsumuhana, the beautiful, the red-nosed, the cold, the passionate---one after another they turn their clear or freakish light upon the gay young man at the centre, who flies, who pursues, who laughs, who sorrows, but is always filled with the rush and bubble and chuckle of life. (Woolf, "Genji" 53)[39]

Orlando, too, is defined through relationships with women. His/her growth as a character is measured in his response to female figures, especially that of Sasha. From defining Sasha as an object, "a fox, an olive tree" (Orlando 30), to angrily stereotyping her, a "devil, [an] adulteress, [a] deceiver" (Orlando 40), to knowing "Sasha as she was" (Orlando 101), to finally seeing Sasha as a link in the chain of reality, "a girl in Russian trousers" in the "pool of the mind" (Orlando 204), Orlando's growing perceptiveness defines and redefines itself in ever-widening circles. Orlando is affected by his/her passion for Sasha through to the close of the tale. Sasha occurs as the epiphanal vision, prompting integration of Orlando's selves into the "present moment," but seventeen pages from the close of the work. "Even minor female characters like the prostitutes Nell, Prue, Kitty and Rose have a serious dignity not bestowed on more prominent male characters" (Knopp 32), and this dignity reflects on Orlando as she interacts with these women in a

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[39] I would like here to point out the astonishing perspicacity Woolf continuously displayed even in her very brief reviews and even when she was virtually ignorant of the background to the subject under scrutiny.

more significant manner than that to be found in her interactions with the quixotic Shelmerdine. This is most readily attributed to the fact that these "adjunctive" characters round out Orlando's character to make a composite picture of women as a whole; as they "like each other,"[40] and as they are opaque to men's gaze.

Hero/female interactions continue into the area of character/narrator relationships. Not only is Murasaki Shikibu present in the figure of the major heroine Murasaki (both deriving their name from Genji's mention of a young grass with purple roots [see Genji 98]), but it is Shikibu, in a sense, who makes love most successfully to Genji. She is continually praising him as she presents him to the reader:

> This rite was performed by Genji with a grace and deftness that was not equalled by any of his companions. You will say that I have noted this superiority many times before; that is true, and I can only plead in excuse that people were actually struck by it afresh each time they saw him. (Genji 214)

Murasaki creates in Genji her ideal male:

> ...the enchanting boy---the Prince who danced "The Waves of the Blue Sea" so beautifully that all the princes and great gentlemen wept aloud; who loved those whom he could not possess; whose libertinage was tempered by the most perfect courtesy; who played enchantingly with children, and preferred, as his women friends knew, that the song should stop before he had heard the end. (Woolf,

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[40] The concept comes, of course, from Woolf's praise of Mary Carmichael's novel discovery that "Chloe liked Olivia" (Room 79).

"Genji" 53)

An entry from Murasaki Shikibu's diary points to the way in which she relates to the fictional Genji. Murasaki and her friend Lady Saishō are hiding behind a screen at a drunken festival:

> Presently the General of the right came and stood near the pillar on our left...I noticed that when the great tankard came his way he did not drink out of it, but passed it on, merely saying the usual words of good omen. At this Lord Kinto shouted: "The General is on his best behaviour. I expect little Murasaki is somewhere not far off!" "You're none of you in the least like Genji," I thought to myself, "so what should Murasaki be doing here?" (Genji, Waley's intro. xii)

Orlando is a similar case. The "central relationship is between Orlando and the Biographer" (29), states one critic, who goes on to say,

> Orlando and her Biographer exist in complementary balance with each other: Orlando all beauty, passion and action; her Biographer---now Keatsian, now Chaucerian, now Shakespearean---all voice and eloquence. (Knopp 33)

Another notes the relationship this way:

> Elizabeth is also valuable, because her virginal attraction to Orlando is similar to the pose adopted by the author: the attracted but occasionally reticent and pedantic admirer. (Trautman 42)

Woolf, too, intertwines her own reality and fiction; witness a letter dated Friday Nov. 4, 1927:

> 1827: to V. Sackville-West.
> Shall I see Orlando next week?
> Say yes.
> But when?
> Let me know in good time.
> Was Orlando presented at Court?
> Poor Virginia

in a
d---d
hurry (Letters 3: 434)

Woolf and Murasaki share a number of similarities in the area of narrative perspective. The vast panoramas of history in Orlando and the Genji are closely tied to the intimate details of life -- and life, often, as seen from a woman's perspective. This perspective changes focus readily. The reader of the Genji is sometimes given Genji's perspective, sometimes Murasaki's, sometimes the general (court) public's, and sometimes the narrator's (to mention but a few). The perspective of Orlando switches between that of Orlando, that of an objective chronicler, and that of the Biographer (to be somewhat reductive). The movement of these voices, in their relation of the stories, occurs through association rather than through causal relationship. Thus, Genji's escapades may be related in confusing succession though occurring at discrete chronological instances. The narrative of Orlando also functions in this way, although this is by no means the book in which Woolf uses this technique to the greatest advantage.[41] An example of this switch of voices in the Genji occurs at the end of the first chapter. Genji's living quarters are being discussed. The line immediately following this states, "Some say that the name of Hikaru the Shining One was given to him in

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[41] See, for instance, Between the Acts and Mrs Dalloway.

admiration by the Korean fortune-teller" (Genji 20). The voice of the concerned narrator (to some extent I feel justified in inferring it to be Murasaki's) suddenly switches to the voice of an objective historical chronicler. Slightly earlier in the chapter is an example of associative, rather than causal, narrative progression:

> But now the father began to think he would not encourage that match, but would offer her to Genji. He sounded the Emperor upon this, and found that he would be very glad to obtain for the boy the advantage of so powerful a connection.
>
> When the courtiers assembled to drink the Love Cup, Genji came and took his place among the other princes. (Genji 18)

In the first paragraph the marriage is alluded to and in the second it occurs; no bold statement or preparation is deemed necessary. Such disconcerting intuitive leaps are common in the Genji. The incident of Yūgao's death and Genji's illness ends with the quotation from Po Chü-i expressing Genji's melancholy. The next paragraph opens: "The young brother still waited upon him, but he no longer brought with him the letters which he had been used to bring. Utsusemi..." (Genji 77). It is not until one reaches the name Utsusemi that the identity of this "brother" is apparent. The objective chronicling voice is also present in Orlando. This is the voice which informs the reader that:

> Love, birth, and death were all swaddled in a variety of fine phrases. The sexes drew further and further apart....The life of the average woman was a succession of childbirths. She married at nineteen and had fifteen or eighteen children by the time she was thirty; for twins abounded. Thus the British Empire came into existence. (Orlando

143)

It is the Biographer who laments:

> Would that we might here take the pen and write Finis to our work! Would that we might spare the reader what is to come and say to him in so many words, Orlando died and was buried. But here, alas, Truth, Candour, and Honesty, the austere Gods who keep watch and ward by the inkpot of the biographer, cry No! (Orlando 84)

(As a matter of interest, Murasaki seems concerned with this very issue:

> I should indeed be very loath to recount in all their detail matters which he took so much trouble to conceal, did I not know that if you found I had omitted anything you would at once ask why, just because he was supposed to be an Emperor's son, I must needs put a favourable showing on his conduct by leaving out all his indiscretions; and you would soon be saying that this was no history but a mere made-up tale designed to influence the judgment of posterity. As it is I shall be called a scandal-monger; but that I cannot help. [Genji 80])

The narrative in Orlando, albeit in a more tongue-in-cheek manner, also functions through association, skipping tedious explanation and preparatory exchanges:

> 'Madam,' the young man cried, leaping to the ground, 'you're hurt!'
> 'I'm dead, sir!' she replied.
> A few minutes later they became engaged.
> (Orlando 156)

The organizing voice of the Biographer yields more and more to a disorganized associative babble as the "present moment" nears:

> 'And walk among my flowered trees,' she sang, accenting the words strongly, 'and see the moon rise slow, the waggons go....' Here she stopped short and looked ahead of her intently at the bonnet of the car in profound meditation.

'He sat at Twitchett's table,' she mused...
(Orlando 195)

The interest of both Woolf and Murasaki in the question of the "truth" of fiction seems a key similarity. The more pertinent portions of a long and highly celebrated discourse by Genji on this subject are as follows:

> There is, it seems, an art of so fitting each part of the narrative into the next that, though all is mere invention, the reader is persuaded that such things might easily have happened and is as deeply moved as though they were actually going on around him....Even its practical value is immense. Without it what should we know of how people lived in the past...For history books such as the Chronicles of Japan show us only one small corner of life; whereas these diaries and romances...contain, I am sure, the most minute information about all sorts of people's private affairs....But I have a theory of my own about what this art of the novel is, and how it came into being. To begin with, it does not simply consist in the author's telling a story about the adventures of some other person. On the contrary, it happens that because the storyteller's own experience of men and things, whether for good or ill--not only what he has passed through himself, but even events which he has only witnessed or been told of--has moved him to an emotion so passionate that he can no longer keep it shut up in his heart. Again and again something in his own life or in that around him will seem to the writer so important that he cannot bear to let it pass into oblivion. There must never come a time, he feels, when men do not know about it....We may indeed go so far as to say that there is an actual mixture of Truth and Error....Viewed in this light the novel is seen to be not, as is usually supposed, a mixture of useful truth with idle invention, but something which at every stage and in every part has a definite and serious purpose. (Genji 501-2)

The reader of Woolf is likely struck immediately by the similarity between this and Woolf's search for a line of Truth between biography, fact, and fiction. Woolf speculates

whether the method she uses in To The Lighthouse may not

> serve whatever use I wish to put it to....I am now & then haunted by some semi-mystic very profound life of a woman, which shall all be told on one occasion; & time shall be utterly obliterated; future shall somehow blossom out of the past. One incident--say the fall of a flower--might contain it. My theory being that the actual event practically does not exist--nor time either. (Diary 3: 117-8)

"Woolf's interest in biography," as one critic states,

> was only a part of the larger aesthetic question which preoccupied her before and during the composition of Orlando: the question of how the dichotomy between fact and fancy affects not only biography, but the novel and poetry, and how that dichotomy might be overcome. (Moore 304)

In Orlando, the theory that an author should write for, or in the style of, others is abandoned. Orlando spends much of his/her time contemplating this very issue. After his trouncing by Nick Greene he rebels:

> At length, starting to his feet (it was now winter and very cold) Orlando swore one of the most remarkable oaths of his lifetime, for it bound him to a servitude than which none is stricter. 'I'll be blasted,' he said, 'if I ever write another word, to please Nick Greene or the Muse. Bad, good, or indifferent, I'll write, from this day forward, to please myself.' (Orlando 64)

Orlando's marriage to Shelmerdine also gives her artistic freedom:

> the transaction between a writer and the spirit of the age is one of infinite delicacy, and upon a nice arrangement between the two the whole fortune of his works depends. Orlando had so ordered it that she was in an extremely happy position; she need neither fight her age, nor submit to it; she was of it, yet remained herself. (Orlando 167)

Orlando makes decisions on different aspects of writing:

> And so they would go on talking or rather, understanding, which has become the main art of speech in an age when words are growing daily so scanty in comparison with ideas that 'the biscuits ran out' has to stand for kissing a negress in the dark when one has just read Bishop Berkeley's philosophy for the tenth time. (And from this it follows that only the most profound masters of style can tell the truth, and when one meets a simple one-syllable writer, one may conclude, without any doubt at all, that the poor man is lying.)[42] (Orlando 161)

The whole work, as with the Genji, settles the question of "how to create a form that [conveys] the underlying forces of historical process...[and captures] the more evanescent growth of human consciousness and experience" (Silver 360). History and fiction become strangely one; the truth of Virginia Woolf's love for Vita Sackville-West melting into the reality of a historical process; the reality of the societal ambience of the Genji, which thrills historians yet, overlaid with the truth of Murasaki's love for Genji.[43]

As my investigation moves from the more narrowly focused aspects of the mirroring of incidents and characters to the greater question of fiction and reality, I find that undeniable similarities between the work of Murasaki Shikibu and that of Virginia Woolf (here held mostly to Orlando and

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[42] I cannot help but speculate whether Woolf wasn't here making a not-so-veiled comment on the work of "Papa" Hemingway.

[43] It is this "reality" with which Woolf is concerned in such works as Moments of Being. See, for example, 133 ff.

the first book of the Genji Monogatari) become apparent. How much of this is influence and how much the similarity of two brilliant women struggling to bring their creations whole to birth, is difficult to say. Certainly Woolf had read Murasaki with an eye to critical analysis; certainly she was interested in many of the same themes; certainly many of Woolf's works show the intangible and untranslatable quality of aware (roughly though, the term is used to refer to the "ah-ness" of life; the wonder and sadness of human existence) so vital to the Genji; and certainly Woolf's final comment on Murasaki's work is one which seems often applied to the works of Woolf herself:

> ...not, nevertheless, a star of the first magnitude. No; the Lady Murasaki is not going to prove herself the peer of Tolstoi and Cervantes or those other great storytellers...Some element of horror, of terror, of sordidity, some root of experience has been removed...so that crudeness is impossible and coarseness out of the question, but with it too has gone some vigour, some richness, some maturity of the human spirit, failing which the gold is silvered and the wine mixed with water. All comparisons between Murasaki and the great Western writers serve but to bring out her perfection and their force. ("Genji" 53 & 80)

Woolf, in her own blindly brilliant and yet insecure way, misses the importance of the place she and Murasaki create; a place where, more fortunate than Genji, the reader "tastes and tries all the queer savours of life" in a search for "something finer," something (perhaps a glimpse of the possibilities of a women's artistic vision) that is not, finally, "withheld" ("Genji" 80).

CONCLUSION

Traditionally, literary investigations of Woolf's work have concentrated on her novels, usually tracing the progression either of theme or influence through those novels. Investigations of aesthetics and philosophy in Woolf's writing have focused on the influence of such schools as modernism, post-impressionism, or rationalism. Viewing Woolf's works through the lens of Heian Japanese women's literature (the only pre-modern literary tradition in which women's voices actually articulated the basis for a widely respected set of aesthetics) however, leads me to question the validity of imposing such restrictive readings onto Woolf's texts. Virginia Woolf, unlike her fictive Judith Shakespeare, spoke (or wrote) long and loud. By taking her writings out of the context of the world-wide women's literary tradition which she articulated in A Room of One's Own and thereby preventing us from hearing vital parts of her speech, critics have effectively disabled Woolf's voice. Thus, just as the rereading back into Woolf's texts of the actual historical and cultural backgrounds of Bloomsbury and early nineteenth-century Britain by feminist critics[44] reveals texts that are entirely different from

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[44] See, for instance, Jane Marcus' Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy, Naomi Black's "Virginia Woolf: The Life of Natural Happiness," and Sherron Knopp's "Sapphism and the Subversiveness of Virginia Woolf's Orlando."

those created by earlier, supposedly "unbiased" critical interpretations, a reading of the texts through the Heian literary and critical tradition, a tradition based on an aesthetics of "women's writing," reveals aspects of Woolf's oeuvre hidden by male-generated traditions. If we were to look at all of Woolf's texts (including those considered "private" documents by the Western critical tradition -- diaries and letters) as sources of information from which we might hope to garner a realization of what Woolf's own aesthetics were, might we not begin to build a less restrictive interpretation of her texts into the canon? Might we not begin to attempt to read modernist texts in another, less "impersonal" and androcentric way? Might we not, in fact, through attempting to articulate Woolf's own aesthetics and (by so doing) taking into account women's experiences and perceptions, begin to subvert the canon itself? A woman writing thinks back through her mothers says Virginia Woolf. Let us remember that we as women critics and scholars are writers as well and so must make an effort to give ourselves access to our mothers' thoughts, be they those of Virginia Woolf or Murasaki Shikibu, because without this access we will repeat only and endlessly a set of perceptions not generated by women's realities. We will participate in imposing silence on the voices of our mothers. We will participate in imposing silence on ourselves.

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APPENDIX

This appendix gives a very brief discussion of the most influential "prose" works of the Heian period. I have attempted to indicate the genre in which the author was working, but, as Morris says, "in the Heian period the lines of demarcation between novel, romance, story collection, autobiography, journal, memoir, notebook, and poetry collection were most tenuous" (Bridge 23).

Ise monogatari. An anonymous text usually attributed to the legendary (ideal) courtly lover Ariwara no Narihira (823-880). The text is built around the actual Narihira's poetic encodings of his amorous affairs and is thus a collection of verses with prose introductions, a pre-"novel."

Tosa nikki. Written by the provincial governor of Tosa, Ki no Tsurayuki (text written 936), this is a poetic diary recording the events of a return to the capital. It is the first of what was to become a very important genre -- the "travel diary." The author is male, but writes in a female persona: "Diaries are things written by men, I am told. Nevertheless I am writing one, to see what a woman can do. (Keene 82 -- the translation is G.W. Sargent's). One of the reasons for the assumption of this role may have been the fact that the tale engages with the author's unrelenting grief over the death of his daughter, something public

poetry would not have supported. Another was the fact that educated men did not write prose in the vernacular.

Kagerō nikki. Written by the "Mother of Michitsuna" (d. 995, text covers 954-974), this is a poetic diary. It is a very intimate record of the claustrophobic life led by the secondary wife of Fujiwara Kaneie, father of Michinaga. An unrelenting recounting of torment and neglect and the ultimate creation of a personal space of her own, this text has the very "modern" feel of a psychological novel. It is one of the texts which may have influenced Murasaki Shikibu's writing.

Makura no sōshi. This is a type of text known as a zuihitsu or "miscellany." It is composed of a mixture of narrative, stories, and lists. The most noted qualities of this work are its precise descriptions of sensual perceptions and its striking lack of linearity. Its author, Sei Shōnagon (text written about 1002) was a well-educated and endearingly opinionated woman courtier at Empress Teishi's court. She was a renowned poet. I understand that the Makura no sōshi is still the standard for grade school instruction on how to write an essay.

Genji Monogatari, Murasaki Shikibu shū, and Murasaki Shikibu nikki. Poetic novel, poetic diary, and poetic memoirs written by the female courtier Murasaki Shikibu (973-perhaps 1031) at the court of Empress Akiko. These texts are famous for their poetry and for their expression of a certain set

of aesthetics. The Genji Monogatari is the canonical text in Japanese literature.

Izumi Shikibu nikki. This is the poetic diary of a woman, Izumi Shikibu (975?-1027?), who entered court service with Empress Akiko in 1009. A fictional account of a this woman's own life and love-affairs, this text crosses the boundary between novel and diary. Izumi Shikibu is also renowned for her poetry.

Sarashina nikki. The author of this text is known as the Daughter of Takasue (1008-1059+). The Sarashina nikki is the poetic diary of a retiring woman very much on the periphery of the nobility. She spent much of her time on pilgrimages to what were then remote shrines. Her text combines the form of the autobiography with that of the travel diary.