

Bloomsbury Influences

Bloomsbury Influences:
Papers from the Bloomsbury Adaptations
Conference, Bath Spa University, 5-6 May 2011

Edited by

E.H. Wright

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	viii
Introduction	ix
E. H. Wright	
Part I: Philosophy and Anxieties of Influence	
Chapter One.....	2
Critics and their Precursors: Theories of Influence in T. S. Eliot, Jorge Luis Borges and Harold Bloom Sarah Roger	
Chapter Two	16
Reassessing the Ethical Influence of the Bloomsbury Group Christopher Lewis	
Part II: Reinventions of Virginia Woolf: Sigrid Nunez, Ali Smith, Susan Sellers and Jeanette Winterson	
Chapter Three	30
“They Leave out the Person to Whom Things Happened”: Re-Reading the Biographical Subject in Sigrid Nunez’s <i>Mitz</i> : <i>The Marmoset of Bloomsbury</i> (1998) Bethany Layne	
Chapter Four	46
What a Lark! What a Plunge! Wooooo-ooooo-ooooo What a Fall What a Soar What a Plummet What a Dash: Virginia Woolf and Ali Smith Ian Blyth	
Chapter Five	56
Biographical Novels Turned Metaphysical Detective Stories: The Case of Susan Sellers’s <i>Vanessa & Virginia</i> (2008) Kirby Joris	

Chapter Six.....	68
A Reflection of My Own: Jeanette Winterson, Virginia Woolf and the Narcissism of <i>Hommage</i> Agata Woźniak	
Part III: On the Periphery: Mansfield, Mirrlees, Bowen and Isherwood	
Chapter Seven.....	88
Creative Friction: Lawrence, Mansfield and Murry as Bloomsbury's Others Susan Reid	
Chapter Eight.....	110
"To Hell with the Blooms Berries": Katherine Mansfield in <i>Mansfield</i> and the Work of C. K. Stead Gerri Kimber	
Chapter Nine.....	126
Crossing the Ritual Bridge: Hope Mirrlees's <i>The Counterplot</i> & <i>Between the Acts</i> Sandeep Parmar	
Chapter Ten	141
"The House was Empty": The Ghost in the Short Fiction of Woolf and Bowen Annabel Wynne	
Chapter Eleven	157
"How Can I Know What I Think Till I See What I Say?": Christopher Isherwood, E. M. Forster and the Creation of a Literary Identity Rebecca Gordon Stewart	
Part IV: Painting and Performance	
Chapter Twelve.....	176
<i>Jeux</i> (1913), Sometimes Known as "The Bloomsbury Ballet": Vaslav Nijinsky's Modernist Work Sue Ash	

Chapter Thirteen	191
“A Kiss is Love. A Broken Cup is Jealousy”: Adaptation Beyond Metonymy Jens Peters	
Chapter Fourteen	205
“Nature Once More had Taken Her Part”: Recuperating Anon, the Common Voice and the Uncovered Theatre Shelley Saguaro and Lucy Tyler	
Chapter Fifteen	227
The Legacy of Vanessa Bell and the Heart of Brand Bloomsbury Hana Leaper	
List of Contributors	245

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INTRODUCTION

E. H. WRIGHT

Beginnings

This volume presents a series of essays developed from papers originally presented at the Bloomsbury Adaptations Conference held at Bath Spa University on 5 and 6 May 2010. The conference aimed to explore the impact of the Bloomsbury Group and their contemporaries on successive generations of literary and visual artists, while also addressing the tricky questions of adaptation, influence and inspiration—a topic discussed in part by T. S. Eliot in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919) and by Harold Bloom in his numerous critical works on the topic. Bloom, a confirmed “Bardolator” (Bloom 2011, 8), has spent a lifetime exploring the effect of Shakespeare, among many other canonical writers, on subsequent generations, as well as in a theoretical discussion of the anxiety such influence causes in later poets. Bloom’s seminal work on influence, which I was reading as I saw an early performance of my play *Vanessa and Virginia*, gave rise to the initial idea for a conference exploring how the Bloomsbury Group has inspired contemporary writers, performing artists and painters.

The play and the 2008 novel by Susan Sellers on which it was based, were in turn motivated by and founded on Sellers’ and my own academic research in the field of Woolf studies. The novel (its style *and* subject matter) and its dramatic adaptation were linked to letters, diaries, memoirs, paintings and biographies of the artist Vanessa Bell and her sister Virginia Woolf. Narrated in the second person (in both play and novel), the reader inhabits Vanessa’s consciousness as she moves in a series of animated pictures through her memories from childhood to the death of Virginia. In addressing herself to her absent sister, Vanessa reveals the central elements in her own life story while exploring her complex feelings for her literary sister. As a narrator (and as she was reputedly in life), Vanessa is scrupulously honest, so in selecting Vanessa as narrator Sellers not only explores the life of the less well-known sister, both artistically and personally, but also creates a storyteller whose words are more credible

than the famously unreliable Woolf. Vanessa's honesty reveals her flaws as well as her strengths, thus rendering her a more sympathetic and approachable figure than the austere recluse that she appeared to be in life. Biographical events—Bell's sense of responsibility for the sexlessness of the Woolfs' marriage, her doubt of her own ability, her relationship with Duncan Grant; her miscarriage, the loss of her eldest son and ultimately the loss of her second self in the suicide of Virginia—are all instances that gave Sellers the chance to sketch in the blanks of Vanessa's real-life silence. As a Woolf scholar, Sellers is meticulous in her attention to facts and details, but through Vanessa's voice she reminds the reader that "art is not life" (2008, 77)—the book is a novel not a monograph after all, the play is a theatrical production not a documentary.

Though "the anxiety of influence", to use Harold Bloom's expression, could have overwhelmed Sellers's own artistry, it does not. Instead Sellers, the *epebe*, rises to the challenge of reinventing the voice of Vanessa and re-presenting the relationship between the sisters in a manner that draws upon, but does not imitate, Woolf's writing style and takes structural inspiration from Bell's post-impressionist paintings. If we push this idea further, perhaps we might say that in this way Sellers has reached, arguably, a Bloomsian *apophrades*. As Bloom claims, this final stage of his "six revisionary ratios" allows the writings of the original poet and the new poet's work to become linked to the extent that their work becomes each other's. As Bloom puts it, "The dead may or may not return, but their voice comes alive, paradoxically never by mere imitation, but in the agonistic misprision performed upon powerful forerunners by only the most gifted of their successors" (1997, xxiv). Sellers is the contemporary author who "*holds*" her work "open to the precursor" rather than passively *leaving* her text open, which would allow the precursor to overwhelm it (1997, 16, my emphasis).

Sellers's work has yet to stand the test of time, so to claim her as "the most gifted" successor of one of Britain's "most gifted" writers and one of the most interesting painters of the twentieth century is perhaps a step too far. However, what *is* impressive about the novel is the lack of fear about taking these famous and influential women and transforming their work and their life-stories into a new fictional enterprise. Rather than deny her "origins" Sellers faces them and proves that "origins are of particular importance to strong writers." (Bloom 1997, xxxiv). From these links between the work of Woolf and Bell and a twenty-first-century novelist, who is also a leading academic on their work, came the central premise of the conference. Thus, these expanded conference papers aim to establish whether subsequent generations of artists were indebted, either knowingly

and deliberately or sub/un-consciously, to Bloomsbury and their contemporaries.

The Boundaries of Bloomsbury

Before examining the topic of influence in a little more depth it is necessary to pause and outline the remit of these essays, which encompass more writers than would ordinarily be considered as “Bloomsbury”. The term “The Bloomsbury Group” has been widely used, with many qualifications, to describe the varied collection of writers, artists and thinkers who lived in and around Bloomsbury in the early twentieth century. Scholars, writers and artists, including those at the heart of the “group”, have sorted these individuals into “Old” and “New” Bloomsbury, central and peripheral Bloomsbury, insiders and outsiders. They have spoken about, as Susan Reid highlights, “meshes, nets and networks” (2014, 90) in an attempt to outline a shape for the group and their dynamics.¹ The exact composition of the group is contentious. Leonard Woolf explains in his autobiography that the term was

applied to a largely imaginary group of persons with largely imaginary objects and characteristics. I was a member of this group and I was also one of a small number of persons who did in fact eventually form a kind of group of friends living in or around that district of London legitimately called Bloomsbury. (Woolf 1964, 21)

Leonard Woolf goes on to list these people as Vanessa, Virginia and Adrian Stephen, Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, John Maynard Keynes, Duncan Grant, E. M. Forster, Saxon Sydney-Turner, Roger Fry, Desmond and Molly MacCarthy and himself; and then later Angelica, Julian and Quentin Bell and David (Bunny) Garnett. He also considers it to have come into being after his return from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1911, but its beginnings were established much earlier in 1905 after his departure for a civil service position in Ceylon. The original collection of family and friends were centred upon the Stephen siblings and Thoby Stephen’s Cambridge friends: Lytton Strachey, Saxon Sydney-Turner and Clive Bell, the latter of whom, like Thoby, had not been elected to the prestigious “secret” Cambridge society, The Apostles. The Apostles and Cambridge also connected the younger group with a wider and slightly older circle of thinkers and writers: the philosopher Bertrand Russell, the economist John Maynard Keynes, the writer E. M. Forster and the philosopher G. E. Moore, whose *Principia Ethica* significantly influenced the group’s moral and ethical outlooks—appropriately, Chris Lewis explores Moore’s impact

in his essay for this volume. Others peripheral to, but still an important part of, the wider literary scene in which they moved included Katharine Mansfield, Hope Mirrlees, Elizabeth Bowen, and even some of the young 1930s poets introduced to Bloomsbury by John Lehmann who worked for the Woolfs at The Hogarth Press. To broaden the reach of this conference, papers exploring the effect of their direct contemporaries on each other and subsequent generations were also accepted for inclusion, though I am painfully aware that these writers did not consider themselves as “Bloomsbury” and were in many ways either contemptuous of it, envious of it or intimidated by it. Thus, for the purposes of the conference the widest definition of Bloomsbury and its associates was used, though the central thematic line of influence runs through all of the essays presented in this volume.

Modernist Influences and Anxieties

Bloomsbury and its milieu were indebted to a plethora of ancient and modern thinkers, writers, artists and performers for their output, some of whom were openly acknowledged in introductions and essays; while others were rejected as “covering cherub[s]” (Bloom, 1972, 11) who overshadowed their work and led, perhaps, to the “guilt of indebtedness” (Bloom 1997, 117). As Bloom argues:

readings of precursor works are necessarily defensive in part; if they were appreciative only, fresh creation would be stifled [...]. Fresh metaphor, or inventive troping, always involves a departure from previous metaphor, and that departure depends upon at least partial turning away from or rejection of prior figuration. (Bloom 1994, 9)

David Ned Tobin claims that Eliot rejected the influence of certain writers such as Tennyson and Kipling because he was “defensive” about their power over his own work. Tobin demonstrates how Eliot’s “profound familiarity” with Tennyson’s work in particular was “coupled with a need to distance it, evaluate it, sometimes misrepresent or belittle it—and finally come to terms with it”, all of which were “unmistakable signs of the ‘anxiety of influence.’” (Tobin 1983, 91). The fear of being “pipped to the post”, of being the successor, also haunted Virginia Woolf, who worried in 1920 that her efforts to revolutionize the novel were “probably being better done by Mr. Joyce” (Woolf 1978, 68–69). Joyce’s experiments were closer to her own than Eliot’s were to Tennyson and thus the desire to be different was arguably, for her, more pressing and more worrying. Though Woolf’s mastery of language and form meant that

she shook off Joyce as a “covering cherub”, Vanessa Bell was not so fortunate. Bell’s work was arguably influenced and somewhat overshadowed in her lifetime by the work of her partner, lover and friend, Duncan Grant; and, as many modern art historians argue, by the work of the seminal Fauvists.

Whether inspirational or threatening there were certainly a variety of significant moments where precursors (ancient and immediate, acknowledged and unacknowledged) made important changes to the work of this group. The First Post-Impressionist Exhibition in December 1910, for example, was a dramatic turning point for the artists Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell. Compare the largely realist portraits: *Saxon Sydney-Turner at the Piano* (c. 1908) and *Lytton Strachey* (1909) by Bell and Grant respectively that were painted prior to the exhibition with Bell’s *Studland Beach* (c.1912) and Grant’s *Dancers* (c. 1910–11) painted afterwards. In both of the later paintings there is little attempt at realism, features are suggested or absent, colours blocked in boldly, shapes starker and more definite. Both of the later works clearly echo the paintings of Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Picasso and Matisse which were exhibited at that exhibition. Of course this radical alteration in style has left them open to attack by contemporary critics such as Andrew Graham-Dixon, who argues that their “homages to Matisse and to the ideals of Fauvism [...] distorted and emasculated precisely what they set out to elevate” (1999, 206). To many modern art historians the influence of their nearest precursors overwhelms their work and undermines their own aims.

Not so for Virginia Woolf who, in her 1924 essay “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown”, implied that the exhibition had altered the art of writing character in fiction by defining December 1910 as the moment when “human character changed” (Woolf 1924, 4). It was a sentiment echoed by Katherine Mansfield who later claimed to Dorothy Brett that these painters: “taught me something about writing, which was queer, a kind of freedom—or rather, a shaking free.” (Mansfield 1929, 423). Mansfield was also clearly influenced by the work of Antonin Chekhov and her short story “The Child Who Was Tired” is a plagiarized version of Chekhov’s “Sleepy”. However, her reading of Chekhov eventually led her to evolve his method to the extent that she reached a point of *apophrades* with her Russian counterpart. As an obsessive reader, Virginia Woolf was also clearly aware that her own writing owed much to the work of her predecessors, as well as her contemporaries such as Mansfield and Joyce with whose work Woolf’s has been linked. In the humorous introduction to her mock-biography, *Orlando*, she explicitly acknowledges her debt to several precursors, by claiming that certain elements of the novel can be

attributed to the “many friends” who “have helped me in writing this book”:

Some are dead and so illustrious that I scarcely dare name them, yet no one can read or write without being perpetually in the debt of Defoe, Sir Thomas Browne, Sterne, Sir Walter Scott, Lord Macaulay, Emily Brontë, De Quincey, and Walter Pater,—to name the first that come to mind. Others are alive, and though perhaps as illustrious in their own way, are less formidable for that very reason. (2008, 5)

Of course the discussion of influence and canonicity is not new, as W. Jackson Bate, Harold Bloom and Frank Kermode have demonstrated, and it was clearly a subject of interest in and around Bloomsbury. T. S. Eliot, for example, explored the issue in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919) and in “What is a Classic?” (1944). Their theoretical consideration of influence, their fear of being overshadowed by certain precursors and their reaction against those who threatened or attacked their originality, and, conversely, their embracing and welcoming of others into their work, seems to fit with Harold Bloom’s six revisionary ratios (*clinamen, tesserae, kenosis, daemonization, askesis, apophrades*) whereby the later poet, in order to become a great or canonical poet, travels through six phases in which s/he imitates, challenges, revises and eventually embraces the precursor by opening his/her work to that of their predecessor.² Certainly who and what influenced Bloomsbury and their contemporaries has been a central concern in discussion of their work, but tracing their influence on the generations that followed is more difficult? Was their success in so many fields overwhelming to subsequent generations? Did they in turn become Bloomsian “covering cherub[s]” against whom their artistic successors have struggled to differentiate themselves?

The Modernists at the heart of the Bloomsbury Group clearly perceived themselves to be influential in their own lifetimes. For example, the skit performed at Charleston Farmhouse, Vanessa Bell’s country home, on 30 August 1936 entitled “A Hundred Years After, or, Ladies and Gentlemen,” recognized, albeit comically, the longevity of their work. The play complimented its audience by suggesting that their fame would continue into the future—even if the truth was somewhat distorted by the passing of the years. In this production, the confidence in their fame and their work, though amusingly distorted, is clear. Indeed, the prediction that Charleston would, one day, become a museum to the group has been fulfilled. “100 Years After” exemplifies the self-congratulatory nature of Bloomsbury, highlighting their self-confidence, as well as their awareness of segregation and their celebration of difference from the ordinary or

average. It was arguably their sense of self-worth and the feeling that they were to be influential to future writers and artists that earned them the criticism of intellectual snobbery levelled at them by Ben Nicholson, Ethel Smyth, Katherine Mansfield, D. H. Lawrence and Wyndham Lewis, among others.

Certainly a wide range of artists and writers have claimed to be the heirs of Bloomsbury and British Modernism more generally, or, at the very least, have plundered their precursors' work to serve their own ends.³ The influence of these modernists is felt even in media in which they did not work. T. S. Eliot's poetry, for example, has had an impact on the work of pop musicians, such as Win Butler, David Bowie and PJ Harvey, as well as painters such as Marilyn Peck and Felix Wilkinson, who claim to take elements of his work to form their own.⁴ Other contemporary creatives rely on the life-stories of Bloomsbury figures for inspiration, such as novelists and playwrights: Susan Sellers, E. H. Wright, Amy Rosenthal, Vincent O'Sullivan, Sigrid Nunez and the theatre group, ShadyJane.⁵ The work of figures such as Eliot, Woolf, Bell, Grant, Fry, Mansfield and Forster is consequently not only "held open to the precursor" (Bloom 1997, 16), but also to the successor, who, if a talented artist (whatever their medium), will reach some kind of freeing creative synthesis with their precursors. They will possess the ideal blend of "difference and debt" (Ellis 2007, 1).

But this blend is not so easy to achieve. The influence of these great Modernists can cause the same problems for contemporary writers or artists as their most illustrious predecessors caused them. Bate and Bloom warn that the central issue in dealing with these literary and artistic heavyweights is the question of originality, or as Bate asks: "*What is there left to do?*" (1991, 3, original emphasis). Eliot was acutely aware of the pressures on the artist of being the successor of a great poet who has seemingly created a finality in their art which excludes the possibility of originality in their heirs. "Not only", Eliot argued, "every great poet, but every genuine, though lesser poet, fulfils once for all some possibility of the language, and so leaves one possibility less for his successors." (2009, 66).⁶ Bate claims that this leaves the writer with a "loss of self-confidence as he compares what he feels able to do with the rich heritage of past art and literature." (1991, 6-7). If previous generations write off, as Eliot suggests, certain possibilities in poetry and thus the ability to be original in certain specific ways, then, Eliot, Bate and Bloom argue, subsequent writers must face this obstacle of originality and either acknowledge and overcome it, thus becoming "strong" poets (Bate 1991, 80) whose work stands the test of time; or, succumb to self-doubt and become lesser poets,

respectable, but not canonical. Indeed, both Bate and Bloom eventually ask whether originality is even necessary for a writer, and by extension any artist, to become canonical in their fields. Perhaps, Bate argues, originality is a “self-created prison” (1991, 133), a “misprision”, as Bloom calls it, which kills creativity (1997, 7). Instead, the successor should embrace the work of the previous generation, not misread it for his/her own benefit, nor “correct” the precursor’s perceived “mistakes”, nor even seek to be completely original. The later poet or artist should “hold [...] his own work open again to the precursor’s work” so “that at first we might believe the wheel has come full circle, and that we are back in the later poet’s flooded apprenticeship, before his strength began to assert itself in the revisionary ratios. But now the poem is *held* open to the precursor, where once it *was* open” (Bloom 1997, 15–16). This is an active choice by the later artist which allows him/her to take control of their creativity. Rather than coasting along in the wake of the precursor the later poet accepts and absorbs the precursor’s work and thus becomes a strong contender for creative eternity.

Certainly, as Bloom argues, “it takes some time even to *see* influence accurately.” (Bloom 1994, 522) and the successors of Bloomsbury have certainly been hard-pressed to find something unique to say in a unique idiom even if “strong” enough to accept their creative heritage. To some, Bloomsbury has become a Bloomsian “covering Cherub”—a set of gifted thinkers, poets, novelists and artists whose achievements have occasionally overshadowed their successors, or been rejected and “corrected” by them. “Repeatedly”, Bate claims, “we find that a cluster of genius in which an art is carried to the highest pitch is then followed by a dearth” of writers who give up on writing overwhelmed by previous achievements, “or else” writers who “manufactur[e] the past”, or are guilty of “searching, in compensation for novelty for its own sake.” (Bate 1991, 82). Is this true of the artists who followed in the wake of Bloomsbury? Woolf argued obliquely in her essay “The Leaning Tower” that *her* generation were the true artists, while the poets of the 1930s (among whom she lists Day-Lewis, Auden, Spender, Isherwood and MacNeice) wrote “politician’s poetry” (Woolf 2011, 272). She considered them to be lesser poets because they were enslaved by their political beliefs, desperate to reject their heritage and arrogant enough to presume they were cutting a new path, but not gifted enough or “strong” enough to produce anything lasting. To Woolf they offered “novelty for its own sake”, but to them they were providing *tesserae*, a “completion” and correction of where Bloomsbury had stopped short or gone wrong (Bloom 1997, 66). This, of course, *would* be Woolf’s perspective. Whether she is wrong or right is

ultimately subjective, though the presence of these poets in collections of canonical British poetry suggests that she is wrong. However, this volume begins to show that the early twentieth century modernists in and around Bloomsbury have *not* overwhelmed the work of subsequent writers and artists, but have inspired, influenced and have themselves been transformed by later work. As T. S. Eliot argued in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (1999, 15).

The Essays

In her opening essay for this collection, Sarah Roger explores the link between T. S. Eliot’s discussion of canonicity and influence in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and the work of Harold Bloom using the theories of Jorge Luis Borges in “Kafka and His Precursors” as a bridge between the two. By linking the ideas of influence put forward by Eliot, Bloom and Borges, Roger demonstrates the complex interconnections that exist between authors, not only in influencing each other’s work, but also in shaping each other’s ideas about influence itself. This piece sets up many of the concerns explored more obliquely in subsequent essays which show specifically how the precursors and their successors have informed one another’s work.

Christopher Lewis’s essay takes a philosophical approach and aims to reveal the contradictory ethical impulses which were present in the “original doctrine” (2014, 16) of the Bloomsbury Group, before the outbreak of war in 1914 provoked their firm allegiance to humanism and individualism. His philosophical discussion examines the causes of Bloomsbury’s early ethical ambivalence and suggests that the consolidation of their legacy in the late 20th and early 21st century has embraced Bloomsbury’s “ethical individualism” (2014, 20) while neglecting to consider the early adherence of Bell and Keynes to the neo-Platonic absolutes Truth, Beauty and Goodness. Lewis explores how the group’s ethical outlook was both a reaction against Victorianism and a pre-emptive vision of future ethical constructs.

While Roger and Lewis examine the theoretical and philosophical questions of artistic and ethical influence, Ian Blyth, Bethany Layne, Kirby Joris and Agata Woźniak address the impact of Virginia Woolf, one of Bloomsbury’s most significant figures, on the work of contemporary novelists Ali Smith, Sigrid Nunez, Susan Sellers and Jeanette Winterson. Ian Blyth muses, in a style reminiscent of Woolf herself, on the “likeness” between Woolf’s fictional and polemical writing and Ali Smith’s creative

work. Blyth raises unresolved and potentially unresolvable questions about the moment where influence over, or being “like”, another writer becomes a matter for the specific reader, rather than a conscious decision by the writer to be “like” her precursor. Jeanette Winterson, on the other hand, openly acknowledges her debt to Woolf as Woźniak demonstrates, forming a mutually beneficial bond between the two writers whereby Winterson keeps Woolf safe for posterity while Woolf provides Winterson with a literary mother in whose reflected glory she can bask. There is little evidence to suggest that Winterson’s debts to Woolf’s work have caused her any creative “anxiety”. As Woźniak points out, Winterson’s ego allows her to assimilate, interrogate and reinvent Woolf’s experiments with poetic prose, feminism and gender fluidity, while modern media and Winterson’s use of it for self-promotion alter the question of canonicity and influence.

Kirby Joris and Bethany Layne, on the other hand, highlight different biofictional interpretations of Woolf’s life in Nunez’s *Mitz: The Marmoset of Bloomsbury* (1998), a re-invention of Woolf’s *Flush* (1933); and Sellers’ *Vanessa and Virginia* (2008), a novel addressed in the second person from Vanessa Bell to her sister Virginia Woolf. In Sigrid Nunez’s novella Layne argues that Nunez’s liminal genre reclaims Woolf from the stereotypes that limit her legacy and extends Woolf’s own creative experiment with her comic biography, *Flush*. Kirby Joris also examines biofiction in connection with Susan Sellers’s novel *Vanessa and Virginia*, but complicates the genre by reading the book as an example of metaphysical detective biofiction. Joris argues that the story is an attempt to give Vanessa the chance to “find” her dead sister in the manner of an arm-chair detective, thus allowing the reader to understand both sisters individually as well as their relationship with each other. Joris also suggests that the novel gives both the author Susan Sellers and narrator Vanessa Bell the chance for Vanessa to destroy some of the myths created by Virginia about her character and to complete certain blank spaces in their life-stories. Thus, the successor (Sellers) blends fact with fiction in order to speculate on the lives of her precursors (Bell and Woolf) who provide not only the bare bones of the plot, but influence more subtly the language, style and structure of her writing.

The bio-drama, bio-fiction and bio-poetry of Vincent O’Sullivan, Lorae Parry, Amy Rosenthal and C. K. Stead, all of whom fictionalize Katherine Mansfield and her milieu (who had an uneasy relationship with the Bloomsbury group) comes under scrutiny in the essays by Susan Reid and Gerri Kimber. Reid and Kimber discuss the relative merits, perils and pitfalls of transforming Frieda and D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield,

John Middleton Murry and Ida Baker's turbulent lives into art. Using Rosenthal's *On the Rocks*, Parry's *Bloomsbury Women & The Wild Colonial Girl* and O'Sullivan's *Jones and Jones*, Reid illustrates how biodrama encourages an exploration of the turbulent relationships between the real-life characters on the periphery of Bloomsbury and demonstrates how their personal friction between themselves and Bloomsbury influenced their creativity. Gerri Kimber, on the other hand, examines the work of C. K. Stead whose critical work on Mansfield has spilled over into his creative work. Kimber analyses Stead's novel *Mansfield* and two poems "Jealousy I" and "Jealousy II" in order to show, not only how Mansfield was both influenced and repelled by Bloomsbury, but also how the later writer, C. K. Stead, has been inspired by both Mansfield's life-story and her writing.

While other critics deal with the impact of this literary movement on contemporary authors, Sandeep Parmar, Annabel Wynne and Rebecca Gordon demonstrate how the group's nearest successors were affected by, and reciprocally influenced, the work of Bloomsbury. Sandeep Parmar, Hope Mirrlees's biographer and an editor of her work, explores Mirrlees's poem "Paris" (1919), which was published by the Woolfs at The Hogarth Press, and her 1924 novel *The Counterplot* in connection with the work of both Virginia Woolf and the classical scholar Jane Harrison. Parmar suggests that Mirrlees's novel which contains a drama and was influenced by Harrison's "tribal ritualism" (2014, 133), played a particularly important part in the composition of Woolf's posthumously published novel, *Between the Acts* (1941). Annabel Wynne, considers the mutual haunting of Elizabeth Bowen and Virginia Woolf through a close-reading of Woolf's "A Haunted House" (1921) and "The Lady in the Looking Glass: A Reflection" (1929) in connection with Bowen's urban gothic short story "The Demon Lover" (1945). Wynne demonstrates not only how Woolf as the precursor left a mark on Bowen's work, but also makes the case that Bowen, initially heralded in early reviews as a new Katherine Mansfield, influenced Woolf. Similarly, Rebecca Stewart traces the impact of E. M. Forster on his literary heir, Christopher Isherwood, whose autobiographical fiction bears the marks not only of Forster's realist "truth", but also Isherwood's reading of Freudian psychoanalysis, which Stewart credits the Woolfs and Bloomsbury for publishing and promoting. Stewart's essay demonstrates how writers can deliberately set out to use and adapt the work of those they admire; in Isherwood's case he uses, adapts and then jettisons the work of experimental modernists in favour of the more controlled realism of E. M. Forster.

The performing arts have also felt the impact of Bloomsbury aesthetics as Sue Ash, Jens Peters, Shelley Saguario and Lucy Tyler suggest in their essays. Contemporary work by Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and its star Vaslav Nijinsky is explored by Ash who argues that while the Russian ballet influenced Bloomsbury, there was a mutual transaction specifically in the ballet *Jeux* which affected and was inspired by Bloomsbury's gender fluidity and formal artistic experimentation in other mediums such as poetry and prose fiction. Jens Peters, on the other hand, discusses the challenges posed by adapting Woolf's work for the stage. Peter's essay teases out the difference between metaphor and metonymy and the struggle to delineate the detailed interiority of Woolf's characters in mediums which require external representation. How can stage and screen represent the subtleties of the inner-life and the ambiguities in Woolf's work in a visual way? Peters, using his own adaptation of Woolf's *The Waves* as an example, posits the idea that the cruder metonymic tools should be replaced by the subtler more abstract forms offered by metaphor. In Shelley Saguario and Lucy Tyler's collaborative essay, the pageant performed by the villagers in Woolf's *Between the Acts* is linked to "ecoperformance" (Bealer quoted in Saguario and Tyler 2014, 207), a theoretical approach which explores the pressures placed on all fresco theatre by the natural world, as well as *how* and *why* it has become an important part of British culture. Woolf, according to Saguario and Tyler, "offers a compelling example of outdoor theatre and its practitioners' methodologies, which can be compared (and are useful) to a contemporary practice of the art form." (2014, 214).

The volume concludes with a piece that uses as its foundation interviews with artists working in the "Bloomsbury Tradition". In this essay Hana Leaper demonstrates how Vanessa Bell has become England's first "Old Mistress", an inspiration to contemporary artists and artisans including The Singh Twins and Anna Frewster (founder of The Bloomsbury Letterhead Press), as well as artists directly descended from members of the group, such as Cressida Bell and Sophie MacCarthy. Leaper also notices how design houses such as Laura Ashley, Mulberry, Anthropologie and Sanderson have used Bell's work commercially; not only direct reprints of certain designs, such as the Bloomsbury prints resurrected by Laura Ashley, but also how they have used "Bloomsbury" as a brand which sells a lifestyle linked to the group's ethos. Thus, companies jettison the real work of the artist and adopt the "spirit" that they symbolize instead. Leaper notes that Bloomsbury is linked in the popular consciousness with "freedom", "friendship", "sexual deviancy and bohemian glamour" which appeals to the contemporary consumer (2014,

243). Bell's name, art and design work (along with other members of her milieu) have thus been transformed into a symbol, freely reinvented and reinterpreted, by companies for commercial purposes.

Each contribution to this collection offers a new and sometimes surprising insight into the extensive effects of Bloomsbury and its wider artistic connections on its nearest and most recent successors. Naturally certain figures, forms and genres are absent in a volume dependent on the lottery of conference papers, though this does leave a window open for other scholars tracing the impact of the work, ethics and life-styles of early British-based modernists.

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Notes

¹ See B. K. Scott 1995, Ellmann 2010 and Southworth 2010.

² See Bloom 1997, 14–16 for a brief synopsis of each.

³ See, for example, the work of novelist Jeanette Winterson who claims links with Woolf and poet Tim Liardet who calls himself a "modernist poet".

⁴ See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/musicblog/2012/may/23/ts-eliot-poetry-pop-music>, accessed 13 October 2013 and Peck 2004. Felix Wilkinson's artwork was exhibited at the Bloomsbury Adaptations Conference and he kindly gave permission for us to use the front cover image for this collection.

⁵ ShadyJane performed “Sailing On” at the Bloomsbury Adaptations Conference, 2010. See <http://www.shadyjane.co.uk/shows-ensemble-sailing/>.

⁶ It was an anxiety explored, as Bate notes, by other writers including Samuel Johnson and John Keats.

PART I

PHILOSOPHY AND ANXIETIES OF INFLUENCE

CHAPTER ONE

CRITICS AND THEIR PRECURSORS: THEORIES OF INFLUENCE IN T. S. ELIOT, JORGE LUIS BORGES AND HAROLD BLOOM

SARAH ROGER

Critics have devoted substantial attention to the theoretical works of T. S. Eliot and Harold Bloom, particularly Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) and Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973, 1997). These texts are now viewed as part of the tradition surrounding concepts of the literary tradition and the influence of earlier writers upon later ones. Bloom's contemporary Geoffrey Hartman, subsequent critics such as Gregory Jay and Graham Allen, and more recent critics such as William Schultz and Paul Fry have highlighted how Eliot serves as a point of origin for—and differentiation from—Bloom. Eliot proposes a pattern of influence that focuses on how the work of an individual writer fits within the preceding tradition, while Bloom proposes a pattern of influence that emphasises how the work of a later writer (usually a poet) surpasses the work of his precursors.¹

There is a noteworthy, unexamined connection between these two writers via Jorge Luis Borges, whose writing illuminates the path of influence that runs from Eliot to Bloom. "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is a precursor for Borges's "Kafka and His Precursors" (1951), and the connection between the two has been established by critics including James Atlas, José Luis Venegas, and Juan E. de Castro. Similarly, Daniel Balderston has shown Borges's essay to be a precursor to *The Anxiety of Influence*. Although Borges has been discussed with respect to the writer he follows and the one whom he precedes, and although the links between Eliot and Bloom have been explored in depth, the connections between all three have not been considered. This study triangulates Eliot, Bloom, and Borges by analysing "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and *The Anxiety of Influence* before interposing "Kafka

and His Precursors” between the two.² By looking at all three theorists of influence together, a train of development appears from Eliot to Bloom by way of Borges, highlighting the points at which Eliot and Bloom connect and diverge, and revealing the spaces where their theories can be developed further.

“Tradition and the Individual Talent”

Published in two instalments in September and December 1919 in the magazine *The Egoist* (and subsequently included in *The Sacred Wood*), “Tradition and the Individual Talent” addresses the relationship between a poet and the preceding tradition, focusing as much on the value of earlier works as it does on the contributions of later ones:

One of the facts that might come to light in this process is our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. [...] Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. (Eliot 1928, 48)

This is not to say that, for Eliot, a poet must be wholly derivative of the preceding tradition: “To conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art” (50). To write something worthwhile, a poet must innovate with an eye to what has come before.

When past and present are given equal weight in the creation of a work, the result is a text that fits seamlessly within—and contributes to—the poetic order:

The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. (50)

Eliot’s view of tradition as an ordered collection of monuments has implications for the poet and the reader, requiring in both an awareness of the literary tradition. The poet cannot create something of value if he does

not have “a feeling [for] the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country” (49), while the reader must take a contextualised approach to reading in order to appreciate the new poet’s work. Both the writer and the reader must remember that literary works are not created, and do not exist, in a vacuum.

The result of this “seemingly ahistorical awareness of a permanent and authoritative tradition” is that no improvements can be made to the literary tradition as a whole (Schwartz 2009, 17). Each work adds to the tradition without bettering it and without surpassing anything that has come before. This does not mean that there is no change, for each addition modifies the way that readers perceive connections between the tradition’s components: “Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature, will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (Eliot 1928, 50).

Eliot considers the effects of this atemporal relationship between texts in the essay’s second half. Employing the analogy of the poet as catalyst, he argues that “the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material” (54). The implications of this view are for the reader, who should endeavour to read poetry without attempting to understand the poet, such that the work stands only in relation to other works and not to the poet himself. This is a point of contention in Bloom’s and Borges’s subsequent theories about influence, which take divergent stances towards the experiences of the writer and the role of the reader.

The Anxiety of Influence

Published more than fifty years after “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence* argues that a writer (ephebe) feels a sense of anxiety when faced with the monumental, seemingly unsurpassable work of his precursor. To overcome this anxiety, the ephebe must swerve away from the preceding poet’s influence, returning to it only when his writing has become so strong that it appears that he has created the work of his predecessor, rather than the other way around. Unlike Eliot, Bloom places the work of the later writer ahead of the earlier one, as he believes in a constantly improving body of poetry.

Eliot is Bloom’s precursor in two ways: in a direct way as advocated by “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, and in an antithetical way as

advocated by *The Anxiety of Influence*. With respect to the latter (and in the spirit of his own theory), Bloom goes to great pains to differentiate himself from Eliot. Where Eliot advocates continuity in the poetic tradition, Bloom argues for an attempted rupture. Eliot stands for change without improvement, which requires a poet's respect for—and participation in—the tradition. By contrast, Bloom has a revisionary view of poetry that privileges the individual who swerves away from that which has come before. Where Eliot emphasises tradition, Bloom prefers individual talent. Eliot wants the poet to be incorporated into the poetic order, while Bloom believes that poetry is personal and that the reward for creating an original work is the poet's immortality. This is achieved at the expense of the precursor.

To come up with this theory, Bloom seems to wilfully twist Eliot, a move that may be rooted in his “lifelong set-to” with his predecessor (Soderholm 2010, 104). Bloom's writing reveals that he feels no fondness for his predecessor, demonstrating his opposition to Eliot's theory by making personal that which Eliot believes should be impersonal:

An obsessive reader of poetry growing up in the nineteen thirties and forties entered a critical world dominated by the opinions and example of Eliot. To speak out of even narrower personal experience, anyone adopting the profession of teaching literature in the early nineteen fifties entered a discipline virtually enslaved not only by Eliot's insights but by the entire span of his preferences and prejudices. [...] It is difficult to prophesy that Eliot's criticism will prove to be of permanent value. (Bloom 1985, 1, 5)

Based on Bloom's dislike of Eliot, it comes as no surprise that he wants to swerve away from that which has come before, and that he advocates for the ephebe (Bloom) to compensate for the shortcomings of the precursor (Eliot).

In an attempt to improve upon his precursor's theory, Bloom turns from Eliot in *The Anxiety of Influence*, swerving away by misreading Eliot's work after the fashion Bloom proposes:

And what *is* Poetic Influence anyway? Can the study of it really be anything more than the wearisome industry of source-hunting, of allusion-counting, an industry that will soon touch apocalypse anyway when it passes from scholars to computers? Is there not the shibboleth bequeathed us by Eliot, that the good poet steals, while the poor poet betrays an influence, borrows a voice? (Bloom 1997, 31, original emphasis)

Bloom focuses on the fact that Eliot's theory advocates a traceable, tradition-oriented path from one poet to the next, but he ignores Eliot's

second tenet, which is that the poet must act as a catalyst who transforms the work of the tradition into something that is different (even if not better). In reading Eliot as such, Bloom reduces Eliot's view to one that privileges tradition to the exclusion of individual talent—a perspective that conflicts with Bloom's own idea that the later poet should improve upon the earlier one.

It is at this point that Bloom tries to diverge from Eliot, yet it is also where the two critics converge. Where Eliot situates the precursor as the source Bloom situates the ephebe, whose work Bloom believes comes into its own when the earlier author appears to be indebted to the later one (rather than the other way around). As Fry explains, "Eliot's first gambit is Bloom's sixth, *apophrades*: the most 'individual' parts of the mature poet's work 'may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously'" (221). The way Eliot and Bloom reach this conclusion may be different, but the end result is the same. For both, the strength of the new poet lies in the interplay between the ideas that separate him from, yet join him to, the preceding tradition.

There are other similarities between the two critics. In turning the ephebe away from the precursor, Bloom implicitly requires the precursor to be someone worth swerving from. In Bloom's case, this worthy precursor (although he does not admit it) is Eliot himself. Employing the linear approach to precursors that Eliot proposes, it appears that Bloom cannot shake Eliot's presence. In "How to Live with the Infinite Regress of Strong Misreading" (2010), Fry traces the correspondences between the two, demonstrating how Bloom's overarching structure—his six revisionary ratios—can be mapped onto Eliot's theory of influence (221–24). Despite Bloom's desire to leave his precursor behind, he agrees with Eliot that poets cannot blindly follow the tradition that comes before, and that there is a reciprocal relationship between writers, whereby the later poet's work influences readers' assessments of the earlier poet's work and vice versa.

Eliot's role as Bloom's precursor is reinforced by the fact that even though Bloom rejects Eliot's ideas, he mentions his predecessor seven times in *The Anxiety of Influence*: five times with reference to the relationship between Eliot and other poets, and twice revealing aspects of Bloom's own relationship with Eliot. In one of these references (cited above, 31) Bloom provides a limited (and limiting) reading of Eliot that focuses on where the ephebe steals from his precursor, rather than how the ephebe's theft catalyses the production of something new. In another, Bloom refers to Shelley, Borges and Eliot as part of the tradition of studying tradition that precedes him. When Bloom situates his own ideas