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Virginia Woolf in the Age of World Literature: *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and Contemporary Global Literature*

The immersive polycentric volume of *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and Contemporary Global Literature* (2021) confirms not only the lasting influence of Virginia Woolf, but also the global engagement with her work and life. Comprising a constellation of worldwide collaborative research, the volume explores the geo-political and aesthetic diversity of critical responses and their implications for the development of the planetary framework in Woolf studies. The volume shows that, indeed, Virginia Woolf prevails in both local and global contact zones.

Planetary and globality are two major overlapping paradigms of *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and Contemporary Global Literature*, edited by Jeanne Dubino, Paulina Pająk, Catherine W. Hollis, Celiese Lypka, and Vara Neverow. The volume originated in the spirit of emancipatory comparative readings dear to Woolf. The twenty-four contributors, among whom are young and mature multilingual writers, artists, teachers, editors and scholars from diverse world communities, form an engaged and inspirational reading public focused on the global contexts of Woolf's connecting presence. Proposing alternative ways to shift the values of intercultural conversations on multiple Woolfs in local as well as global contemporary literatures, the contributors emphasize interconnections and alliances. For them to emerge, unidirectional models of thinking about local and world literatures need to be broken. Accordingly, as we read in the Introduction, the volume is designed to "disrupt the center and periphery binary; by including essays that focus primarily on twentieth- and twenty-first century women and/or queer writers, it offers new models for Woolf global studies and promotes planetary understandings" (4). This declared goal is both original and necessary.

After the global turn, comparative interventions press urgently for new trajectories, new identities, selves, and personalities attuned to the world of “they”. In 2002, contributions reflecting on issues of “our own history, politics, and culture,” examined in *The Reception of Virginia Woolf in Europe*, negotiated the familiar. Though Mary Ann Caws and Nicola Luckhurst asserted Woolf’s position as a “globally important figure” (xix), the large-scale collection they introduced was informed by the desire to change the horizons of the reading public in order to fix the influence of the British iconic author on European culture. *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and Contemporary Global Literature*, acknowledges Woolf’s global importance while adding in relational circulation transnational, transtemporal, and transcultural ideas.

Reading *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and Contemporary Global Literature*, we enter the site of complex ideas that cut across genders, classes, nationalities and histories. They are introduced in highly commendable contributions spreading over four hundred pages. The volume is divided into two parts: the first, “Planetary and Global Receptions of Woolf”, is driven by explorations of Woolf as a “hypercanonical, countercanonical and shadow canonical figure” (5). The second, “Woolf’s Legacies in Literature”, is orchestrated to engage explorations of the legacies of Woolf’s oeuvre in modernist and postmodernist texts, especially in mixed genres and in cosmofeminist texts. The direction from receptions to productions emphasizes the role of the creative impulse of translation as mediation and as an indispensable formative aspect of literature. The volume demonstrates that translation expresses an appetite for the world, triggering processes of transfer(ability) and global dialogues. They have become so animated in Woolf-inspired academic and non-academic conversations that contributors do not hesitate to talk about the global renaissance of her studies.

The authors of *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and Contemporary Global Literature* acknowledge translators as authors performing the roles of critics, creators of the canon, educators, and editors. Translators are acknowledged agents responsible for the words of Woolf and for the mediation of conversations with cultures into which they introduce her oeuvre. Their transgressive work as theory and practice keeps contemporary global literature alive. In her chapter “Virginia Woolf’s Feminist Writing in Estonian Translation Culture”, Raili Marling writes that translation “creates new modes of reading but also new ways of coming together across the limiting national barriers” (155). The work of translation, sometimes mistranslation, slipping into paradoxes and ambiguities, highlights the consciousness of the cultural diversity. In Marling’s words, tracking the multiple histories of translations of Woolf’s work, as well as the interest in translation as an “expression of Woolf’s broader cosmopolitan worldview” (153), contributors to the volume reflect and develop ideas on the cultural turn in translation studies. For example, in her chapter “Virginia Woolf in Arabic”, Hala Kamal emphasizes the role of feminist translators and the strategies, like footnoting, prefacing, and sup-

plementing, which “make themselves and their translation strategies visible in the text” (172). New transgressive textual space instantiates new relationships. Daniel Göske and Christian Weiß in “‘What a Curse These Translators Are!’ Woolf’s Early German Reception” point to the important collaborative nature of translation work, “literary agents, publishers, translators and reviewers, those elusive makers and mediators of world literature” (26). Likewise, in “Solid and Living: The Italian Woolf Renaissance,” Elisa Bolchi, giving particular credit for the Italian Woolf Renaissance to “common and passionate readers”, notes the importance of the agents “who play fundamental roles in the distribution of an author within the marketplace” (183–184). Overall, we get a sense that the contributors adhere to new translation studies; they engage with translation as the creative space where, in the words of Susan Stanford Friedman, “the negotiation between cultural distinctiveness embedded in language is a rich source of new understanding” (313).

A planetary archive, the companion develops strategies proposed by Susan Stanford Friedman in *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity across Time*. As a vision, planetarity is an epistemology directing attention to “modes of local and translocal meaning making and translation, to processes and practices of perception and expression on a global scale” (79). Friedman suggests that *re-vision* (“asking new questions about local/global interrelations”); *recovery* (“the search of new archives outside the Western canon”); *circulation* (“the tracing of networks, linkages and conjunctions on a transcontinental landscape”); and *collage* (“the juxtaposition of different archives or texts for comparative purposes”) (314) can lead to a significant enlargement of the spatial and temporal scale. These strategies, Friedman argues, can help facilitate the “fluid scalar thinking”, a way to get out of the dependence on “the Eurocentric box” (96).

Paulina Pająk, Jeanne Dubino and Catherine W. Hollis’s Introduction posits not only the golden age of Woolf in translation but reminds about the continuity of critical reflection in Woolf studies as well as the global, century-long, history of Woolf. Readers can reference the range of this global engagement from very helpful tables listing the number of editions of Woolf’s works in each language, number of websites on Woolf’s work, and number of studies on Woolf’s work. Compared with the earlier numbers included in *The Reception of Virginia Woolf in Europe*, Woolf’s presence in the twenty-first century has grown remarkably. The scholarly Introduction of *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and Contemporary Global Literature* highlights the rise in Woolf’s participation in global dynamics in the present time of crisis. This is an important clue. In his chapter “From Julia Kristeva to Paulo Mendes Campos: Impossible Conversations with Virginia Woolf”, Davi Pinho explains in connection with Woolfian sense of decisive moments that crisis promises “the potential for our separating, discerning, delimiting, and perhaps deciding our presence in language” (102). Crisis as dynamism features in a recent interview with Judith Butler, where she identifies the present crisis as time of “broader vision”, a time informed by questions of tak-

ing shape, and also of “great despair as we see global economic inequality intensify under the pandemic” (Gleeson 2021). With contradictions in Woolf’s patterns of thought in mind, contributors agree that Woolf provides powerful examples in political engagement against oppression and that her examples are unfailingly inspirational. Following Madelyn Detloff, “Woolf’s anti-imperial, feminist, pacifist, and antihomophobic sentiments” (2) emerge as major sparks sent to future readers. The companion makes it clear that in time of crisis, when literature continues to have political value, we can only gain by probing “Woolf’s global consciousness”, and by looking “*in and around*” Virginia Woolf (Cuddy-Keane 159–160).

In the twentieth century, the reception of Woolf was impacted by political, economic, and cultural forces. In many parts of the world, they were responsible for negligence towards, and even stigmatization of, Woolf’s work. Suzanne Bellamy in “The Reception of Virginia Woolf and Modernism in Early Twentieth-Century Australia” shows that her writing methods and also her politics were at times met with ambivalence. In “Virginia Woolf’s Literary Heritage in Russian Translations and Interpretations”, Maria Bent maps the late arrival of Woolf in Russia, in the 1980s, as a result of Social Realism (1932–1988). Woolf circulated illegally in Germany “under the threat of war” (127) to become “officially banned as an ‘enemy author’” (37) when WWII broke out. She came to a “virtual halt” in Romania under the communist regime and Soviet occupation, as Adriana Varga shows in “The Translation and Reception of Virginia Woolf in Romania (1926–89)” (42). In “Tracing *A Room of One’s Own* in sub-Saharan Africa, 1929–2019”, Jeanne Dubino explores “colonialism and its institutional legacies against Woolf’s broader appeal to sub-Saharan Africa-based writers” (200). When Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo, a sub-Saharan African writer she introduces, wrote about his deplorable condition in prison, he alluded to *A Room of One’s Own*. His writer’s cell was not his own; it was provided by the Kenya government (210). This potent reference speaks volumes about Woolf’s historic trajectories. Elsewhere, the popularity of Woolf coincided with waves of democratization, for example, in Brazil, though it was often challenged by conservative literary traditions, and interrupted in 1964 by the military coup, as Maria A. de Oliveira writes in “Virginia Woolf’s Reception and Impact on Brazilian Women’s Literature”. Justyna Jaguścik concludes her essay “In Search of Spaces of Their Own: Woolf, Feminism and Women’s Poetry from China” with the optimistic view that in the post-Mao era, despite the backlash against women’s emancipation, Woolf will retain her status of “one of the most important feminist mother figures for subsequent generations of Chinese women writers” (326). These cogent essays show that the extensive history of Woolf and her reception allows articulations of global political and religious oppressions and reinterpretations of our understanding of their consequences in contemporary literature.

The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and Contemporary Global Literature traces multiple positive attitudes to Woolf’s work, what Anne-Laure Rigeade theorizes as liberatory “iconic transformation” (378). Woolf invites textual experi-

ments involving non-human lives, as Lourdes Parra-Lazcano writes in his essay “English and Mexican Dogs”. In Patricia Laurence’s “The Dream Work of a Nation: From Virginia Woolf to Elizabeth Bowen to Mary Lavin,” Zhongfeng Huang’s “Rooms of Their Own: A Cross-Cultural Voyage Between Virginia Woolf and the Contemporary Chinese Woman Writer Chen Ran”, Cristina Carluccio’s “Dialogues Between South America and Europe: Victoria Ocampo Channels Virginia Woolf”, and Hogara Matsumoto’s “A New Perspective on Mary Carmichael: Yuriko Miyamoto’s Novels and *A Room of One’s Own*”, we can explore the ways Woolf catalyzes creative activities of her friends and women writers. Woolf enters into dialogues with feminist activists and writers, most recently Olga Tokarczuk from Poland. Paulina Pająk discusses the dimensions of such creative transformations, for example, in the novel *House of Day, House of Night*. Reinventions of Woolf are like bridges or a “guiding intermediary between Woolf and her readers”, as Bethany Layne presents in the example of contemporary biofiction by Maggie Gee, *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* (409). Clarissa Dalloway has become a “global character who migrates and adapts to different geographical and cultural environments,” writes Monica Latham, following Woolf from London to Paris in her essay “Clarissa Dalloway’s Global Itinerary” (367). Woolf “reverberates” in the work of writers and scholars, common and professional readers and because this is a “discontinuous and even contradictory relationship among texts, rather than one of contiguity or of similarity”; as Lindsey Corderey shows, drawing on Gérard Genette’s concept in her “Virginia Woolf’s Enduring Presence in Uruguay” (237), Woolf cannot but emerge as multiple, plural, and contradictory.

In the twenty-first century, Woolf’s texts remain constant reference points. Helpful sites such as nonprofit magazines and independent publications help inspire new generations of writers and scholars. Favourable publishing circumstances in Italy have sparked the “renewed interest” (185), resulting in the creation of The Italian Woolf Community and the active Italian Virginia Woolf Society. In Estonia, the popular “Woolf Group” is creating new vibrant communities. The Woolf Salon Project, which started in 2020, is a very recent global initiative providing an opportunity for Woolf scholars to enter into topical monthly conversations. Woolf’s fourth Salon, introducing participants to *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and Contemporary Global Literature*, is worth following for the additional information on the planetary legacy of Woolf.

What Virginia Woolf wanted was conversation, an unstable way of dwelling together “with time past and future”, as Davi Pinho shows in his penetrating chapter (97). Like Mrs. Crowe from “A Portrait of a Londoner”, Woolf possessed a gift of creating poetics of relation, making the world seem like a community open to diverse affiliations and new creative participants. Ongoing conversations confirm that we “think back through Virginia Woolf” and we “think forward through the literary work currently being done by Woolf’s global progeny” (412), as Catherine W. Hollis writes in the final essay of this indispensable companion.

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