

Aesthetes, ‘A’ Roads and Cricketing Criminals: Annotating *The Voyage Out*.

Emma Sutton

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In ‘How should one read a book?’ Woolf imagines following Donne across London ‘through the paths that lie in the pages of books’; she imagines the ‘vision[s]’ and ‘vistas’ created by a letter or a few sentences and invites readers to follow ‘signs and hints of almost imperceptible fineness, from the twist and turn of the first sentences’ (*E* 5, 574-77). Reading is, Woolf suggests, a form of travel. Editing, like reading, is a voyage – a journey into a text, after which both text and author look rather different than they did before. It’s a matter of following trails, at times clearly visible avenues like the ‘wide pathway’ ‘resembl[ing] a drive in an English forest’ (*VO* 315) that Rachel and Terence follow during the excursion to the ‘native village’, at times hardly discernible so that it becomes hard to know where faint paths end and editorial bushwhacking begins. The editing will, you hope, clear a way for others to follow and extend; the tracks will, you hope, connect to form new networks within the text and beyond it. Familiar critical landmarks you hope will guide you, even as you may travel far from some of them. Wandering and disorientation you hope to avoid, at least for long. And you hope above all to be a good traveller: observant, respectful, attentive, speculative and enquiring but self-effacing. Editing is not the place for the acquisitive travel of Mrs Flushing, the inflexible cultural judgments of her husband, the languid disinterest of Helen Ambrose or the appalled revulsion of St John Hirst from the tropical jungle.

The guidance provided by the general editors of the Cambridge edition of Woolf’s works embraced the parallels between editing and reading, inviting volume editors to attend to Woolf’s own practice as a reader and to heed the writer ‘for whom reading is an activity that requires almost the same talents and energies as the activity of writing itself’ (Goldman and Sellers, ix). CUP’s scholarly edition deals with the first published text of each novel; the volumes are not primarily analyses of the works’ textual history, a particularly thorny problem in the case of *The Voyage Out* with its numerous drafts and false starts. Rather, the Cambridge edition aims to provide a reliable, transparently edited text and to flesh out the social, historical and

literary contexts of the novels – what the general editors termed the works’ ‘possible – and its manifest – cultural and historical referencing’. Editors were asked to provide ‘thorough’ annotation rather than ‘interpretative conclusions’ (Goldman and Sellers, xiii, xv). Of course, differentiating ‘possible’ from ‘manifest’ references, and fact from interpretation in any absolute way is inherently problematic, particularly so in the case of Woolf whose writing relies on what Linden Peach calls ‘cryptographic’, buried traces of contexts, influences, allusions and pre-texts (Peach, 193). The questions of what was relevant, when an allusion was ‘intended’, occupied conversations among the three co-editors – Tuzylina Allan of CUNY, the late Jim Stewart of Dundee and myself.¹ Rather than attempting to offer a nugget of truth about editorial theory and practice today, I hope, by discussing four explanatory notes, simply to convey something of the pleasure of annotating this extraordinary novel and to convey something of the diversity and minutiae of Woolf’s reconfiguring of her immediate historical and literary contexts. In a novel full of set pieces and conversations among the educated, leisured central characters, many of whom are scholars or artists, there are many diegetic mentions of real individuals, historical events, literature and music, cultural ephemera and so on: the allusions, the intertexts, are often closer to the surface in *The Voyage Out* than in some of her later fictions. The novel’s embeddedness in its particular historical moment is obvious. But I think it would be fair to say that even this didn’t prepare us for the scale of the work’s saturation with political, aesthetic and cultural discourses, many of which are presented discreetly and obliquely in the published text, nor did it prepare us for the unexpectedness of some of the cultural contexts to which the novel responds. The general direction of many of the annotations will be unsurprising to many readers – Woolf’s attention to classical literature, Renaissance voyage narratives, imperialism, women’s history and so on are as apparent in *The Voyage Out* as elsewhere in her writing. But today I’d like to mention a few examples that place her first novel in more unexpected matrices.

Let’s begin with a passage from chapter 21 of the novel. The evening after they’ve declared their love, Rachel and Terence ‘crave’ (*VO* 335) Helen’s ‘advice’ about marriage as the three sit in darkness on the steamer:

¹ Jim Stewart tragically died in June 2016, before work on the edition was complete.

[Helen's] face was turned towards Terence, and although he could hardly see her, he believed that her words really covered a genuine desire to know more about him. He raised himself from his semi-recumbent position and proceeded to tell her what she wanted to know. He spoke as lightly as he could in order to take away her depression.

'I'm twenty-seven, and I've about seven hundred a year,' he began. 'My temper is good on the whole, and health excellent, though Hirst detects a gouty tendency. Well, then, I think I'm very intelligent.' He paused as if for confirmation.

Helen agreed.

'Though, unfortunately, rather lazy. I intend to allow Rachel to be a fool if she wants to, and – Do you find me on the whole satisfactory in other respects?' he asked shyly. (*VO* 335)

The content and syntax of this exchange suggest that *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a resonant intertext here. In Wilde's 1895 comedy, Lady Bracknell interrupts Jack Worthing as he proposes to her niece Gwendolen with the instruction "Rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture. It is most indecorous." In the lines that follow, Lady Bracknell demands an account of Jack's income, properties, politics, education and occupations. In the exchange, she commends his smoking (a habit shared by the 'lazy' Terence) since "There are far too many idle men in London as it is" and she approves his 'ignorance' (he tells her he "knows nothing") (Wilde 264-65). Lady Bracknell is certainly a far more formidable literary aunt than Helen Ambrose, but in his self-assessment Terence's remarks closely echo or directly invert Jack Worthing's statements. Woolf seems, that is, to be temporarily aligning her own characters with the mannered Aesthetes of Wilde's comedy: Terence with Jack Worthing, Helen with Lady Bracknell, and Rachel with an unlikely foil - the wordly, assured Gwendolen. The lovers of Woolf's Meredithian social comedy temporarily recall the mannered Aesthetes of Wilde's play.

These syntactic and structural echoes are the legitimate material of 'thorough' annotation since Woolf certainly knew Wilde's plays by this date, but in this context we can also speculate *why* Woolf reworks Wilde's famous comedy at this point. Her evocation of this intertext underscores the artifice of proposals and marriage, the

choreographed conversation again pointing up the social constraints that Rachel and Terence have to negotiate: whereas Wilde's characters do so with insouciance and little sense of real threat, Woolf reminds us of the risks for Rachel in her attempts at self-realisation and in her relationships with others. In particular, Gwendolen's confidence as a practised, socially poised lover points up Rachel's inarticulacy and her vulnerability as a social protagonist. Woolf may also be recalling the instability of conventional gender roles in Wilde's play: during the proposal scene, Gwendolen instructs Jack to kneel, tells him her response before he's proposed and directs his movements. Her independence denies Jack the conventional role of proactive male lover, again contrasting with Rachel's more tentative expressions of female emancipation. The echo of Wilde's play also augments the traces of the literary and social history of homosexuality in the novel – our understanding of Terence and Hirst's friendship may be modulated by the homosocial, for some contemporaries recognisably homosexual, example of Jack and Algernon's 'Bunburying'. And we might also consider the question of genre: Wilde's pre-text reminds us that Woolf's literary models for this novel are dramatic as well as fictional. While Meredith's shadow may be obvious in *The Voyage Out's* tragi-comic mode, it's worth noting that here Woolf flirts with another model of comedy – Wilde's comedies of manners. This passage suggests that Woolf's engagement with *fin-de-siècle* drama was richer and more positive than the 'scorn' with which Steve Ellis rightly observes she often 'effac[ed]' the decadent poets and the 90s generation more broadly (Ellis 58-9).

My second example arises from an apparently inconsequential but awkward exchange in chapter 9 between St John Hirst and Miss Allan. The catalyst for this annotation was a conversational stumble rather than a syntactic echo. Miss Allan observes, "When I think of the Greeks I think of them as naked black men", a remark that Mrs Thornbury turns onto Hirst by asking "And you, Mr Hirst? [...] I'm sure you read everything" (*VO* 125-6). Hirst deflects that line of conversation about Greek men and reading matter with the apparently unrelated answer, "I confine myself to cricket and crime" (*VO* 126). Hirst's remark may simply refer to the crime and cricket columns in the newspapers, heading off a conversation about reading tastes. But the comment and Hirst's reaction to it also suggests it may be an attempt by the older women to enquire about Hirst's sexual orientation, a counterpart to Mr Elliot's unwelcome mention of Wilde at the end of the chapter, at which Hirst 'drew his lips together very tightly and made no reply' (*VO* 135). Furthermore, Hirst's

interest in reading about cricket and crime suggests a couple of sources in popular detective fiction: Conan Doyle, for example, was famously a keen cricketer, and between 1899 and 1907 played 10 first-class matches for the Marylebone Cricket Club. (And Doyle had been a friend of the Stephens, photographed with Thoby in 1896) (Humm, 59). But Hirst's remark also evokes the character A. J. Raffles, the so-called 'gentleman thief' in the popular stories, novel and play by E. W. Hornung (Doyle's brother in law), which appeared from 1898 onwards. Raffles is a keen cricketer who is able to infiltrate country houses and pursue his criminal activities because of the invitations extended on the basis of his cricketing prowess. Hirst, like Woolf, may be more informed about popular writing than is often assumed. If we conclude that Hirst's remark does allude to Raffles, then Hirst's deflection of the enquiry about his sexuality becomes more complicated: in the detective stories Raffles, like Sherlock Holmes, has a faithful companion (Bunny Manders) and their relationship is strikingly homoerotic. Furthermore, the fictional character Raffles was based on the Cambridge-educated criminologist and cricketer George Ives (1867-1950). Ives was a poet, a penal reformer, and a campaigner for gay rights. He was a friend of Wilde and Edward Carpenter, and went on to found the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology in 1913 with Carpenter, Magnus Hirschfeld, Laurence Housman and others (Cook). How far Woolf wishes us to follow these traces is of course a question for editorial judgment and it may well be that this trail will remain in the hinterland of the 'possible' or 'probable' rather than becoming a 'thorough' annotation. But it's suggestive that what began as an annotation extending the web of classical references evoked by Miss Allan's interest in the 'black men' of the black-figure vase painting of sixth-century pre-Christian Greece started to look after some research more firmly like Woolf's oblique reworking of homoerotic subjects in classical art and in contemporary popular fiction.

And my third example: an 'A' road. The prompt for this annotation was the need to document one of the many allusions to Woolf's contemporary historical context. In the second chapter, Mr Pepper delivers 'a disquisition upon the proper method of making roads':

Beginning with the Greeks, who had, he said, many difficulties to contend with, he continued with the Romans, passed to England and the right method, which speedily became the wrong method, and wound up with such a fury of

denunciation directed against the road-makers of the present day in general, and the road-makers of Richmond Park in particular, where Mr Pepper had the habit of cycling every morning before breakfast, that the spoons fairly jingled against the coffee cups, and the insides of at least four rolls mounted in a heap beside Mr Pepper's plate.

'Pebbles!' he concluded, viciously dropping another bread pellet upon the heap. 'The roads of England are mended with pebbles! "With the first heavy rainfall," I've told 'em, "your road will be a swamp." Again and again my words have proved true. But d'you suppose they listen to me when I tell 'em so, when I point out the consequences, the consequences to the public purse, when I recommend 'em to read Coryphaeus? Not a bit of it; they've other interests to attend to. No, Mrs Ambrose, you will form no just opinion of the stupidity of mankind until you have sat upon a Borough Council!' (*VO* 22-23)

This may appear nothing more than another example of the novel's extensive satire of male pedantry and masculine knowledge but I chose it because it suggests Woolf's engagement with the minutiae of quotidian life, and her recognition of its political resonance. Mr Pepper's frustration is informed by recent developments in road maintenance, such as the invention of tarmac that was developed and patented by the civil engineer and County Surveyor Edgar Purnell Hooley in 1901. Hooley patented tarmac in Britain and the US, publishing in British and North American engineering journals articles with such alluring titles as: 'Steam Rolling: With Discussion' (1896), 'Tar and its uses in modern road construction' (1909) and 'Modern Road Repairs' (1910). Hooley's invention allowed for improved road surfaces and, thus, greater speed for drivers as well as increased durability and longevity for the road surfaces. Road maintenance was also very much part of political debate during the composition of the novel as the British government devised a classification scheme for principal and minor roads. Work on classification began in 1913 by the Roads Board to determine the quality and usage of British roads; the work was initially intended to aid decisions about the division of funding between Westminster and local councils, but after the First World War road signs for A and B roads were introduced on atlases and the roads themselves, becoming navigational aids to help motorists. Pepper has clearly been party to these discussions via the Borough Council and his reflection on

Roman road building is unsurprising, given the unusual length and continuity of some of these roads in England; some cover long distances traversing several road numbering zones in the process. And, of course, road building was crucial to the Romanisation of Italy and in the Roman empire; Pepper's rant contributes to the novel's sustained critique of imperialism, manifested for instance through the many references to mapping and topological control of the fictional South American environment and through the Edwardian remodeling of London's public spaces such as the Embankment's monuments to imperial conquest.

To end, I'll briefly mention a much more speculative annotation concerning the novel's colonial contexts. We are becoming accustomed to postcolonial readings of *The Voyage Out* that attend to its representation of a fictionalised South America and of African politics (via the Dreadnought Hoax and the allusions to the Moroccan crisis) but today I want to add to these a less familiar context: the Pacific. This interest arose from the need to provide an annotation on *Robinson Crusoe*, widely recognized as an important intertext for *The Voyage Out*. Woolf's essays on Defoe were not published until the 1920s and 1930s in *The Common Reader*, but she must have known Defoe's archetypal travel narrative long before this - over 700 versions were circulating by the end of the nineteenth century. As I considered the textual relationship, I was struck by Defoe's decision to relocate the events that provided the source for his narrative from the Pacific to the Caribbean. Defoe's novel raises the question of a displaced or erased Pacific, overlaid with other settings - such as the 'South America' of Woolf's first novel?

Most Defoe scholars agree that the individual on whom Defoe based his novel was the Scottish sailor Alexander Selkirk, who spent more than four years as a castaway after being marooned on an uninhabited island (in the Juan Fernández archipelago, off the coast of Chile) in the South Sea, or South Pacific Ocean, between 1704-09. Following Selkirk's return to England, there was extensive interest in his experiences and when Defoe published *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719 the similarities to Selkirk's adventures would have been obvious to many readers, an affinity emphasized by Crusoe's enduring visual iconography. The opening page of the first edition shows Crusoe on a shoreline, guns resting on his shoulders, dressed in shaggy goatskins, with his feet and shins bare. But in Defoe's narrative, Crusoe's island is not in the mid-latitudes of the South Pacific but 2,700 miles away in the Caribbean, a climate in which goat hides would be unbearably stifling dress. This inconsistency is

one piece of evidence supporting the argument that *Crusoe* is based on Selkirk: *Crusoe's* clothing is suited to the original Pacific location rather than the Caribbean where the novel is ostensibly set. It's possible, then, that this archetypal visual image of *Crusoe* is one reason for Woolf's otherwise puzzling decision for Mr Vinrace's trade to rely on the importing of goat skins from South America. Consciously or not, Woolf's choice of goods may be influenced by this detail from Defoe's novel.

What of the relationship between South America and the Pacific in Woolf's novel, then? It's clear that some of Woolf's evocations of the setting are simply generic, suggesting imaginary exotic settings rather than real geographical locations (similarly, the flora and fauna, as the explanatory notes document, are drawn from various Old and New World habitats). However, it's pertinent that during the writing of the novel, Woolf – like many contemporaries – was interested in the Pacific (albeit Polynesia rather than the eastern Pacific) and representations of it. Hermione Lee describes:

the Stephen girls appear[ing] as 'indecent' Gaugin girls at the Post-Impressionist Ball, half-dressed in brightly coloured stuffs from a firm called Burnetts 'made for natives in Africa with which we draped ourselves'. Vanessa recalled: 'we wore brilliant flowers and beads, we browned our legs and arms and had very little on beneath the draperies'. After the ball, they posed for a picture: 'I have to dress up again as a South Sea Savage', Virginia wrote to Molly [MacCarthy], 'Its an awful bore!' (Lee 291)

Lee terms this a 'frivolous example of the European interest in the 'primitive'' (Lee 291) and Jane Goldman rightly draws attention to the 'suspect reinscriptions of sexual/racial stereotypes' exemplified by this fancy dress and the Dreadnought Hoax; however, she also notes that Woolf was 'gleefully exploiting' the subversive challenge to the racist Establishment (Goldman 120). Certainly, this was a provocative and frivolous act yet it doesn't suggest that Woolf's interest in the Pacific was necessarily casual.

We should therefore re-attend to the detail that one of the guests at the Santa Marina hotel is putting the life of Father Damien into verse. As Jane Wheare explains in her notes to *The Voyage Out*:

Father Joseph Damien (1841-89) [was] the Belgian priest who worked at the leper colony on Molokai [Hawaii] from 1873 until his death from the disease. His story is told by R. L. Stevenson (1850-94) in 'Father Damien' (1890). When Woolf visited Florence with the Bells in April 1909 she met a woman poet who had written a life of Father Damien in verse. (Wheare 366)

There was indeed such a poem, as Stuart Clarke has also recently established: the poem, in 11 sections, was published in *'Father Damien' and Other Poems* by Mrs Colin G. Campbell in 1899. Father Damien's case was notorious in the late 1880s and 1890s: his work at Molokai had been attacked by an American Congregationalist missionary, the Revd. C. M. Hyde, in an open letter of 1889 accusing Father Damien of personal and professional failings including the sexual exploitation of women in his care. Stevenson's 1890 open letter (reprinted as a book) did not simply 'tell' Father Damien's 'story': it was an impassioned intervention, so vitriolic that Stevenson claimed it was libelous, and it was reproduced widely in extract and in its entirety (Smith 135-39). Stevenson's letter was a personal attack on Hyde and on what Stevenson saw as the hypocritical material wealth and comfort of missionaries aloof from indigenous Hawaiians; it was informed by Stevenson's extensive knowledge of Pacific languages, cultures and histories, and by interviews with those he visited in Molokai. Thus, during Woolf's youth, Father Damien was something of a cause celebre highlighting the difficulties of cross-cultural encounters in Pacific and, more broadly, colonial contexts: the allusion in Woolf's first novel contributes discreetly to its recording of colonial exploitation across the globe by individuals (such as the bullying Vinrace), nations and institutions (such as the church). Equally pertinently to the concerns of *The Voyage Out*, Hawaii's annexation by the US was one of the most prominent examples of colonisation of Woolf's young adulthood: Stevenson was only one among many Europeans as well as indigenous Pacific islanders who protested against the politically and economically aggressive foreign policies of the global powers in the Pacific at this point. There is more to be said about Woolf's lifelong engagement with Stevenson, who spent the last seven years of his life in the Pacific: Woolf's library includes editions of his travel writing and letters published during the composition of *The Voyage Out*, and she would almost certainly have been aware of his numerous public letters on Pacific subjects in the 1890s. Stevenson's writings on Pacific politics were among the most controversial late-

nineteenth-century examples of a prominent writer's intervention into contemporary political debates, received by many readers as regrettable digressions from his literary gifts and interests (Smith 12-15). His example must have illustrated for Woolf the opportunities and risks for a writer in addressing political scandals - particularly colonial politics - explicitly.

What these details suggest, then, is that during the writing of *The Voyage Out* Woolf was, at the least, aware of European art about Pacific subjects, and of Pacific political controversies and colonial politics, even if few direct references to the Pacific make their way into the novel. She was familiar too with, and influenced by, Defoe's archetypal travel narrative in which an original Pacific setting was overlaid by another location. The Pacific thus contributes to her analysis of international colonialism, even if it is going too far to claim that the Pacific was the starting point behind this postcolonial palimpsest as it was for Defoe. These tantalizing details that evoke Woolf's reflection and digestion of contemporary debates about the Pacific illustrate one of the principal challenges of editing: the challenges of substantiating inferences and of knowing when and where to stop...

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