

Virginia Woolf and/in the World
Review 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. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021.

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Literally speaking, Virginia Woolf was not a woman of the world. Although she travelled abroad quite a lot (to Italy, France, Spain, and Germany, among others [Morris 1993]), Woolf was not a keen traveller. Occasionally, she might have found her foreign destinations beautiful and captivating (particularly Venice which she visited a few times), but most of her stays abroad turned out to be rather disastrous – from her 1906 trip to Greece and Turkey when she struggled with hotel bugs, unintelligible Greeks, and her sick travelling companions, to her 1935 visit to Germany when she found herself waving to (or possibly saluting) the Nazis (Briggs 2005: 13; Lee 1997: 678–9). Often feeling overwhelmed and anxious during her voyages out of the British Isles, she was most comfortable when in Britain. If St Ives was considered comparable to Athens while Canterbury lovelier than Venice (Lee 1997: 229; Derek 2016: 31), it is not surprising why Woolf repeatedly showed preference for the former destinations.

However, Woolf's predominantly "insular" or "domestic" interests (perhaps best exemplified by a dismissive line in *Mrs Dalloway* on the subject of Armenian genocide: "[S]he could feel nothing for the Albanians, or was it the Armenians?" [Woolf 88]) does not mean that the world has remained indifferent or uninterested in the writer and her oeuvre – particularly the present-day world. On the contrary, as the EUP's excellent new companion unambiguously proves, Woolf's presence in global literature is not only widespread and multifaceted but also extraordinarily fruitful.

Expertly co-edited by a group of international scholars (both esteemed figures in the Woolf scholarship such as Jeanne Dubino and Vara Neverow, as well

as junior but already well-established academics such as Paulina Pająk, Catherine W. Hollis, and Celiese Lypka), the volume's departure point is the claim that "[t]oday Woolf is a global icon, a transnational symbol" (2). Though this statement might verge on the cliché (as Woolf's "global status" in literary and visual arts, as well as popular culture has already been thoroughly researched), it soon becomes evident that the volume's editors are not simply interested in tracing or listing more or less straightforward manifestations of Woolf's life and work in present-day literary and cultural practices. While the book does not hide the fact that it wishes to address the writer's worldwide impact, it considers Woolf's influence and legacy in the context of planetary humanism and transnational studies – thus turning the entire monograph into an original and, in some instances, ground-breaking piece of scholarship.

An impressive variety of essays and authors that the book's co-editors have managed to invite to contribute to the volume (twenty-three in total grouped under two major sections titled "Planetary and Global Receptions of Woolf" and "Woolf's Legacies in Literature," respectively) make it impossible to discuss every single contribution in detail. Suffice it to say that they cover an unprecedented array of topics (e.g. translation, intertextuality, feminism), periods (from the late 1920s to the present day), languages (Semitic, Slavic, Romance, Sinitic), and geographical locations (e.g. Central and Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, South America), which testify to Woolf's pre-eminent position in the late 20th- and early 21st-century global cultural imaginary.

True to the generic identity of the "companion," the volume's ambition is to be as broad in its content as possible. However, this desire for all-encompassing diversity may sometimes lead to one calling into question the volume's very coherence. If the first part of the book is thoroughly consistent in its choice of essays (all are concerned with either translation or reception of Woolf's works in different literary and linguistic traditions from the late 1920s to the present), the relationship between individual contributions included in the second part is not always clear or evident – especially given the rather general title of the section, namely "Woolf's Legacies in Literature." It seems tenable to argue that the editors' understanding of "legacy" has been informed by contemporary heritage studies in which heritage is understood as a "meaningful past" (Macdonald 2009: 1) – one that does not only have a direct effect on the present but which, in fact, becomes activated in the present (the editors themselves mention the 2016 conference "Virginia Woolf and Heritage" as having provided an impetus

for their work on the volume). If this is the case, one is surely entitled to inquire whether few book chapters which do not engage with the idea of “legacy” but use it predominantly as a springboard to address other issues and concerns (e.g. the question of genre, influence, etc.) or, alternatively, as a justification to offer a rather conventional (methodologically speaking) comparative analysis should not be grouped under a different heading so as to reveal yet another framework or set of strategies (perhaps not as revolutionary as one might hope) that might be identified in Woolf’s contemporary global presence.

As a matter of fact, the question of coherence is the only domain where some form of criticism can be applied to this otherwise excellent and academically superior collection. This concerns not only the book’s structure (as mentioned before) but also its methodology. Though all the chapters are superb in their own right (original, though-provoking, competent, and highly informative), one might wonder if they fully correspond to the ambitious methodological framework and principles of the book stipulated by its editors in the volume’s introduction – particularly planetarity and transnationalism. If one agrees that planetary aesthetics is about both: the dialogical or the relational and the political (see references to the “Czarny protest” and “Ni una menos” in the introductory section), the latter – understood as the contemporary political and social resonance of Woolf’s ideas – does not seem to be fully or adequately addressed in some of the essays included in the volume. Likewise, its emphasis on transnationalism is somewhat challenged by one’s close scrutiny of individual chapters which unequivocally prioritise one country or one language (especially regarding translation and reception models), rarely seeking truly transnational affinities or solidarities.

Still, the book’s numerous merits should be given the attention they deserve. *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and Contemporary Global Literature* is certainly a major addition to the rich, varied, and highly competitive field of Woolf scholarship, one which is bound to become an indispensable point of reference for any reader who wishes to consider the past and present relationships between the writer and the world.

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