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"Flying Round Her, Across Her, Towards Her in a Pattern": Towards a Materialist Historiography of Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction

Amy Bromley

[T]he sullen intermittent thud made her think that the very earth shook with the hoofs of the horse that was galloping towards her ("Ah, I have only to wait!" she sighed), and it seemed to her that everything had already begun moving, crying, riding, flying round her, across her, towards her in a pattern. [...] Miranda slept in the orchard, or was she asleep or was she not asleep?
Virginia Woolf, "In the Orchard"

There is a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been: its advancement has the structure of awakening.

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

- 1 Virginia Woolf's short story "In the Orchard" was published twice in 1923: in April, T.S. Eliot printed it in *The Criterion*, and in September it was commissioned by Harold Loeb for the American Dada magazine *Broom*. It was never printed by Woolf's own Hogarth Press, where she only published one collection of short stories in her lifetime, entitled *Monday or Tuesday* (1921). Leonard Woolf published a posthumous collection, *A Haunted House*, in 1944, and although the story was available he chose not to include it in this volume. The story has received very little critical attention,¹ but the contexts in which it was originally published are rich with potential readings. This paper therefore takes "In the Orchard" as a case-study through which to begin to re-think the patterns and connections made by Woolf's short stories, reading it as an artefact in juxtaposition with other texts, and as

one which also permeates future moments in Woolf's writing. Contrary to the note in Susan Dick's *Complete Shorter Fiction* (302) and the entry in B.J. Kirkpatrick and Stuart N. Clarke's *Bibliography of Virginia Woolf* (270), which cite it as an unchanged reprint, the story's form undergoes an important change between publication in *The Criterion* and *Broom*. This paper considers the implications of such a typographical and formal change in the contexts of the other pieces in the magazines, and explores its significance in relation to the form of the short story as a "scene making" which is also, for Woolf, a way of writing history.² Finding a way to talk about the history of this story, and about its place in the history of Woolf's works (and in terms of the Modernist short story more generally), requires a critical encounter with the idea of the historical moment itself and with historiography. Walter Benjamin writes that:

Historicism offers the "eternal" image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past. [...] Historicism rightly culminates in universal history. It may be that materialist historiography differs in method more clearly from universal history than from any other kind. Universal history has no theoretical armature. Its procedure is additive: it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time. Materialist historiography, on the other hand, is based on a constructive principle. ("On the Concept of History" 396)

- 2 Rather than assume that there is an historical truth, or true shape of the past that can be accessed and told objectively, Benjamin's materialist historiography pays attention to the fact of the historian's *writing* the past; that is, constructing it as narrative. In doing so, the materialist historiographer does not just "fill empty time" with a story or an explanation, but engages with the past as it concretely exists, and builds a narrative by placing these specific moments in constellation with each other. He does not start from a negative position in which the unknown past must be explained ("filled" with "a mass of data"), but rather from a positive encounter with the artefacts of historical moments which are illuminated in light of each other, and of the historian's own time. In engaging with a writer's body of work, we are writing it in (and in relation to the concerns of) our own time. Taking Benjamin's critical engagement with the concept of history as "theoretical armature," this paper is part of a larger thesis which close-reads the materiality of Woolf's short stories and probes the historical moments which converge in that materiality.³

- 3 The publication of Woolf's short stories in her lifetime alone, and in magazines in particular, brings them into contact with and opens up readings of various modernist moments that are not usually immediately related to Woolf. As will be explored in the case-study of "In the Orchard" (1923), one such juxtaposition is with the Parisian Surrealist avant-garde. This is a connection which has not been made in Woolf Studies and which underpins my larger work-in-progress; Benjamin's materialist historiography also has particular resonance with Surrealist epistemological and phenomenological enquiries.⁴ We might thereby take Woolf's short stories as a case-study in themselves, in order to question what is taken for granted in a linear historicism and canonization of literature, and of the short story in particular. What patterns (concrete and potential) are created by the lines which circumscribe the edges and juxtapositions of these stories? What others could we make, and what would be the effect of reading them in constellation with other modernist moments—for example, with the Surrealist avant-garde? Of course, Benjamin's materialist historiography also allows for juxtapositions which are not limited to modernism, but for the sake of brevity and beginning somewhere, this paper focuses on unexplored connections within modernism. This is of

further importance in thinking through the instability of the stories' generic classification, and carries wider implications for the material history of the (modernist) short story in general.

- 4 For Benjamin, the actuality of a moment's historical existence is in fact indistinguishable from its potential to *become* historical. He writes:

Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal nexus among various moments in history. But no state of affairs having causal significance is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. The historian who proceeds from this consideration ceases to tell the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. He grasps the constellation into which his own era has entered, along with a very specific earlier one. ("On the Concept of History" 397)⁵

- 5 To consider the history of Woolf's short works as moments capable of being read in constellation—with each other and with other, lateral moments, including our own present in which we are reading them—is in keeping with Woolf's own desire to avoid prescriptive boundaries of genre and form.⁶ From the vantage point of our "now-time,"⁷ this would be to reject a reading which places them in a relationship of linear progression, or indeed regression, with regard to experimentalism and which links them solely to her novels. To read Woolf's short stories as existing always in a state of potentiality is not to remove the stories from their historical situations, but rather to make those contexts permeate them on a number of levels. Benjamin writes that:

[The historical materialist] takes cognizance of [the historical object] in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history; thus, he blasts a specific life out of the era, a specific work out of the lifework. As a result of this method, the lifework is both preserved and sublated in the work, the era in the lifework, and the entire course of history in the era. The nourishing fruit of what is historically understood contains time in its interior as a precious but tasteless seed. ("On the Concept of History" 396. Italics in original.)

- 6 This raises the possibility of drawing out specific contexts in specific readings and opens up questions in terms of the ways in which we think about a writer's oeuvre, and about the pictures and patterns we form in reading them. These approaches are not neutral (there can be no such thing), as Christine Reynier points out: they are "always already critical stances," with aesthetic and perhaps political implications (7).
- 7 If "the short story encapsulates the essence of literary modernism, and has an enduring ability to capture the episodic nature of twentieth-century experience" (Head 1), this suggests that modernism itself (so far as we can locate "the essence of literary modernism") takes the form of the short story. "The modernist short story," then, might be a somewhat tautological categorization. Aside from the difficulty of defining "modernism" and "the modernist short story," Virginia Woolf's stories in particular cannot be easily categorised or historicized; nor can they be easily defined in terms of genre. It has been argued convincingly that the term "story" is itself misapplied.⁸ These difficulties are testified by the fact that there have been, to date, only three book-length studies and a collection of essays on Woolf's short fiction.⁹ Jean Guiguet's 1965 study tackles Woolf's oeuvre in its entirety, placing the short stories in the context of the other works. He divides the stories into three groups by publication date: 1917-1921 (the most experimental); 1927-1929 (the "Mrs Dalloway" stories, more concerned with character); and 1938-1940 (the more conventionally realist "late style").¹⁰ These configurations prove reductive, presupposing as they do a teleological progression or regression of

experimentalism in parallel with Woolf's novelistic work.¹¹ Recognizing the inadequacy of this approach, he discards it in the same chapter, noting that: "If, indeed, they may have served as [experimental] exercises [in relation to her novels], they are something more than that" (331). He re-arranges the stories by formal and thematic properties, which also proves to be inconclusive. Dean R. Baldwin adapts Guiguet's periodization of the stories for his own study, in which he acknowledges, but exempts himself from addressing, the question of genre. He declaredly works on the basis of Susan Dick's choices in her 1989 edition of *The Complete Shorter Fiction* which, as Reynier points out, is not the final word and other texts have since been found (7).

- 8 There is, then, no single way of completing a project which attempts to categorize Woolf's short stories; to identify them as such, or to identify a "Woolfian short story."¹² What emerges through these attempts is the opportunity for a material historiography which would "blast open the continuum of history" (Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" 396). These stories can (be made to) link with each other in a multiplicity of ways, and no single act of organization and taking stock is ever going to be conclusive.¹³ Following Benjamin, a reading of the material specificity of their historical moments would break individual stories out of a narrative which circumscribes them in a certain temporal and artistic place: in Woolf's oeuvre; in relation to her novels, as more or less experimental; or as part of a particularly British, High Modernist, Bloomsbury aesthetic. They do not lose their historical situations, but those situations become less limited by a linear, causal progression.

Case-Study: "In the Orchard" (1923)

- 9 Only eighteen stories were published in Woolf's lifetime, of which the Hogarth Press collection *Monday or Tuesday* (1921) contained eight.¹⁴ Magazine publications therefore account for more than half of the primary publications of Woolf's short stories. It is important to engage with these publications as material artefacts in our present readings of Woolf, not only in light of their quantitative significance, but in the sense that magazines themselves visibly bring together numerous artists and pieces in a constellatory way, or in "networked collaboration" (Timms, in Brooker and Thacker 1021). As Edward Timms points out, T.S. Eliot's *Criterion* was explicitly conceived as "a 'phalanx' of the 'best minds,' including English, American and European authors."¹⁵ "In the Orchard" was published in *The Criterion* in April 1923, in the company of pieces including Koteliansky's translation of "Two unpublished letters of F. Dostoevsky," Herbert Read's "The Nature of Metaphysical Poetry," and Paul Valéry's "The Serpent."¹⁶ Woolf had been corresponding with Eliot about the story since April 1922, when she writes:

I won't anyhow send you anything now. I'm trying to finish off, and send to the printer, a long story ["Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street," published in *The Dial* in July 1923]; and though I mean to do this in 3 weeks most likely it will take six. If I can, I will try and write something, less than 5,000 words, by Aug. 15th: I should very much like to be edited by you, but you know how ticklish these things are. When one wants to write, one can't. Anyhow, you will not only have to fix the length—you will have to be sincere, and severe. I can never tell whether I'm good or bad; and I promise I shall respect you all the more for tearing me up and throwing me into the wastepaper basket. When are we to see your poem [*The Waste Land*]?-and then I can have a fling at you. (*Letters* II 521)

10 This specific context and the pieces with which "In the Orchard" is juxtaposed emphasize particular intertextual connections in the story itself: for example, in *Criterion*, the Biblical resonances of the scene are illuminated in light of the serpentine imagery and the persuasive voice of the snake in Valéry's poem. Its opening line, "Among the trees, the breeze lulls" (267), could be describing the same setting as Woolf's story. Before reading any further, it should be made clear that the intention here is not to suggest that the other pieces in the issues are only there to work for Woolf's story; due to the constraints of this paper and in making "In the Orchard" a case study, there is a danger of projecting a Woolf-centric reading onto the magazines. We have to take our bearings from somewhere, however, and in opening up potential readings of Woolf's story in this specific context, by implication the same could be done for each piece in the issue, or in the whole run of the magazine, or between other magazines. The idea of the configuration is obviously not supposed to be centred on one piece, but in a paper of this length, it can only begin there. The connections made also need to be analysed in terms of their wider aesthetic and political implications.¹⁷

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11 That the issue will be read from cover to cover, in the order of the contents page, and in one sitting, is by no means a safe assumption to make; indeed the freedom of readers' choices and the potential for re-arranging linear models are crucial in a Benjaminian reading: he writes that "each 'now' is the now of a particular recognizability" (*Arcades Project* 463). The order in which the pieces in the issue are read, whether they are all read, and where and when they are read, all play a role in bringing out each specific reading. There are infinite variations, and we can only ever approach, or move towards a materialist historiography that is one of many. The unwritten potentials are, at the same time, somehow implied in the writing of (this) one. A full study of the story in the context of each piece in both *Criterion* and *Broom* is far beyond the scope of this article (and perhaps not a desirable task for either reader or writer), so it will be read mainly in the context of one piece from each magazine. In doing so, we can begin to map out potential connections at the same time as actualizing certain readings by mining the finer details of a particular material situation.

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12 Paul Valéry's poem, "The Serpent," was published at one article's remove from Woolf's story in *Criterion*.¹⁸ This was a piece which evidently intrigued Woolf, since she asked Eliot for a copy of the translation before correcting her final proofs, which he sent to her in January 1923:

I am sending you herewith a proof of "In the Orchard" [...] I am also sending, as I promised, a galley proof of the translation of Valéry's poem [*Le Serpent*] which I discussed with you and Leonard. The thing looks perhaps a little preposterous unless one has a French version with which to compare it. I don't think that the translation has enough strength to stand entirely on its own legs and I should have liked to print the French text in *Criterion* as well. [...] I shall send you in a day or two a copy of the original edition, now out of print. (27)

13 The translation in question is Mark Wardle's, and although the original French did not appear in *Criterion*, this letter suggests that Woolf had read both. The question of

translation is pertinent to "In the Orchard," which quotes from Pierre Loti's *Ramuntcho* (1897), a romantic novel set in the French Basque Country; there was a film adaptation in 1918 by Jacques de Baroncelli, and a theatre production in Paris in 1910, but there is no evidence that Woolf had seen either. Although the question of direct influence is not being raised here, there is a linguistic resonance between the lines that Woolf quotes from Loti and the French text of *Le Serpent*: Miranda's dreaming repetition of the lines "le rire des filles... éclate... éclate... éclate..." (150)¹⁹ chimes with Valéry's third and fourth lines "Un sourire, que la dent perce/ Et qu'elle éclaire d'appétits" (177), after which the word "éclatante" also appears on the next page (line 21, 179). In Woolf's text, in its situation in this particular magazine, Loti's and Valéry's texts collide, bringing together two distinct literary and historical moments to be illuminated in a constellatory reading.

- 14 Following the order of contents, the Edenic note of "In the Orchard" is retrospectively heightened as we read "The Serpent" and begin to reflect on the image of a woman tasting forbidden knowledge in the shade of an apple-tree. Reading "In the Orchard" as a re-telling of the story of Genesis by contact with Valéry's poem, the Fall that it depicts is both the story of a falling asleep and of an awakening from a dream; the Fall of mankind is also a fall into language and sexual awareness. Eve is seduced by the language of the snake as she is sleeping, and in Woolf's story Miranda also appears to be under the influence of words:

Miranda slept in the orchard, lying in a long chair beneath the apple-tree. Her book had fallen into the grass, and her finger seemed to point at the sentence "Ce pays est vraiment un des coins du monde où le rire des filles éclate le mieux..." as if she had fallen asleep just there. (CSF, 149)

- 15 Is the location of the "just there" the orchard, or is it "the corner of the world where the laughter of girls glitters best"?²⁰ In her story, Woolf presents us with the scene told three times each with different emphasis and perspective: each scene begins with the phrase "Miranda slept in the orchard," and the reader is then placed in differing degrees of proximity to Miranda by changing linguistic positions. The descriptive instability of this scene ("her finger *seemed* to point") is repeated in the subsequent tellings: "Miranda slept in the orchard—or *perhaps* she was not asleep, for her lips moved very slightly *as if* they were saying [...]" (150; my italics); "Miranda slept in the orchard, *or was she asleep or was she not asleep?*" (150; my italics). In the *Criterion* version (reprinted in the collected editions),²¹ there is a single-line gap between each telling. We might ask what goes on in the spaces, where Woolf appears (as an absent presence) to be shifting focus; beginning each scene with a different tense and from an altered linguistic and narratological position. The gaps which frame each telling both break up and join together this story's re-writing of the same scene; in fact, we might ask whether these should be read as three tellings of the same scene, or as three different scenes. Can this be called one short story, or is it a triad, or a series? In the version printed in *Broom* a few months later, however, these gaps do not exist. Whether closed by Woolf or by the editors it is unclear, but this typographical variant changes the stylistic and formal qualities of the entire story. As three separate scenes, the altered linguistic positions are concrete, immediately identifiable changes; as a prolonged piece of prose, the shifts are more slippery. In *Broom* the closing of the gaps is curious, since the spaces create a cinematic effect of cutting and changing of scene which would have been particularly apt in this publication, as we will

see. Their absence does, however, bring out another more dreamlike quality to the story's repetitious form.

- 16 The uncertainty about states of consciousness, straddling the threshold between the waking world and the reverie, plays into Surrealist epistemological and aesthetic encounters with the world. The Surrealist group around André Breton in Paris were interested in the collision of the dream consciousness and the everyday experience of the world. By destabilising the distinction between the two, they created works under the idea "that whatever *might* exist destroys at every step whatever does exist" (Breton 20; my italics). This was also an agitative political movement, which hoped that the re-contextualisation of materials by the emancipated imagination would lead to a collective revolution in consciousness and, ultimately, a reconstitution of the material world.²² Philippe Soupault was one of the most prominent Surrealists, who were inspired by Valéry and Apollinaire: all three feature in these issues of *Criterion* and *Broom*. Although their presence in these publications presents a strong likelihood that Woolf knew about Surrealism, there is no mention of the word "Surrealism" in any of her letters or diaries, nor references to Breton or any of the Parisian group. In their contents, however, these magazines position Woolf in the company of the Parisian avant-garde; perhaps with an understanding of her as part of the British contingent: Herbert Read, whose essay "On the Nature of Metaphysical Poetry" follows Woolf's in *Criterion*, was a figurehead of the Surrealist movement in England during the 1930s, and socialized in the peripheries of Woolf's circle.²³ She was in contact with Read, as well as with Roland Penrose and David Gascoyne who held a Surrealist exhibition in London in 1936.²⁴ Woolf makes no specific mention of this exhibition and would not have attended since she was absent from London altogether, recovering from illness. It is likely that others in the Bloomsbury group did attend, however, and that they would have talked about it. It is also likely that she knew some Surrealist cinema, at the very least through her brother-in-law Clive Bell, who was a "self-proclaimed English expert on the movement." (Hankins qtd. in Humm 361). The Woolfs also owned books by two of the most (initially) prominent Parisian Surrealists: Louis Aragon's *Paysan de Paris* and René Crevel's *Mon corps et moi*, as well as works that the Surrealists themselves were influenced by, including the Comte de Lautréamont's *Les chants de Maldoror* and Arthur Rimbaud's *Oeuvres: vers et proses*.²⁵ Since I am not positing any direct influence or cross-fertilisation between Woolf and the Surrealists, but rather juxtaposing parallel modernist visions, her awareness of the texts that the Surrealists were reading is in fact more appropriate than would be an overt knowledge of the movement itself: the Surrealist trope of the chance encounter is itself mirrored in a Benjaminian materialist historiography.

- 17 In superimposing one reality on top of another, the Surrealists' experiments were both visual and linguistic, and they were interested in the materiality of the signifier in a way that is also present in Woolf's work. In her shifting narrative positions in "In the Orchard," Woolf is playing with the specifically *linguistic* construction of a scene (or scenes). In her memoir, "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf writes about her impulse to "scene making" as a way of experiencing a particular reality, indeed as the form in which reality is preserved in her historiographical practice:

[W]hatever the reason may be, I find that scene making is my natural way of marking the past. A scene always comes to the top; arranged; representative. This confirms me in my instinctive notion—it is irrational, it will not stand argument—that we are sealed vessels afloat upon what it is convenient to call reality; at some moments, without a reason, without an effort, the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality; that is a scene—for they would not survive entire so many years unless they were made of something permanent; that is a proof of their "reality." (*Moments of Being* 145)

- 18 The idea of reality flooding in is a Surreal image in the sense that it shows a barrier between the external and subjective worlds being broken down, and the mingling of two realities. These moments where the exterior world intrudes with a shock are particularly able to be manifested and preserved in the form of a scene. Woolf writes that, "the shock-receiving capacity is what makes me a writer. [...] It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole" (*Moments of Being* 85). This is particularly fitting to the short story form and to Surrealism. It has to be noted, however, that it does not follow that these are the most profound experiences—the scene is only capable of capturing the superficial or the sensory. Woolf notes that "scenes [...] seldom illustrate my relation with Vanessa [Bell, her sister]; it has been too deep for 'scenes'" (*Moments of Being* 146). Woolf suggests in this memoir that her historiographical practice, her recording of experience and the past so far as it *can* be written, expresses itself in the short story form. It is one which, in her hands, often presents nothing more than a scene, and which is particularly able to manifest the Surreal image and experience of the "moment of being." In the case of "In the Orchard," it is a scene told three times, in which the practice of writing takes on the simultaneous functions of recording and of manipulation and re-contextualisation.
- 19 The story shows Woolf editing before the reader's eyes; testing ways of framing; bringing out certain aspects and diminishing others. Her typographical and grammatical use of brackets performs further parenthetical editing, by which she compresses certain points and re-frames others. In the first telling, she repetitiously describes "the school-children saying the multiplication table in unison, stopped by the teacher, scolded, and beginning to say the multiplication table over again" (CSF, 149). In the second telling, the emphasis shifts to the interiority of the character Miranda: "She smiled and let her body sink all its weight on to the enormous earth which rises, she thought, to carry me on its back as if I were a leaf, or a queen (here the children said the multiplication table) (71)." The brackets introduce a break in Miranda's interior discourse, containing a level of reference back to the first telling and emphasising the re-framing of the narrative focus. This is a technique that Woolf repeats throughout the story, referring back and recalling another frame of reference, but also highlighting the process of syntactical editing that she is performing.
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- 20 The printing of "In the Orchard" in *Broom* not only focuses the idea of the dream by closing the gaps between tellings, but in the context of the pieces with which it is juxtaposed, also evokes a cinematic language of interpretation; Woolf's linguistic modifications can be said to mimic shifting focus and camera angles, where the line breaks present in *Criterion* would have marked a cut and new take. Although this is not the case in the *Broom* version, its place in that magazine still allows us to read it in terms of the cinema (and to project such a reading onto the *Criterion* one: they become,

however, two very different films). The shifting focus becomes more fluid and dreamlike in *Broom*, perhaps more in the vein of Surrealist cinema. The story is directly preceded by Philippe Soupault's essay, "The U. S. A. Cinema," which is also the first piece in the issue, setting the cinematic theme which is then continued by essays such as "Motion Picture Dynamics" by Robert Alden Sanborn.²⁶ Soupault writes about the dawning realisation of the importance of cinema as an art form, and the beginning of its use poetically rather than as "a perfected mechanical toy" (66). This resonates with the closing of the gaps in Woolf's story, which allows it to flow more naturally rather than foregrounding the mechanics of the writerly manipulation of language.²⁷

- 21 The constellations made in *Criterion* and *Broom* not only open points of connection out from Woolf's work, but also take us back into her own oeuvre, making internal connections which are not based on a formalist idea of development towards the more or less experimental. The associated setting of the Garden of Eden in *Criterion* links "In the Orchard" to the loss of innocence and the Fall into language: in this light, the story also foreshadowingly echoes scenes from Woolf's 1931 novel, *The Waves*. The story's description of setting "compacted by the orchard walls" (CSF, 151) resonates with Bernard's description of "Elvedon," where "the lady sits between the two long windows, writing" rather than reading (*The Waves*, 11):

Now we have fallen through the tree-tops to the earth. The air no longer rolls its long, unhappy purple waves over us. We touch earth; we tread ground. [...] Now we are in the ringed wood with the wall round it. This is Elvedon. [...] Now we wake the sleeping daws who have never seen the human form; now we tread on rotten oak apples, red with age and slippery. (11)

- 22 This is one of many potential connections that can be made with Woolf's other works through associations external to her oeuvre, made by juxtaposition with other writers and texts in the context of the magazine. There are also resonances with *Orlando: A Biography* in the description of Miranda's dream of the sea, interrupted by the feeling of ecstasy:

[H]er fingers relaxed and her lips closed gently as if she were floating on the sea, and then, when the shout of the drunken man sounded overhead, she drew breath with an extraordinary ecstasy, for she thought that she heard life itself crying out. (CSF, 150)

- 23 The juxtaposition of the story with Valéry's poem, "The Serpent," might lead us more quickly to the Hyde Park scene in *Orlando* by linguistic association:

If one looks at the Serpentine in this state of mind, the waves soon become just as big as the waves on the Atlantic; the toy boats become indistinguishable from ocean liners. [...] "Ecstasy!" she cried. "Ecstasy!" [...] And repeating "A toy boat on the Serpentine," and "Ecstasy," alternately, for the thoughts were interchangeable and meant exactly the same thing. (*Orlando* 187-188)

- 24 This type of association by conflating and condensing ideas through signifiers (including the sound or shape of words) is one of the principles of Sigmund Freud's structure of the dreamwork, which hugely influenced Surrealist practices.²⁸ The means of writing history in this constellatory way, following Benjamin, is also in line with the Surrealist imagination and its shaping of the material realities that it encounters. To point in conclusion to the implications of a Benjaminian, Surrealist, constellatory materialist

historiography of the stories as a body of work, we might ask, "How does this play into the future situations of Woolf's texts in published editions?" Discounting anthologies with other writers for the moment (as potentially infinite configurations), how do we account for layers of history which might only become visible at certain moments, in certain contexts? Benjamin writes that:

[T]he historical index of images not only says that they belong to a particular time; it says, above all, that they attain to legibility only at a particular time. And, indeed, this acceding to "legibility" constitutes a critical point in the movement at their interior. Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each "now" is the now of a particular recognizability. In it, truth is charged to the bursting point with time. (*Arcades Project* 463)

- 25 What is it about this present moment that allows me to read "In the Orchard" as a Surrealist text? Considering the variety of potential places of publication and patterns of collection, this analysis is of particularly illuminating and exciting significance to critical and theoretical engagement with the short story. In reading the form as a manifestation of the moment of being, as a scene making which absorbs a shock or captures a moment and makes it (become) historical, what happens when we juxtapose these "moments" as historical material artefacts, and what emerges from them when we place them in different patterns of relation? What can we read in them, or what images are released by the light of chance encounters, when "thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions" (Benjamin, *Arcades Project* 464)? In terms of Woolf's oeuvre specifically, by rejecting a determined historical path of experimental progress or diminution (as was the prominent critical impetus behind initial studies such as Baldwin's and Guiguet's), we might take license to read them in juxtaposition with other, parallel moments of significance—for example with the Surrealist avant-garde—and it is hoped that we might thereby break them out of (and at the same time reinvigorate as moments themselves) Bloomsbury High Modernism, the Hogarth Press and the Modernist market, to mention a few contexts usually invoked in biographical and chronological readings of Woolf's short stories.²⁹ These have analogues in the study of the short story more generally, and as suggested here, we need to look at those contexts more closely, not in order to establish a "truth" about them, but to raise the possibility of a "unique experience with the past" (Benjamin "On the Subject of History" 396) in the connections that can be made, and the configurations in which we (can) read and write their history.

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NOTES

1. I have found only two articles with the story in their title: See Cavicchioli and Bonadei.
2. See "A Sketch of the Past" (145), below.
3. Other critics have made links between Woolf and Benjamin. Angeliki Spiropoulou's sustained study of Woolf and historiography posits Benjamin as a critical and theoretical framework for Woolf's concern with historical narratives. While Spiropoulou mainly focuses on the novels, I would argue that her work lays a crucial foundation on which to build an analysis of the short stories. See *Virginia Woolf, Modernity and History: Constellations with Walter Benjamin* (2010). See also Pamela Caughie (ed.), *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (2000).
4. See Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" (1929; 2006).
5. See also Giorgio Agamben: "at the limit, pure potentiality and pure actuality are indistinguishable" (47).
6. The major studies of Woolf's short fiction (as they define it) touch on the issue of genre, but as yet there is no sustained analysis of the question. See Reynier, Benzel and Hoberman, Baldwin (1989), Guiguet and Škrbić. For Woolf this unfixed state has a political feminist and socialist point as well as an aesthetic one: see Benzel and Hoberman. The implications of reading Woolf through Benjamin for the politics of her short stories will be a crucial consideration of the larger project.
7. Benjamin continues his section on the constellation with his concept of "messianic time," with which there is not space to deal fully in this paper, but which is important for the idea of the present as "now-time": "Thus, [the historical materialist] establishes a conception of the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time" ("On the Concept of History" 397).
8. See Reynier (8-10).
9. This is not to discount the numerous articles on individual stories, but to point out the lack of (the possibility of) a conclusive, systematic study of the short fiction as a body of work. See Note 2 above (excepting Guiguet, which refers to a cursory chapter in a larger work focused mainly on the novels).
10. Guiguet (329-43). On Woolf's late novelistic style and political aesthetics, see Wood.
11. Guiguet writes: "Although these dates only enable one to give a rough estimate of the time of writing, they correspond too closely to the periods of exploration in Virginia Woolf's career for the coincidence to be a fortuitous one" (330).
12. See Reynier (7).
13. See Reynier, Guiguet and Baldwin (1989).
14. Case-studies of *Monday or Tuesday* (1921), *Two Stories* (1917) and *Kew Gardens* (1919) are part of current work in progress. Although published under the auspices of the Hogarth Press, *Monday or Tuesday* was not actually printed there—it was set by F.T. McDermott and The Prompt Press, albeit with great difficulty due to the woodcuts. The only works of her own that Woolf set the type for were *Two Stories*, *Kew Gardens* and *On Being Ill* (1930). See Rhein and Leonard Woolf.

15. See also Jason Harding, "The Idea of a Literary Review: T. S. Eliot and *The Criterion*," (Brooker and Thacker 346-63; and Harding).
16. Full contents:
 Charles Whibley, "Bolingbroke," Essay, 203-216.
 F. M. Dostoevsky, S. S. Koteliansky (translator), "Two Unpublished Letters of F. Dostoevsky," Letters, 217-226.
 Julien Benda, "A Preface," Dialogue, 227-242.
 Virginia Woolf, "In the Orchard," Story, 243-245.
 Herbert Read, "The Nature of Metaphysical Poetry," Essay, 246-266.
 Paul Valéry, "The Serpent," Poem, 267-276.
 Antonio Marichalar, Mde S. A. Middleton (translator), "Contemporary Spanish Literature," Essay, 277-292.
 B. M. Goold-Adams, "The Obsequies," Story, 293-302.
 T. S. Eliot, "Dramatis Personæ," Essay, 303-306.
 Various, "Foreign Reviews," Review, 308-313.
17. See note 5, above.
18. The piece separating them was Herbert Read's "On the Nature of Metaphysical Poetry," which makes significant references to Milton.
19. For ease of reference and consistency, I have given page numbers from Susan Dick's edition rather than from the magazines.
20. My translation.
21. See Dick, Kemp and Bradshaw.
22. See also Durozoi.
23. On this matter, see Ray.
24. See Penrose.
25. The digitised catalogue of the Woolfs' library is available at: *The Library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf: A Short-title Catalogue*, ed. Julia King and Laila Miletic-Vezjovic.
26. Full digitised copy available at: Blue Mountain Project: Historic Avant-Garde Periodicals for Digital Research: Princeton University. See *Broom* 5.2.
27. The cinematic quality of Woolf's work in general has been analyzed by many critics. See Hankins (351-375).
28. See Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), and on his influence on the Surrealists see Durozoi.
29. See, for example, Baldwin (*Art and Commerce*) and Hunter.

ABSTRACTS

Cet article présente une analyse du récit bref "In the Orchard," de Virginia Woolf, revenant tout d'abord sur ses premières apparitions (dans les revues *Criterion* et *Broom*) avant d'étudier sa dimension visuelle. En liant le récit de Woolf au mouvement surréaliste, cette contribution propose un point de vue alternatif sur les nouvelles de l'écrivaine, telles qu'elles ont été étudiées jusqu'à présent, et revient plus spécifiquement sur leur appartenance au genre. L'étude se base sur les concepts de Walter Benjamin d'historiographie matérialiste et de constellation – qui ont eux-aussi été influencés par les pratiques et les stratégies esthétiques surréalistes – afin de

suggérer la possibilité d'établir de nouveaux rapports entre les textes de Woolf lorsque l'on introduit des cadres historiques et culturels différents pour étudier son œuvre.

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