

Breaking The Waves

How Virginia Woolf righted 'one chapter gone wrong'

EDWARD MENDELSON

While correcting proofs of *The Waves* in 1931, Virginia Woolf was, as she reported to her friend, the composer Ethel Smyth on August 16, in a desperate grapple with the last pages of that wearysome book: I shall finish tomorrow; but must then go through all the corrections again, copy into a second proof, and finally get a revision of one chapter gone wrong.

Scholars have deduced that the "chapter gone wrong" was the last chapter of the book, and the place where it went wrong was almost certainly in the long paragraph that begins with Bernard thinking, "This fitful gust blowing so sharp and cold" on page 300. Woolf had given another friend, Hugh Walpole, a copy of the uncorrected proofs in which the leaf for pages 301 and 302 had been removed. (These proofs are now in the Mortimer Rare Book Room at the Smith College Library.) In the uncorrected proofs, after the gap left by the missing two pages, the text resumes on page 303, eleven lines below the point where the corresponding text occurs in the published book. This suggests that Woolf had fulfilled her intention to "get a revision" by reducing the text on the removed pages by eleven lines of type.

Her revision has now been found, and, as expected, it reduces the original text by eleven lines. A complete set of corrected proofs, marked by Woolf for use in typesetting the American edition of *The Waves*, published by Harcourt, Brace, is in the Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscript Library. The proofs were acquired in 2016-17 as part of a collection of papers of Donald C. Brace, the founder of Harcourt, Brace, donated by his granddaughter Katharine Consenza Butler. The collection was acquired by Karla Nielsen, then Curator of Literature at the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at Columbia, now Senior Curator at the library at the Huntington, who told me about it at a chance meeting a short while ago.

The collection includes, among many other documents, two further sets of proofs sent to Brace by Leonard and Virginia Woolf. One is a set of proofs corrected in her hand for use in setting the American edition of *The Common Reader: Second series* (1932). A similar set of corrected proofs of the first series of *The Common Reader* is in the Smith College Library, together with the unmarked proofs of *The Waves*, both long been known to scholars. Other sets of proofs that Woolf marked and sent to Brace include *Mrs Dalloway*, at the Lilly Library, and *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando*, both at Smith. Sets of unmarked proofs of *Flush* and *The Years* are also at Smith; a set of unmarked proofs of *Orlando* is at the University of Texas; and a second set of unmarked proofs of *The Years* is in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library.

Stuart N. Clarke compiled a list of variants in the Smith College proofs of the first series of *The Common Reader*, published as a supplement to the *Virginia Woolf Bulletin*, No. 36, January 2011. His widely mourned death earlier this year leaves the task of compiling a similar list of variants in the proofs of the *Second Series* to another hand.

The third set of proofs at Columbia is a set of unbound signatures of the British edition of



"Still life: Jug and eggs" by Roger Fry, 1911

Orlando, evidently one of six such sets sent to Brace for use by his "travellers" (see page lxvii of the edition of *Orlando* by Suzanne Raitt and Ian Blyth in the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Virginia Woolf, 2018). The *Orlando* proofs are listed in the Columbia catalogue as uncorrected, and they have no markings by the author. But they have at least one correction, made to the index by an unknown hand. Woolf seems to have sent these proofs to Brace on July 22, 1928, with a brief covering letter (published in the *Virginia Woolf Bulletin*, May 2025) reporting that she had rewritten page 269 and added an index. A comparison between these proofs and the published edition may perhaps reveal which of Woolf's late revisions were her final ones.

A finding aid for the Donald Brace papers is easily available through the online catalogue of the Columbia University Library, but, as far as I know, the three sets of proofs have not been mentioned in print or online, except in the finding aid.

A third set of proofs of *The Waves*, the set that Virginia Woolf marked for the British edition of the novel, published by the Woolfs' Hogarth Press, has been lost, so the proofs at Columbia are the only written record of her late revisions. The edition of *The Waves* in the Cambridge Edition (2011), edited by Michael Herbert and Susan Sellers, by necessity reports only the uncorrected proofs at Smith.

Woolf's revision to the chapter gone wrong occurs in the middle of a paragraph where Bernard remembers a visit he tried to make to Rhoda and Louis when they were lovers sharing a flat. He begins by imagining Rhoda's awkwardness with the tea-kettle and staring out over the slate roofs. As he arrives at the door, fantasizing about Rhoda, the unrevised text reads:

She parted the curtain to look at the night. 'Away!' she said. 'The moor is dark beneath the moon!' (I knocked and waited) and then perhaps told him some story, for instance, of women in Holborn wearing false noses - she had seen them. How lovely is the privacy of those to whom the world has given so much strife! I waited. Louis perhaps poured out milk in a saucer for the cat; Louis, whose bony hands shut like the sides of a dock closing themselves with a slow anguish of effort upon an enormous tumult of waters, who knew what has been said by the Egyptian, the Indian, by men with high cheek-bones and solitaires in hair shirts! Then taking a fine nib and dipping it in red ink, proceeds to rule straight lines for this infinitely various, vagulous, uncharted and unsounded life. I rang; I waited. And Rhoda flings wide the window and cries 'Away! The moor is dark beneath the moon. The gathering winds will call the darkness soon.' I knocked: I waited; there was no answer.

Woolf revised this in two ways. First, she changed the parenthesis "(I knocked and waited)" to "(I rang, I waited)" and followed the parenthesis with a full stop, ending the sentence after "waited"; she also removed the thirty-eight words from "and then perhaps told" through "strife! I waited".

Second, she made another cut later in the passage, but then restored part of it. She began by

following "tumult of waters" with a full stop instead of a comma, and deleted everything from "who knew what" through "the darkness soon". Finally, she restored the original comma after "tumult of waters" and marked "stet" next to everything from "who knew what" through "in hair shirts!" The remaining part of the original second cut, from "Then taking a fine" through "the darkness soon", remained cut.

The surviving passage, in the published British and American editions, reads:

She parted the curtain to look at the night. 'Away!' she said. 'The moor is dark beneath the moon!' I rang; I waited. Louis perhaps poured out milk in a saucer for the cat; Louis, whose bony hands shut like the sides of a dock closing themselves with a slow anguish of effort upon an enormous tumult of waters, who knew what has been said by the Egyptian, the Indian, by men with high cheek-bones and solitaires in hair shirts. I knocked: I waited; there was no answer.

One can only guess at Woolf's motives for making this revision. It occurs in a passage where Bernard imagines the exchange between Rhoda and Louis while he stands waiting outside their door. Possibly she wanted to avoid a protracted repetition of a technique she had used at length in *To the Lighthouse*, when Lily Briscoe imagined, in convincing detail, marital conflicts between Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle that may never have occurred. In revising Bernard's imaginings in *The Waves*, Woolf may have been responding to the same doubts that Lily Briscoe felt:

And this, Lily thought, ... this making up scenes about them, is what we call "knowing" people, "thinking" of them, "being fond" of them! Not a word of it was true; she had made it up; but it was what she knew them by all the same ...

One striking detail about the omitted passage: it uses a word, "vagulous", that Woolf invented by translating a Latin diminutive in Hadrian's "Animula vagula blandula", his address to his wandering, charming little soul. (The masculine form is *vagulus*.) When she used the word in *Mrs Dalloway* - about "that wandering wild-o'-the-wisp, that vagulous phosphorescence, old Mrs. Hilbery" - someone at the printers, R. & R. Clark, Edinburgh, miscorrected it in proof to "vagus", which duly appeared in the British edition (264). The American edition correctly retained "vagulous" from the proofs that Virginia Woolf sent to New York to be used in typesetting that edition (267). There are two incidents in which she uses the word in her diary. She also invented the verb "vagulate", which she used four times in her diary and letters, and the noun "circumvagulation", which she used once in a letter. Woolf admired and emulated Shakespeare's word-coining powers.

Earlier in the book, the corrected proofs confirm a textual detail that helps to illuminate the publication history of *The Waves*. In the second section, at the end of the paragraph that begins "'That dark woman,' said Jinny", the American edition has a one-line break between the final sentence ("And we pray") and the opening of the next paragraph ("Now we march"). In the British edition, no such break appears: "And we pray" occurs at the foot of a page, with no additional space between the text and the page number, and "Now we march" occurs at the top of the next page, again with no indication of a break. The uncorrected proofs, like the published British edition, have no indication of a break, but Woolf marked the proofs "Leave larger space" (above "Now we march") and the American printers duly inserted the break that appears in the American edition. Thanks to Leonard Woolf's letter to R. & R. Clark, 27 July 1931 (now in Reading University Library), we know exactly what he and Virginia Woolf intended for those breaks: "In the cases where we have merely marked 'Leave larger space', it will be correct if you leave half an inch space."

If Virginia Woolf made a similar marking in the lost proofs that she marked for the British edition, the printers ignored it. But she seems not to have

Edward Mendelson's new book, *The Inner Life of Mrs Dalloway*, will be published in September. His new edition of *Mrs Dalloway* will appear in the same month

forgotten it. The Albatross, the Hamburg-based publisher of English-language books for sale on the continent of Europe, published its reset edition of *The Waves* in 1933, two years after it appeared in Britain and America. The Albatross edition closely follows the text of the British edition, with one exception: like the American edition, it has a one-line break between “And we pray.” and “Now we march”. The only conceivable way this break could have got into the Albatross text was that Woolf marked it on the copy of the British edition that she sent to the Albatross as “copy” for its edition. Possibly she was still annoyed by the absence of the break in her own Hogarth Press edition.

The editors of the Cambridge University Press edition of the novel write in their introduction: “it seems highly probable that – aside from giving her permission and receiving the royalties – Woolf had nothing to do with the text of this European paperback edition”. But the textual apparatus in their edition records the presence of the break in the

Albatross edition, which I would not have noticed otherwise, and which makes clear that the author herself made this correction, apparently the only correction she made to the published text. She seems never to have revised *The Waves* after publication, but she evidently took the trouble to make this one correction to the printed text. In contrast, she continued to make minor revisions to the texts of *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando* after each of these novels had been published.

Woolf took seriously the blank-line breaks in *The Waves* and her other novels. She first made use of them in *Jacob's Room* (1922) where the breaks vary from one to four lines in length. Among current editions of *Jacob's Room*, only Raitt's Norton Critical Edition and the scholarly Cambridge edition edited by Clarke and David Bradshaw reproduce the breaks in the way that the author obviously intended. In *Mrs Dalloway* she took care, in the final proofs, to add breaks that divided the British edition of the book into twelve sections, recalling its

original title ‘The Hours’. Again, only a few current editions reproduce all these breaks, one of the breaks having got lost when the Hogarth Press reset the book in 1942.

In *The Waves*, the corrected proofs unfortunately offer no solution to the book's one unsolvable textual mystery. In the third section, in the paragraph that begins “You have been reading Byron”, Neville addresses Bernard: “then you will visit Paris in the Easter vacation and come back wearing a black tie some detestable Frenchman whom nobody has ever heard of”. One or more words seem to be missing from this sentence, and the surviving manuscripts give no clue of what it might be. An American editor, marking the Columbia proofs, inserted “like” after “black tie” but added a circled question mark next to it. This word did not get into the published American text. A compositor, or another editor, instead inserted a comma after “black tie”, but this scarcely solved the problem. One can only hope for some future discovery that might offer an answer. ■

The fox and the shoemakers

Tudor and Stuart London in new editions of early-modern plays

GEORGINA WILSON

VOLPONE, OR, THE FOX
BEN JONSON

Edited by John Jowett
448pp. Bloomsbury. Paperback, £16.99.

THE SHOEMAKERS' HOLIDAY
THOMAS DEKKER

Edited by James Loxley
328pp. Bloomsbury. Paperback, £16.99.

There are eleven commendatory and dedicatory poems at the start of Ben Jonson's comedy *Volpone, or, The Fox*, both as it first appeared in print in 1607 and in the new Arden edition edited by John Jowett. That's a lot of praise. As Jowett tells us, the effect is to produce “a network of association between notable people”. Jonson asserts that he belongs in an elite sphere of early-modern writers (his learned cheerleaders include John Donne and George Chapman), putting himself and this play about overinvestment in the wrong sort of riches at the centre of that sphere.

The Shoemakers' Holiday, on the other hand, as James Loxley notes in his Arden edition, shows at least the possibility of imagining an anti-elitist society. In Thomas Dekker's version of early-modern London, inequalities are conjured away. Simon Eyre the shoemaker becomes mayor, class divisions are overcome in the marriage between Rose Oatley and Roland Lacy, and shoemaking is exhibited as a craft with cultural capital. If the play reflects the London of its day, then the image in its mirror is one turned upside down.

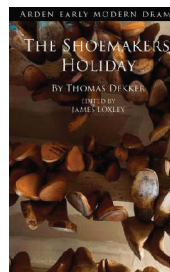
Early-modern London was a more complex place than this reading would allow, of course, and Loxley knows it. His introduction explains the unrest that was rife in London in the late sixteenth century, and in particular the resistance to Dutch migrants who joined existing trades. The Dutch shoemaker “Hans” in *The Shoemakers' Holiday*, actually Roland

in disguise, triggers mockery and stereotyping among the other characters, yet is the means by which Eyre socially ascends. Rather than using historical context as a key to unlock Hans's role, Loxley is good on how he offers a glimpse of class-specific attitudes towards migration.

Loxley's attention to place shifts from international relations to the early-modern capital. When Ralph agrees to bring a pair of newly made shoes for Hammon “to the sign of the Golden Ball in Watling Street”, the footnotes tell us not only where Watling Street is, but locate multiple sites of the Golden Ball to show that Dekker probably didn't have one place in mind. Loxley's enthusiasm for Tim Ingold's “taskscape” – a place made by living in it – brings theoretical vibrancy to this historic detail. Early-modern London emerges from this edition as a performed site as well as a geographic one. The introduction shows how Dekker makes use of the Rose Theatre's set-up, including a central “discovery space” that operates across three scenes as alternatively the street and a shop.

Loxley is interested in communities and political levelling, so it makes sense that his choice of title, *The Shoemakers' Holiday* (rather than the singular *Shoemaker's* used by David Bevington in the *Norton Anthology of English Renaissance Drama* and all three New Mermaids editions), emphasizes “a series of invocations of holidays” and resists the centring of any particular festival or munificent individual. *Volpone, or, The Fox* has an equally unsteady sense of its own title. While modern editions usually refer to *Volpone*, Jowett is faithful to his base text of 1607 in using *The Fox* as the running header. The effect is not only editorial fidelity, but a reminder of the animal fables that are central to this play. Jowett draws attention to these fables in his close reading of “The Persons of the Comoedye” (helpfully reprinted here), which gathers all bar one of the animal-based figures under *Volpone* himself. The introduction, meanwhile, includes a detailed exposition of foxes in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with reference to animal fables by Aesop, William Caxton, the second-century Greek Christian text *Physiologus* and Marie de France.

Chasing all these foxes makes clear the amount of learning on display from both Jonson and Jowett. While the formidable *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* has done much of this Penelope-like tracing of textual threads, the extra room afforded in this single-work edition means that Jowett can, for example, quote the relevant lines of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* evoked by *Volpone's* musings on old age in Act 1 Scene 4, as well as find new resonances in a Monologue by the Duke in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. At times, these footnotes risk casting a Casaubonian gloom rather than lighting up the textual signposts that the passing of 400 years and Jonson's propensity for learning (and showing off) have made difficult to read. But Jowett has gathered an



unprecedented amount of scholarship into footnotes that trace not only Jonson's various sources, but the editions in which he found them. The introduction cuts through the swathes of Jonson's references and gives us something to hold onto: Lucian, Plautus, Terence and Juvenal are pulled out and presented to the first-time reader as Jonson's most significant predecessors. Introductory sections on dramatic structure and particular characters amass contextual knowledge and performance histories with illuminating clarity.

Loxley is a welcoming editor for newcomers to *The Shoemakers' Holiday*, with concise introductory sections (“The Tradesman's Wife”, “Resenting Strangers”) that scoop out key issues in digestible nuggets. He begins every scene with a footnote explaining its location (that focus on place again) and narrative significance. Both editors gloss moments in which layers of deceit become tricky to peel back, such as Mosca's false claims to be “bound by Bonario”.

Both also write about grappling with Arden's editorial policies, which occasionally sacrifice nuance in the name of consistency. In *The Shoemakers' Holiday*, Rose speaks in verse, but her half-line “Sybil what news at London?” needs the next sentence from the usually prosaic Sybil's speech, “None but good”, to complete it. As Loxley notes, the Arden policy of indenting the first lines of prose, but not verse, means making definite decisions, without the option to “leave lines such as Rose's in what seem to be their properly indeterminate state”. Jowett, too, takes on the publisher's punctuation policy in his introduction by transcribing 5.10b.66-70, complete with its “delicate but dragging commas placed with uncertain effect”, which are necessarily banished from an edition with modernized punctuation.

Both editors are fundamentally invested in these plays' existence as printed texts. Two of Jowett's four appendices are devoted to textual matters, including one on the Folio *Workes* of 1616. Another is Alfonso Ferrobosco's setting of “Come My Celia”, *Volpone's* song, which circulated independently of the play itself. *The Shoemakers' Holiday* was first printed with two three-man songs before the text of the play, a separation that Loxley retains. The effect is to recreate the sense that these songs belong to the world of the play and might be performed outside it by early-modern readers. Another song, “Round Boyes Indeed. Or The Shoemakers Holy-Day”, printed by John Wright, who owned the publishing rights to Dekker's play, is included as an appendix. In addition, five extracts from Thomas Deloney's prose celebration of shoemaking, *The Gentle Craft*, point readers towards the most pertinent moments of Dekker's chief source.

“Hence is it now that I render myself grateful”, Jonson wrote in the epistle to *The Fox*; a sentiment that will be echoed by users of these rich and learned editions. ■

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