

The Linda Langham Virginia Woolf Collection¹

"Collecting an individualized and representative sampling of Woolf's work is a challenging, intriguing, and life-long adventure. Continuous and conscious planning, expert information, limited (yet expandable) objectives, high standards, and personalized investment parameters virtually ensure that one will have a memorable experience and a memorable collection."

Linda Langham, "Virginia's Pages: Collecting Woolf's First Editions & Letters" (231)

Introduction

The Linda Langham Virginia Woolf Collection, housed in Pace University's Birnbaum Library, consists of all the published works of Virginia Woolf, including various editions of her novels, letters, essays, diaries and journals. It also contains significant subcategories of works by and about the Bloomsbury Group and other authors directly or tangentially associated with Woolf—whether by literary style or lifestyle—such as Jane and Paul Bowles and Jeanette Winterson. Secondary sources include literary criticism, biographies, literary journals, conference proceedings, annuals and other miscellany and ephemera. Collected over the span of 45 years, it was given to the University by Ms. Langham in 2015 and dedicated in 2018.

Linda Langham the Collector

Born in 1950, Linda J. Langham attended a small college for women in northwestern Philadelphia where she majored in English Literature, receiving her B.A. in 1972. Two years earlier, at the insistence of her best friend Peggy Field, she had purchased her first copy of the limited edition of *Orlando, A Biography*. At the time, the price of \$50.00 for a single book without a dust jacket seemed high to her, despite the fact that it was signed by the author of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Three Guineas*.

This initial purchase led to a lifetime of collecting the works that make up the Virginia Woolf Collection. While not an academic herself—her career was in the corporate world—Ms. Langham was a familiar presence at Woolf conferences and contributed her first-hand knowledge as a collector to the field of Woolf studies. In her 1994 article, "Virginia's Pages: Collecting Woolf's First Editions & Letters," Ms. Langham offered advice to the novice collector. Her suggestion: act quickly.

Alacrity is called for. Factors continue to converge which may someday make the establishment and preservation of a Woolfian library an endeavor feasible only for the most affluent. The posthumous award to Woolf of the status of genius and the economics of fame are mingling (enlivened by Woolf's long-standing and newly emerging audiences) to hasten the arrival of a time when readers of Woolf, desirous of a first edition of *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own* will need to practice rather extraordinary financial sacrifice and maneuvering to obtain them.

The ironies of this situation would not be lost on Woolf: the outsider becomes accepted; her products become lucrative commodities, gradually being changed from dust collectors into collector's items; her books, decorated and wrapped with her sister's artwork, exclusive property reserved, for all intents and purposes, solely for the very types who maintained the systems and forces that marginalized and excluded her while she lived. (230-31)

Excellent advice from a knowledgeable and prudent collector.

After years of collecting privately, Ms. Langham contacted Pace University professor and Woolf scholar Mark Hussey about finding her collection a permanent and accessible home. Her greatest concern was that the collection remain intact and not be broken up and sold separately, as individual titles can command high prices. With Dr.

Hussey as intermediary, Pace University agreed to accept the collection. It now resides in a light-filled room of its own, complete with a rocking chair, work desk and reproductions of Woolf family photographs on the walls, on the second floor of the Birnbaum Library in downtown Manhattan.

Some Highlights of the Collection

First American and British editions of all the major works of Virginia Woolf, many featuring book jackets designed by her sister Vanessa Bell, are treasures of the collection. In addition to these and numerous subsequent American and British editions, there are translations of a number of titles, including *The Voyage Out* in French and *Orlando* in French and Russian. Woolf's immediate circle is represented with titles by and about her husband Leonard Woolf, as well as on the history of the Hogarth Press, Virginia and Leonard's publishing venture. There are also works by family members: sister Vanessa Bell, brother-in-law Clive Bell and nephew Quentin Bell.

Likely to be of interest to scholars of the period are works by some of the major personalities in Woolf's circle of friends and acquaintances, such as Vita Sackville-West, together with some of lesser known figures such as Frances Partridge and Julia Strachey.

There are sub-collections of the works of Jane Bowles and Paul Bowles, including a number of the latter's translations of other authors, and Jeanette Winterson, with copies of all her published works in English and in multiple translations.

Linda Langham could be described as a completist. She also collected works in which Virginia Woolf appears as a fictional character, among them Christine Duhon's novel *Une Année Amoureuse de Virginia Woolf*, Jacqueline Harpman's *Orlanda*, in a translation by Ros Schwartz, Edna O'Brien's play *Virginia*, and *The Shadow of the Moth*, by Ellen Hawkes and Peter Manso, intriguingly described as "a novel of espionage" in which Virginia Woolf plays an important role.

Rounding out the collection are copies of most of the standard works of Woolf bibliography, literary criticism and analysis, volumes of the *Woolf Studies Annual*, *Virginia Woolf Conference Proceedings* and individual special issues of *The Charleston Magazine*, *South Carolina Review* and *Twentieth Century Literature* devoted to Virginia Woolf.

Consulting the Collection

"Sounding above the voices and tunes of our festivals, the call to gather and preserve Virginia's pages resonates. Listen, listen: for the common readers of tomorrow's tomorrow as well as for oneself." (Langham 231)

The Birnbaum Library of Pace University is proud to be the custodian of the Linda Langham Virginia Woolf Collection and, in keeping with Ms. Langham's wishes, to be able to make it available to scholars, researchers, students and perhaps incipient collectors. For further information or to make an appointment to visit the collection, please contact Pace University Archivist Ellen Sowchek at esowchek@pace.edu.

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Work Cited

Langham, Linda J. "Virginia's Pages: Collecting Woolf's First Editions & Letters." *Virginia Woolf: Emerging Perspectives: Selected Papers from the Third Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Mark Hussey and Vara Neverow. New York: Pace UP, 1994. 230-38.

¹ Both Ellen Sowchek and Brendan Plann-Curley were involved throughout the process of acquiring the collection and making it accessible.