Ilaria Andreoli

Bloomsbury in Print
Book Illustrations from the Omega Workshops and the Hogarth Press

The Omega Workshops between word and image

Among the numerous partnerships developed within the Bloomsbury Group, that between authors and artists, between word and image, was one of the most significant. Observing Bloomsbury through the prism of book illustration reveals its nature as a tightly knit artistic community and helps to understand both the insularity of the Group and its involvement in the twentieth-century culture at large.

In a 1926 article about Edward McKnight Kauffer's illustrations to Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, published by Nonesuch Press in 1925, Fry provocatively describes book illustration as combat, acknowledging that its purpose is not to repeat visually what the author has to say, but rather to engage him in one fashion or another. Fry concedes that illustrations for a scientific treatise "can clearly be perfect" but he insists that "where the writer is an artist and the illustrator an artist there must be divergence"(211). He distinguishes between decoration ("initials, borders, *cul de lampe*") and artist's forms that have their own "further significance" (212), which suggests ideas or feelings by what they represent or by symbolical or expressionist methods. If he offered warm praise for Kauffer's illustrations he reserved his admiration for a greater example of modern book illustration—the woodcuts of Derain for Guillaume Apollinaire's *L'enchanteur pourrissant*, published by the art dealer Kahnweiler in 1909. Fry drew attention to Derain's woodcuts with their massive blacks and pure whites and their innovative freedom of handling:

> […] instead of taking the pen drawing as the point of departure, […] he has regarded the gouge as the essential instrument of expression. He shows, I think, a wonderful instinct for conceiving forms directly in terms of the gouge-stroke on the wood block, with the result that his sensibility comes through to us unchecked. It is like having an original poem instead of a translation. (226)

What Fry writes here about Derain can be applied to his own work in the field and it best approximates the work of all Bloomsbury artists. Derain was not the only French artist to be commissioned by Kahnweiler to produce woodcuts for books; Raoul Dufy was another. Both were inspired by Gauguin's vigorous and primitive woodcuts shown in Paris in 1906 in his posthumous retrospective exhibition. Dufy made woodcuts between 1907 and 1911, and like Gauguin and Derain cut across the grain of the block with gouge and penknife. Just as the French artists made much play of the rich and decorative vegetation that they included in their composition, mixing short lines, arabesques, squiggles and other graphic variations, Fry's woodcuts display equal interest in creating space by an interplay of intense blacks and luminous whites. He and other Bloomsbury artists such as Bell, Carrington and Grant were much closer to the French mood of "*luxe, calme et volupté*" than to the urban angst of their contemporaries in Germany, such as Kandinsky and Marc and the *Die Brücke*'s artists.

Prior to his Omega years Fry had participated in a variety of experiments in book illustration, beginning his illustrative career with a cover for the undergraduate magazine *The Cambridge Fortnightly* in January 1888, followed in 1892 by illustrations for *From Whitechapel to Camelot* by his fellow student at Cambridge, and energetic contributor to the Arts and Crafts Movement, C. R. Ashbee. In 1901 and 1908 he designed title pages for books of poems by another friend, the poet Robert Trevelyan (Greenwood 60, fig. 7). He may also have gained inspiration for his publishing projects from the Parisian dealer Ambroise Vollard, who had lent several paintings to the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* in 1912 and who frequently encouraged artists to illustrate texts with lithographs, etchings and woodcuts.

The first mention of woodcuts in Fry's letters occurs in 1912, in an undated love letter to Vanessa Bell. The letter included a drawing of Bell's naked torso and Fry wrote:

> That's the shape of your breast when you're lying down. I send it because it's one of the things you can only enjoy through me. I see that Greek mythology has made one bad mistake. It never made a story about a female Narcissus. I s'pose women weren't artists enough or hadn't enough energy and independence then. Well, I shall have to write the story and then we'll do woodcuts to illustrate it. Of course it's rather late to do a story like that—Oscar Wilde would have done it to perfection. (*Letters* 1: 358)

By 1912 Fry had not yet nudged Vanessa Bell into woodcutting, nor had he cut wood himself, but after having commissioned one from Eric Gill in 1910, he had drawn the following year a Christmas card that Winifred M. Gill—no relation of Eric—actually cut, as we learn from a letter that Fry sent to his mother along with the card. Winifred M. Gill cut another drawing by Fry in 1911, an ambitious composition for the endpaper of E. M. Forster's *The Celestial Omnibus and Other Stories*. For Christmas 1913 Fry produced an Omega Workshops woodcut card that looks at first as though it could be the Virgin and the Child accompanied by the infant St. John, but the source is instead a secular and very intimate one, being based on a photograph of Vanessa Bell kneeling on the grass and embracing her two sons, Julian and Quentin. Fry made drawings from this photograph and rather surprisingly carved a small wooden sculpture that was displayed in the Omega Workshops sitting room at the *Ideal Home Exhibition* in October 1913 (Greenwood 61; Shone).

It is likely that Roger Fry had envisaged the production of illustrated books as one of the Omega Workshops activities from its outset; but it was not until 1915, when paper shortages occasioned much less propitious circumstances, that he began to make plans for an Omega imprint. The first indication that the Omega Workshops was to harbour a publishing venture is in a letter from Fry to an old Cambridge friend, Nathaniel Wedd, at the end of July: "We're nearly finished producing Clutton-Brock's poem on Hell. It'll be the best thing I think done in the

way of books for ages. […] It seems an odd time to do this sort of thing, but I think it's as necessary as ever to keep certain thing going" (*Letters* 2: 388).

The "poem of Hell" was *Simpson's Choice*: *An Essay on the Future Life*, a satirical text, by Arthur Clutton-Brock, art critic of *The Times* and Fry's friend and neighbour in Guildford.

The book was reviewed in *The Observer* on 6 February 1916: "Mr Clutton-Brock's satire is a trifle over-facile, but his notion of the real hideousness of Hell is impressive. The apparently excessive price of the book (a slim quarto of sixteen pages), is justified by its beauty of production. The woodcuts of Mr R. K[ristian] are amusing and the fine large page and handsome type are a great pleasure to the eye" (qtd. in Greenwood 15).

The same year Fry published another slight volume also illustrated by the Norwegian painter Roald Kristian (Greenwood 109-21), *Men of Europe*, his own translation of *Vous êtes hommes*, a collection of poems on the horrors of the war, written in 1914-15 by the young French writer Pierre-Jean Jouve, a close friend of Charles Vildrac, Fry's contact in the contemporary French literary world.

The third book was *Lucretius on Death*, Robert Trevelyan's translation of some verses from book three of *De rerum natura*, for which Fry and Carrington collaborated on a woodcut for the title page (44-45). Fry seems to have been pleased with this book, and when it was published in September 1917 he placed a full-page advertisement for it in *The Burlington Magazine*.

The last book, *Original Woodcuts by Various Artists*, published in 1919, is the only publication by the Omega not to combine text and illustrations. The suggestion for a folio of woodcuts came originally from Virginia Woolf in the summer on 1917. She and Leonard Woolf had just begun handprinting their own stories for sale by subscription and were considering buying a press which would also reproduce illustrations. Vanessa Bell—now living with Duncan Grant at Charleston in Sussex and divorced from the day-to-day business of the Omega—responded eagerly to this casual invitation from her sister, and made plans to involve other artists in the project. But in September the idea was discarded because Vanessa's determination to have final artistic control was

met by Leonard's uncompromising insistence that he and nobody else should make the ultimate decisions. The following year Fry asked some friends to join him in contributing woodcuts to the Omega imprint (22-23, 36, 63-67, 103-05, 138-39; *Conversation anglaise* 228-31, no. 144). He cut the Omega device for the title-page (two figures holding an Omega symbol) and four other blocks (*Still Life*; *Harliquinade* [sic], from a drawing by Mark Gertler; *The Cup* and *The Stocking*); the remaining ten cuts were by Vanessa Bell (*Dahlias* and *Nude*), Simon Bussy (*Black Cat*), Duncan Grant (*The Hat Shop* and *The Tub*), Edward Mc Knight Kauffer (*Study*), Edward Wolfe (*Ballet* and *Group*). Fry also retrieved two unused prints by Kristian (*Animals*). The print run was of 75 copies; there is no record of its price, but it must have been more expensive than the 12s.6d asked for *Simpson's Choice* because Virginia thought the book was "very magnificent but fearfully expensive" (*Letters* 2: 296-97).

The Bloomsbury artists had almost no practical experience of printmaking. Fry though, unrelenting as ever, immersed himself in the technical processes of printing: he took advice from John Henry Mason, super-intendent of the printing school at the Central School of Arts and Crafts and employed Richard Madley, a professional printer whose premises were nearby, in Whitfield Street, to produce his books. "Roger I hear is cutting wood all over the carpets of Gordon Square," Carrington wrote to Virginia Woolf in autumn 1918 (106). Fry's five woodcuts relate in their subject matter to his contemporary still life and figure paintings, while stylistically they make much use of the strong tonal contrasts afforded by the medium. Probably the other artists were making woodcuts for the first time. Vanessa Bell had produced one or two shaky silver point etchings in 1905, but nothing since; Duncan Grant had drawn a poster for the suffragettes and taken a hand in designing invitation cards for the Omega (Greenwood 99, 102). Perhaps unsure of their competence in woodcutting, they both based prints on existing paintings. Vanessa Bell's *Dahlias* relied on a 1914 painting, while *Nude* was made while she was working on a large decoration, *The Tub*, for which Mary Hutchinson has posed beside a tin bath (1917, London, Tate. See *Conversation anglaise* 172-73, no. 50). Reducing the scale by at least

ten times for the woodcut enabled her to alter the proportions of the composition, resolving the awkward spatial relationship between the figure and the tub in the painted version and emphasising the prominence of the nude. In both cases, Bell simplified the composition when cutting the woodblock. Her paintings at that time were strong, simple and bold in composition, and she carried these qualities over into her woodcuts, exploiting the dramatic and luminous contrast between the black and white areas of mass. She makes little use of line, preferring instead to juxtapose blocks of form, the edges of which she leaves uneven and jagged. The mark of the gouge, which cuts away the white areas, is a distinctive feature at the edges of black. Likewise, Grant's woodcut of *The Tub* was copied directly from a painting of the same title and his *Hat Shop* was a witty reference to his own designs for hats to be sold at the Omega (1913, London, Tate. See *Conversation anglaise*, 172, no. 49). Both artists' prints drew extravagant acclaim from Fry. Grant's he thought "typical of what's best and most characteristic in him" in its fusion of formal coherence and delicate fantasy; and he told Bell: "Your woodcut is simply lovely. I don't think I've ever admired you enough. I like personally almost more than D's Hat Shop. It's really a big thing. You *are* an artist" (*Letters* 2: 439). The woodcuts in the Omega book are unrefined but effective, remarkably fresh and lively compared with the elaborate designs of many conventional printmakers: the artists "shy away from ostentation of whatever skill they possessed" (Collins 164). Their definitive influence was from France, and particularly from Matisse—the pose of the nude in Bell's *The Tub* was taken straight from his *Le Luxe I*—and Derain, and their concern was similarly with surface sensibility. But set against the prints made by some of the Vorticists, and particularly by Edward Wadsworth, for whom the woodcut was a primary means of expression at this time, their form and structure is tame indeed.

Original Woodcuts by Various Artists was the Omega's last communal endeavour. Financial failure and the strains of running the business almost single-handedly had worn Fry down. In June 1918 he announced a clearance sale, and then closed the shop.

After the demise of the Omega, Bell and Grant only experimented sparingly with woodcuts but Carrington, who

had not been included in the Omega portfolio, found that the medium suited her well. She printed a self-portrait in 1916, and in the next few years designed bookplates for Lytton Strachey and several of his friends. Unlike the Omega artists, Carrington did not rely on the obvious contrast of black and white for her effects, but was fascinated instead by the subtle interplay of light and dark in three tones, which she realised through an arrangement of finely-graded lines. Her subjects were often derived from an earlier, pastoral, arcadian tradition (Greenwood 19-20, 39, 42-43, 46-51 and 54). Carrington used earlier woodcuts for inspiration, from Chinese books shown to her by her friend Arthur Waley, assistant keeper of Oriental prints and drawings, and particularly from 15th century Italian books and from the magnificent collection of early German woodcuts given to the British Museum in 1895 and catalogued in 1903 by Campbell Dodgson. At the turn of the 20th century, the momentous encounter between the artistic avant-garde and the "primitive woodcut" closely coincided with collection patterns in museums and the scholarly interpretation of these works. Dodgson was aware that the British Museum did not collect contemporary prints and he bought them himself for presentation to his department.

By 1919, however, she was beginning to think that woodcuts were "too limited in their technique, & that certain elements, as colour, will never be able to be shown" (qtd. in Hill 45). One of her last woodcut was the one, printed in red, for the cover of Leonard's first monograph, *Stories of the East*, drawn on his experiences living in Ceylon and published in 1921.

Fry also continued to make woodcuts, and he too produced a self-portrait, as well as still-lifes and interiors in which he explored the formal possibilities of the medium (Greenwood 68). In 1921 the Hogarth Press published a dozen of his new prints. 150 copies of *Twelve Original Woodcuts* were handprinted by the Woolfs in November (68-78). They sold out within two days, and in the next year two further impressions were issued to meet the unexpected demand: "Roger's woodcuts, 150 copies" Virginia wrote in her diary "have been gulped down in 2 days. I have just finished stitching the last copies—all but six" (2: 144).

Despite the very considerable commercial success of Fry's book, woodcuts were never again to feature in any way with the Hogarth Press. In hindsight this appears strange but it seems that the limited interest Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell had in this technique had evaporated, while Fry, the main protagonist of the woodcut, had also characteristically moved on to other challenges. He published seven titles with the Hogarth Press, all of them art-related, indicating his formative influence on the press's perspective on art and design.

Roger Fry made the Omega Workshops a direct antithesis to Morris' Kelmscott Press, yet both men attempted to create objects that were more meaningful than those produced by the impersonal methods of the Industrial Revolution.[1] If Fry felt the need to create more meaningful items too, he believed that objects would take on the joy of their creation, expressing the pleasure an artist feels when he has satisfactorily fulfilled a creative impulse through his product, be it a chair, a pot or a textile. Meaning for him was not dependent on technique but on the opportunity to create. He laughed at the affectations of craft in the Movement: he wanted to introduce spontaneity into the work of the Omega as well as the sense of formal design that Post-impressionism had emphasised. It is within this aesthetics that the Woolfs' attitude toward printing and its end result must be considered.

Woodcuts and the Hogarth Press

The Hogarth Press was born on the dining-table of Hogarth House, the Woolfs' home in Richmond, in April 1917, following the impulsive purchase of a small handpress, an instruction booklet that promised to teach them how to print, and some Caslon Old Face type noticed in a shop window while walking on London's Farringdon Street.[2] It started as a hobby, but what had been

---

1 See Stansky, *William Morris and Bloomsbury*; Spalding, *Roger Fry* 178.

2 Woolf, *Beginning Again* 234. See Woolmer; Rhein; Willis; Rosenbaum; Porter; Fewster; Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing*; Bradshaw, "Virginia Woolf and Book Design"; Southworth; Svendsen.

intended as a therapeutic, manual occupation for Virginia Woolf soon mushroomed into a consuming and flourishing operation—an autonomous, undemanding publisher of Woolf's own work and then a fully-fledged press whose eminence was widely acknowledged. The Hogarth Press emerges from the Woolfs' writings as a mixed blessing, one that developed a will of its own, and, on occasion, caused them enormous frustration. It proved itself, however, to be an appropriate venture for two writers as it happily joined a shared hobby, printing, with the ideal publishing situation for an author: to find a means for fulfilling their individual creative needs without the restraints and confines of the commercial publishing world. As Virginia loved to affirm, she was "the only woman in England free to write what I like" (*Diary* 3:43): the Hogarth provided her "a press of her own."

Even if it is remembered today for publishing Katherine Mansfield and T. S. Eliot, for the impressive list of other writers who appeared under its banner and for its twenty-nine translations, from Russian, German and Italian, between the two wars, the Woolfs chose mostly essays and works of poetry and fiction, written by themselves or friends and acquaintances, that might not have been published otherwise. Throughout the history of the Hogarth Press they did not see themselves as professional publishers, as Leonard stresses in his autobiography: "The organisation and machinery of the Press were amateurish; it was, so far as Virginia and I were concerned, a hobby which we carried on in afternoons, when we were not writing books and articles or editing papers" (*Downhill All the Way* 78). Between the years 1917-1932 Leonard and Virginia handprinted 18 books and published in total 34 titles (18 others were printed by professional printers) out of a total of 315, 11 of which were illustrated.

Unlike many private presses founded in the slipstream of the pervasive Arts and Crafts movement, the Hogarth Press was not concerned with *editions de luxe*, not in the least interested in producing fine books as such, and it showed no interest in new experiments with typography. Their intentions were more cerebral and their concern was with the text above all. Leonard Woolf restated (234) that publishing rather than printing was the primary reason for continuing the Press each time they were

ready to give up, and stressed their purpose not to make the Hogarth Press into the kind of private press that published finely printed books "meant not to be read but to be looked at" (80). He recalled that one of the major reasons for beginning the Hogarth Press was to publish small books that would otherwise have little chance of being printed by established publishing companies and that they wanted their books to "look nice," having their own views of what nice looks in a book would be, but neither of them were interested in fine printing and fine binding. Nonetheless they took some pleasure in the appearance of their books and care in the choice of artists they asked to decorate them.

Even before artists were asked to design dust jackets, the earliest productions of the Hogarth Press were distinguished by their unusual covers, carefully chosen and brightly coloured. The Woolfs begun to use marble paper provided by Fry in 1919, for Eliot's *Poems*.

Fry had his own methods of marbling or colouring papers: rather than using the traditional method of suspending colour on water and floating it onto the paper, he took discarded wallpaper which was far too heavy and poor in quality for the purpose he intended, and simply flung colours on it in random patterns, alternating large and small splashes until he had filled an area to his satisfaction. Unfortunately, the flat paint soon dulled with dirt. Virginia's active involvement in finding and even making coloured papers with which to bind that first book clearly foreshadows their subsequent interest in using a book's cover to enhance its impact (Isaac). Virginia Woolf, who took lessons in bookbinding when she was only nineteen, bound her own books and made coloured papers "with wild success," as she wrote in a letter to Vanessa (*Letters* 2: 544). Another common practice was to use a variety of covers within the same edition: of the 34 handprinted books, close to half appear in at least two different covers, and quite a few of the early, commercially printed books show similar variations. The reasons for this habit are not actually known but it is possible that the Woolfs simply used what was handy and bought more as they went along (Stansky, "Leonard Woolf's Journey" 118; Spater and Parson 175). This creates multiplicity within one edition,

a term which usually indicates conformity, for the torment of bibliographers and the delight of bibliophiles.

The Press's very first publication by the Woolfs themselves, as it proudly says on the title page, is *Two Stories*, published in 1917 and sold by subscription, for which Virginia set the type, Leonard machined the paper over the inked type and Virginia sewed the thirty-two pages and cover together in the dining room of Hogarth House. It contained four small woodcut illustrations by Carrington—a frontispiece and tailpiece for each story: "Three Jews" by Leonard and "The Mark on the Wall" by Virginia—and had a cover of at least three different types of Japanese paper within its run of just 150 copies (Rhein 10-14). The book incorporates several elements of book design which the Woolfs continued to favour in their succeeding productions, and also has some features that were dropped from subsequent handprinted books. One of the most obvious characteristics is their use of capital letters on the cover and the title page for author, title, publisher and place of publication. This format is often used for one and sometimes, as here, for both components. A generous use of space in margins and between lines is typical. The Woolfs favoured a white page rather than the black page of dark ink, close lines and closely spaced type popularized by William Morris. Their use of space becomes a practical advantage when the reader is faced with poor inking and grey type, less admirable qualities also typical of Hogarth Press handprinted books.

There is indeed a general tendency in the early books toward sloppiness in printing, with messy corrections littered through the text in ink or with cancel slips pasted in the back or front, all of which certainly indicates a lack of care or concern for the books' neat and tidy appearance. Oddly enough, though both were avid readers, neither of the Woolfs seems to have been affected by what for most people would have been an offensive barrier to enjoying the content of their books.

Two Stories' illustrations elicited praise from Lytton Strachey and aroused the immediate interest of Vanessa Bell. Despite eventually abandoning woodcuts in books, she was quick to volunteer a frontispiece illustration for Virginia Woolf's story *Kew Gardens* in the summer of 1918. There are two woodcuts, one

in the front and one in the back of the book, but they exist in three states; some are printed on the page, others on a separate paper and pasted onto the page, and still others are printed on a separate page and pasted over those printed on the text page (Greenwood 24-27; Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 39, no. 27). Again, Bell relied on an earlier painting for inspiration: *A Conversation* of 1913-1916 (London, The Courtauld Institute of Art), a portrait of three women gossiping at a window. However, when the story was published in 1919 she was furious at the uneven printing of her block, which had been terribly overinked in places. The printing of this book caused more entries in Virginia's letters and diaries than any other book handprinted by the Woolfs. Most of the serious conversations between the two sisters took place in person but they were all painful for Virginia, who was stung by the ferocity of the criticism.

The book's bold mingling of text, illustration, and book design—covers hand-painted by Roger Fry, with strokes and dabs of blue, green, and dusky rose on a black background, and the woodcuts by Bell that magically echo the story's interplay of animate nature with the flowers and plants of Kew Gardens—met with critical acclaim (a glowing review was published in the *Times Literary Supplement*) and sold well, requiring a commercial reprint, this time of 500 copies.

Vanessa made no secret of her opinion of Leonard's taste and skills in printing, so any project which involved both of them led to a great deal of trouble. The quarrel blew over, but might easily have erupted again when Bell's four woodcut illustrations to Virginia's collection of stories, *Monday or Tuesday* (1921), were similarly disfigured by a commercial printer who impressed her blocks heavily onto dreadfully poor paper: the result was ink smudges and paper flaking off on the blocks, not to talk about the number of spelling and punctuation errors (Greenwood 28-33; Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 21, no. 16).

Still, when the following year the Woolfs decided for the first time to produce a dust jacket, for *Jacob's Room*—the first of Virginia novels to be published by the Press in 1922—they turned confidently to Vanessa Bell for the design. It was in fact a collaborative effort: Vanessa made the drawing, Virginia chose the

terracotta colouring, and Leonard Woolf advised alterations to the lettering. It was the start, though not a very auspicious one, of an important, successful and long-lasting partnership—the longest in the Press's history. The post-impressionist cover of *Jacob's Room*, a characteristically suggestive assembly of simple shapes—a table, flowers and curtains—was ridiculed by booksellers and buyers alike. It was quite unlike the linear, illustrative decorations to which they were used.

Published by the Hogarth's in 1923 with a print run of 400 copies, *The Legend of Monte della Sibilla* or *Le Paradis de la Reine Sibille*, an hedonistic and witty poem by Clive Bell based on Antoine de la Sale's account of a voyage he made to the Monts de la Sibyle in 1420, is illustrated with a frontispiece and headpiece as well as a cover from original ink drawings by Vanessa Bell—whose initials are incorporated into her design—and Duncan Grant, whose contribution is unsigned. One of the most significant collaborations in the history of the Bloomsbury Group, it was the result of a three-way (or a five-way, if we include the Woolfs) collaboration, and one of the largest format books produced by the Press. With its generous margins and fairly dark type it is rather consistently well printed, a nice tribute to the combined skills in the decorative arts of Grant and Bell, who had by this time established an artistic and emotional partnership.

Apart from illustrations, the dust jackets and covers were two other ways in which the Woolfs richly fulfilled their intention to enhance their publications by visual means (Rhein 40-41). The Woolfs' special attention to covers occasioned a dispute with Katherine Mansfield over *Prelude* (1919). Mansfield wanted the cover to carry an illustration by her friend J. D. Fergusson; the Woolfs did not like it and ended up printing a few copies with the Fergusson's design for Mansfield and her close friends but replacing this cover with plain dark-blue wrappers on subsequent copies. *Prelude* was an ambitious second attempt by a couple of amateur printers: considering the conditions under which Leonard printed this book—carrying chases to the printer's shop after Virginia had set them in the dining room—it is amazing that the book can be read at all. In the midst of printing it, it had been pointed out that the running head was

given incorrectly as *The Prelude* rather than just *Prelude*. This was subsequently corrected, but only on pages not yet printed.

Travellers for the Hogarth Press grew accustomed to the sniggering of bookshop assistants when they unpacked their wares for inspection. Reviewers were equally critical: *The Star* remarked of Vanessa Bell's jacket for the first series of *The Common Reader* (1925), Woolf's first collection of essays, that "only a conscious artist could have done it so badly" (qtd. in Woolf, *Diary* 3: 16n4; Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 73, no. 55). But Virginia was to make light of this attack: "The Star has a whole column about your decorations of the Common R: and says I try to live up to them by being as revolutionary and nonsensical—a very good advertisement" (*Letters* 3: 182). She never abandoned the partnership with her sister and during the next two decades Vanessa produced dust jackets for each of her books, as well as designing the covers for the collections of Virginia's essays compiled by Leonard Woolf and published posthumously by the Hogarth Press and those used for the Uniform Editions of her novels in Britain and America (Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 72-86). Virginia's letters to Vanessa abound with enticements to illustrate her work, and with praise for her designs. "Your style is unique; because so truthful; and therefore it upsets one completely," she wrote after Vanessa sent her the jacket for *To the Lighthouse* (1927) (*Letters* 3: 391; Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 77, no. 57).

By that time Vanessa Bell's bold designs and lettering, usually in the lower case—showing the influence Omega's Workshops—had become a distinctive signature of Virginia Woof's works, they influenced the perception and reception of her writings and contributed to the definition of the "aesthetic" of the Press. Consistent in the use of black and white or one or two striking and contrasting colours, usually browns, greens, and blues, Vanessa Bell's book-jackets employ many of her favourite decorative motifs, familiar from her work in other media: "still life arrangements," flowers, curtains and circles and hoops, all images of plenitude and nourishment, merged into almost abstract patterns. Many of her designs are, at most, only allusive to the title of the book and rarely do they indicate its content. Once, when writing

to John Lehmann to thank him for sending a dummy of one of her sister's novels, she admitted: "I've not read a word of the book—I have only the vaguest description of it and what she wants to me to do from Virginia—but that has always been the case with the jackets I have done for her" (qtd. in Lehman 27). But this is not to suggest that they were necessarily produced on a whim: she filled a whole sketchbook with ideas for *A Room of One's Own* (1929) before settling on a simple design of a clock on a mantelpiece (Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 77-78*,* no. 58). Vanessa Bell's dust jackets ranged from the purely abstract—a typically geometric combination of cross-hatching, circles and lines for Virginia's limited edition essay *On Being Ill* (1930), the last book of Virginia's to be handprinted and one of the last books handprinted by the Woolfs—, to the delightfully decorative—two flowers drooping from a vase for the first series of *The Common Reader*, a bouquet for *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), a single rose for *The Years* (1937) (Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 75, no. 56 and 118 no. 87)—and the apparently descriptive—two ghostly figures on the shore, seen from a window ledge, for *The Waves* (Filby Gillespie 295; Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 79, no. 60), an emblematic lighthouse for *To the Lighthouse*, three bank notes, quill pen, and ink for *Three Guineas*, which Leonard Woolf considered the most beautiful of her designs (Wilson Gordon, *Woolfs-head Publishing* 85, no. 62). For *Walter Sickert: A Conversation* (1934) she provided a more elaborate set-piece drawing: a quite un-Sickertian still-life of fruit and drink on the table around which the conversationalists will dine (Bradshaw, *The Bloomsbury Artists* 69, no. 123). Virginia liked the cover so much she raised the price of her essay on the strength of it.

There is an attractive lightness of touch to all these; Vanessa provided indeed "a kind of 'visual underscoring' which gave the books a sympathetic atmosphere—feminine, imaginative, delicate, modern but domestic" but, as it has been suggested, in the late novels "as Virginia Woolf's writing developed, the decorativeness of the covers became, to an extent, misleading" (Lee 369) making these novels look less powerful and angry than they are.

However, more usually "the perfect sisterly accord of writer and artist sharing the same vision" (Lehman 26) was intuitively realised and this was exemplified in their most complete collaboration, the third edition of *Kew Gardens* published in 1927. This commercial reprint of 500 numbered copies is a different type of publication. In addition to being more expensive than most titles at the Press, there is an increased focus on creating a beautiful object, a collectible item, at least as much as a readable book. This edition uses expensive paper and is printed only on rectos, creating more white space and some copies are signed by the author and by the illustrator. Each of the 21 pages of Virginia's text is framed by the organic growth of Vanessa's designs, which allude to the light, shape and movement of the story, the spontaneity of the drawing echoing the flickering quality of the writing. Though the decorations shape the actual words of the story, they are imprecise enough not to overpower them. Yet they are so assured "as to make each page visually dramatic, text and image balancing each other as in Blake's illuminated books" (Spalding, *Vanessa Bell* 221).

Beyond the Hogarth Press

Vanessa Bell was the most prolific designer to work for the Hogarth Press, and she created what became almost its house style. With John Banting, she provided the designs for the various series of pamphlets issued by the Hogarth Press in the 1920s and 1930s, which greatly enhanced the Woolfs' list of authors and contributed to the Press's growing prestige (Bradshaw, *The Bloomsbury Artists* 66-77, no. 107-45). She also supplied the emblem of a wolf's head enclosed in a medallion used as the Press's colophon from 1925, apart from a brief period in the 1930s when it was supplanted by a more stylised and modern device by McKnight Kauffer.[3] Roger Fry produced a cover for William Plomer's *Paper Houses* and the Woolfs also published, in an edition of 550 numbered copies, his *Sampler of Castille*, Fry's record, in

[3] See Greenwood 103-08; About McKnight Kauffer, see Wilson Gordon, "On or About December."

words and pictures, of a journey through Spain in the summer of 1923 (Bradshaw, *The Bloomsbury Artists* 52-53, no. 47, 79, no. 149 and 151). Fry also designed the cover for his own *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (1927), and another for William Plomer's *Paper House* (1929). Duncan Grant drew relatively few dust jackets between the wars (the one for Fry's book about his own work for the *Living Painters* series in 1924, the first and only volume to appear in this series), though he decorated several covers for catalogues distributed by Francis Birrel's and David Garnett's bookshop in Bloomsbury. When Garnett invited him to design a cover for a new novel in 1931, Grant reminded him of the fate of his proposed jacket for Julian Bell's first volume of poems *Winter Movement* (1930): "Hatchard said that he would tear off the one I did for Julian from every copy that entered his shop" (qtd. in Spalding, *Duncan Grant* 316).[4] Perhaps it was a fear of further retaliation from booksellers that led him the next year to worry that his design for Julia Strachey's story *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding* (1932), a commission he inherited from Carrington after her suicide, was vulgarly put together (Bradshaw, *The Bloomsbury Artists* 80, no. 155);[5] it was, in fact, one of his most fluent. Grant's easy draughtsmanship was particularly suited to graphic arts: so, too, was his natural inventiveness. For Arthur Waley's translation of *Monkey* by the 16th century Chinese writer Wu Ch'êng-ên, published in 1942, he wound his drawing of a monkey around the entire book at the suggestion of the publisher David Unwin. All the title details were put on the back, in keeping with the reverse nature of Chinese literature (81, no. 161 and 164). In the last year of the war he made five vivid lithographic illustrations for a private edition of 700 copies of the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1945) published by Allen Lane, a little later dust jackets for Dorothy Bussy's anonymous, but thinly-disguised, autobiographical novel *Olivia* (1949) and for her translation of Paul Valery's *Dance and the Soul* (1951). Grant readily agreed to produce a cover and chapter headings for the first novel by his friend Paul Roche, *O Pale Galileian* (1954),

---

4 See Bradshaw, *The Bloomsbury Artists* 80-83, no. 154-173.

5 At the British Library there is a rough sketch by Carrington for the cover of this book.

and for his later books of poetry. In the last decades of his life, with his enthusiasm for new projects undimmed, he adapted designs for early publications by Richard Shone and made a drawing (erroneously printed upside-down) for *London Lickpenny*, a small selection of poems by Peter Ackroyd (1973).

In the torrent of books and essays on the Bloomsbury artists over the last thirty years or so, scant attention has been paid to their graphic work that constitutes, of course, only a fraction of their vast, and varied, output. Above all, it was ephemeral: Carrington's woodcuts were sometimes just slipped into an envelope with her letters; the volume of woodcuts printed at the Omega Workshops and the Hogarth Press were published in small editions and many have subsequently been divided up; Virginia Woolf's novels and essays were issued in far greater numbers, but only very few are found today with their jackets intact; widely regarded as just a fancy bit of advertising, dust-wrappers were often thrown away or they might be pasted to the inside covers. Even at Charleston, the house shared by Bell and Grant for fifty years, none survive; there they were quite as likely to become part of a still-life arrangement or, left lying around a studio, to be spattered with paint. Those that had not been vandalised in some way might be "rescued" by keen and light-fingered bibliophiles.

The Omega Workshops produced a range of products and only four books, while the Hogarth Press produced only books, yet they are tightly linked via shared personnel, as well as through a shared commitment to amateurism and experimentalism. But both the Omega and the Hogarth Press sought to forge a closer relationship of art and industry and similar to Fry's general mission at the Omega, the Woolfs had an open, pragmatic, even humoristic approach to book production; all they wanted was to produce book "to be read," not simply "to be looked at."

Works Cited

Bell, Vanessa. *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*. Ed. Regina Marler. London: Bloomsbury, 1993.

Bradshaw, Tony. *The Bloomsbury Artists. Print and Book Design*. Introd. James Beechey. Foreword Angelica Garnett. Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000.

---. "Virginia Woolf and Book Design." *Edinburgh Companion to the Bloomsbury Group*. Ed. Maggie Humm. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2010. 280-97.

Carrington, Dora de Houghton. *Carrington: Letters and Extracts from her Diaries*. Ed. David Garnett. London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971.

Collins, Judith. *The Omega Workshops*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1983.

Conversation anglaise. Le groupe de Bloomsbury, Exhibition Catalogue (Roubaix, La Piscine, 2010). Paris: Gallimard, 2010.

Fewster, Anna. *Bloomsbury and Books: Materiality, Domesticity, and the Politics of the Marked Page*. Diss. University of Sussex (Charleston Trust), 2009.

Fry, Roger. "The Author and the Artist." *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*. 49.280 (Jul. 1926): 9-12. Rpt. as "Book illustration and a modern example." in *Transformations: Critical and Speculative Essays on Art*, 2nd ed. New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956. 211-27.

---. *Letters of Roger Fry*. Ed. Denis Sutton. 2 Vols. London: Chatto & Windus, 1972.

Filby Gillespie, Diane. *The Sisters' Arts: The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1988.

Greenwood, Jeremy. *Omega Cuts*. Introd. Judith Collins. Woodbridge: Wood Lea Press, 1998.

Hill, Jane. *The Art of Dora Carrington*. London: Herbert, 1994.

Isaac, Alan. *Virginia Woolf: The Uncommon Bookbinder*. London: Cecil Woolf, 2000.

Lee, Hermione. *Virginia Woolf*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1996.

Lehmann, John. *Thrown to the Woolves*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978.

Porter, David H. "'We all sit in the edge of stools and crack jokes': Virginia Woolf and the Hogarth Press." *Book Illustrated: Text, Image, and Culture 1770-1930*. Ed. Catherine J. Golden. New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll, 2000. 277-311.

Rhein, Donna E. *The Handprinted Books of Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, 1917-1932*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985.

Rosenbaum, Stanford P. "Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press." *Aspects of Bloomsbury: Studies in Modern English Literary and Intellectual History*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998. 142-60.

Shone, Richard. "'Group" 1913: A Sculpture by Roger Fry." *The Burlington Magazine*, 130.1029 (Dec. 1988): 924-27.

Southworth, Helene. "The Bloomsbury Group and the Book Arts." *The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group*. Ed. Victoria Rosner. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014. 144-61.

Spalding, Frances. *Roger Fry: Art and Life.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1980.

---. *Vanessa Bell*. London: Macmillan, 1983.

---. *Duncan Grant*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1997.

Spater, George, Ian Parson. *A Marriage of True Minds: An Intimate Portrait of Leonard and Virginia Woolf*. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977.

Stansky, Peter. "Leonard Woolf's Journey." *Atlantic*. 225.5 (1970): 118.

---. *William Morris and Bloomsbury*. London : Cecil Woolf, 1997.

Svendens, Jessica. "Hogarth Press." *The Modernism Lab at Yale University*. Yale U. 2010. Web. 10 May 2015.

Willis, J. H. *Leonard and Virginia Woolf as Publishers: The Hogarth Press 1917-41*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1992.

Wilson Gordon, Elizabeth. *Woolfs-head Publishing. The Highlights and New Lights of the Hogarth Press*. Exhibition Catalogue (U of Alberta Libraries, Bruce Peel Special Collections, 2009). Edmonton: U of Alberta Libraries, 2009.

---. "On or About December 1928 the Hogarth Press Changed: E. McKnight Kauffer, Art, Markets and the Hogarth Press 1928-39." *Leonard and Virginia Woolf: The Hogarth Press and the Networks of Modernism*. Ed. Helen Southworth. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2010. 179-206.

Woolf, Leonard. *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911-1918*. London: Hogarth, 1964.

---. *Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939*. London: Hogarth, 1967.

Woolf, Virginia. Foreword. *Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell*. By The London Artists' Association. London: Favil Press, 1930.

---. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie, 5 vols. London: Hogarth, 1977-1984.

---. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1912-1922: The Question of Things Happening.* Ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann. Vol. 2. London: Hogarth, 1976.

---. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1923-1928: A Change of Perspective*. Ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann. Vol. 3. London: Hogarth, 1977.

---. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1936-1941: Leave the Letters Till We Are Dead.* Ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann. Vol. 6. London: Hogarth, 1980.

Woolmer, J. Howard. *A Checklist of the Hogarth Press 1917-1946*. Rev. and enl. Ed. Revere, PA: Woolmer/Brotherson, 1986