

How Should One Read “The Reader”?

New Approaches to Virginia Woolf’s Late Archive

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ABSTRACT

In the final months of her life, Virginia Woolf worked on two projects. One was the posthumously published novel *Between the Acts* (1941). The other was a literary-historical project, which she provisionally titled “Turning the Page” or “Reading at Random”, but which is now known by the dual titles “Anon” and “The Reader”. Although published in a 1979 eclectic edition, these documents have received little critical attention. This article proposes three novel approaches to this archive of documents. The first takes up the methodology proposed by Woolf’s original titles and reads a single folio of this project at random, paying close material attention to what is on both sides of Woolf’s typescript page. The second approach expands on the materialist slant of the first approach and offers an anatomy of this archive, while the third approach expands on my previous discussion of cataloging and classification, in order to sketch out a historiography of Woolf’s late archive.

IN THE FINAL MONTHS OF HER LIFE, VIRGINIA WOOLF WORKED simultaneously on two projects that she would not live to see published. The better known of the two became the novel *Between the Acts* (1941), edited and published posthumously by her husband Leonard Woolf. In the introduction to his innovative edition of the novel, Mark Hussey observes that *Between the Acts* is “not usually considered among the well-known unfinished works of modernism” (in WOOLF 2011, xxxix).¹ He collocates Woolf’s 1941 novel with Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*, Antoni Gaudí’s *Sagrada Familia* and Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades* project. Still less well known is the work of literary history she had started but would never finish. This was provisionally titled “Reading at Random” or “Turning the Page” but is better known now by the dual title “Anon” and “The Reader”. In editing

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1. While it is customary in *Textual Cultures* to cite editions by editor rather than author; here the many editions of Virginia Woolf’s work are distinguished by dates. References to Woolf are to Virginia Woolf unless otherwise noted.

Between the Acts, Hussey undid some of Leonard Woolf's more enthusiastic emendations to Virginia Woolf's typescripts, producing an edition that hews closer to the last state of the text that Woolf herself had produced.² No such textual work has been undertaken with the drafts of "Anon" and "The Reader", which are published only in editions that, this article argues, are flawed. As well as discussing the published editions of the "Anon" and "The Reader" drafts and providing an introduction to the drafts themselves, this essay makes the case for a new edition of the drafts. This edition would be one that aims to be as complete as possible, that makes every page of every draft available; it would be one that aims to be as transparent as possible, that points up and explains the rationale behind every editorial intervention as far as possible. Such an edition would be unruly and contradictory, certainly, but this contradictory unruliness would be apt to the model of literary history Woolf proposes in these drafts.

Woolf wrote a number of drafts towards her literary-historical project, of which seventeen are extant. The draft pages of this project are housed in the New York Public Library's Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English Literature, where the various drafts of "Anon" are catalogued as M.45 through M.54 and the drafts of "The Reader" are catalogued as M.108 through M.113. These drafts are all written, either by hand or typewritten, on loose-leaf foolscap paper, which Woolf tended to number but not to date. In addition to these loose-leaf fragments, there is an extant draft in holograph in M.1–8, a notebook kept 1938–1939, which also contains drafts of contemporaneous essays, short stories, and portions of *Between the Acts*. I will expand on the nature of these documents in the second section of this article and will discuss their classification in the final section.

This article proposes three approaches to Woolf's final work, all premised on the materiality of the documents in her late archive. The first of these approaches is materially informed close reading. I bracket off a single folio from this project where Woolf has typed out a paragraph of "The Reader" on the back of a sheet from the drafts of *Between the Acts* and discuss the ways in which Woolf uses this folio to place "The Reader" in conversation with *Between the Acts* and the ways in which she uses this conversation to model a community of readers. The second approach expands on the materialist slant of the first and offers an anatomy of this archive, discussing the

2. The most noticeable change that Leonard Woolf made to the typescript involved italics. Leonard Woolf set all of the novel's pageant scenes in italic type where Virginia Woolf's typescript had employed roman type. Hussey's edition restores Virginia Woolf's original italicization. For more on these italics, see HUSSEY in WOOLF 2011, lxiv–lxviii and GOLDMAN 2013, 61.

documents Woolf left after her death and how they have been classified and cataloged in the years following her death. My third and final approach expands on my previous discussion of cataloging and classification, using Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1995) as a key analytic to sketch out a historiography of Woolf's late archive. Further, I use this section of my article to point up areas of the drafts where Woolf appears to anticipate this discussion. These three approaches work alongside one another to answer the question posed in my title, "How should one read 'The Reader'?" For now, though, I want to briefly discuss present editions of Woolf's final work to help orient us in this archive.

Woolf inscribes a radical version of literary history in the draft pages of this project, but it is my contention that present editions of Woolf's project do not do justice to her final work: in 1979, some four decades before I came to this archive, Brenda Silver produced an edition of "Anon" and "The Reader" that remains the standard edition of these essays. Silver's 1979 edition of Woolf's essay is reproduced in Bonnie Kime-Scott's 1990 anthology *The Gender of Modernism*, and it also acts as a copy-text for the edition published in the last of the six-volume *Essays of Virginia Woolf* (2011).³ Silver's edition of the essays is an eclectic one, in that it constructs a single reading text from this constellation of drafts. This edition is in many ways meticulously constructed — Woolf did not date the vast majority of the fragments, but Silver inferred a stemma for the "Anon" drafts from the slow fading of Woolf's typewriter ribbon, dividing them up into three variant traditions, A, B, and C. Silver argues that only the C variants represent the "rough draft of a completed and coherent essay" (1979, 363–64). She gestures towards a potential variorum edition that would display all versions, but instead provides a "clear" reading text as the best use of the space available to her. In privileging later and more "complete" drafts, Silver's edition of "Anon" does not reproduce material from the earliest drafts, instead presenting exclusively material from M.50 onwards — far later in the composition process.

Silver's 1979 edition does not preserve what Edward Bishop in a 2002 paper calls the "wildness" of Woolf's drafts (154). This "wildness" is both generative and speaks to Woolf's generative writing process — these draft fragments do not just describe literary history but rather document Woolf's attempt to work through literary history. Although these fragments are not strictly speaking in Woolf's hand, being typed, they constitute what Hans

3. In an introductory note the volume editor Stuart N. Clarke writes that he is "indebted to Professor Silver's scholarship and [has] followed her reconstruction"; see WOOLF 1986–2011a, 6: 580.

Walter Gabler calls, after Nelson Goodman, “autographic” documents, which are the “material manifestation of writing [. . .] in draft manuscripts” (GABLER 2018, 214). Autographic writing, composition, and drafting, finds a counterpart in “allographic” writing, which inscribes a text for reading, whether as a second draft, a proof or galley, or a published text. Autographic writing is not “vectored” in the same way that allographic writing is. Gabler writes that “the prime function of draft documents and the writing in them is not to record text for reading” as an allographic document does, but rather is to “record, support, and engender further composition” (2018, 211). Being autographic, these documents bear the material traces of Woolf’s process of composition, of creative writing, and of working through her radical vision of literary history. I contend that any reading done in Woolf’s late archive necessarily has to be of a materialist bent in order to account for the autographic nature of Woolf’s final project. The section that follows is an attempt to model such a practice of reading, examining one single folio from a fragment of “The Reader” where Woolf recycles older paper to write her literary-historical project and where she writes back to her substrate.

Approach I — The Fragment and the Substrate

This section of the article turns to one particular folio in Woolf’s late archive, a single sheet of loose-leaf paper filed as part of M.111, to illustrate what is at stake when reading in this archive. The folio is typed on both sides, and both sides are reproduced here as Figures 1 and 2 (see below).⁴ On one side, in faint type, is p. 185 (numbered by Woolf) of the typescript of *Between the Acts*. On the other side of the page, in darker type, is a single paragraph collected as part of the drafts of “The Reader”. That this paragraph is written in darker type indicates Woolf changed her typewriter ribbon before writing it, and Silver proposes that Woolf did so at some point between December 1940 and February 1941 (1979, 363). However, as neither side of the page bears a date, beyond this most basic of insights we cannot know for sure what the timeline for the dual composition of this folio was from the evidence presented to us by the folio itself; nor can we know what else Woolf was doing while she typed the paragraph from “The Reader”. Perhaps Woolf wrote this paragraph of “The Reader” while re-typing *Between the Acts*, or perhaps she used a stack of already superceded

4. Transcriptions of these documents appear later in this section of the article.

pages from an earlier draft of *Between the Acts* to type out her literary-historical project. We cannot know for sure, and I do not consider the precise timeline crucial to my analysis in this portion of the article; precise dates and timelines, insofar as they can be determined, will become important in the second and third portions of the article, but for now I wish to bracket off such questions and instead attend to this single folio.

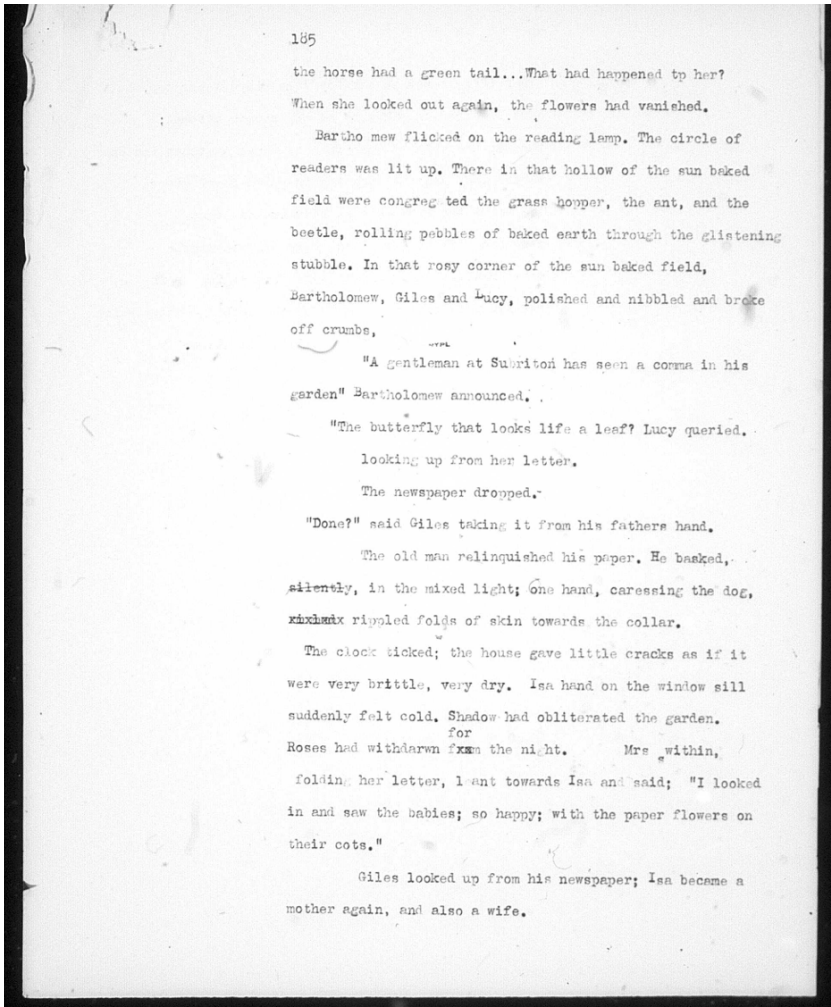


Figure 1. Virginia Woolf. 1940–1. M.111: Typescript Draft of "The Reader", Berg Coll. MSS Woolf, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English Literature, New York Public Library. Set III, p. 32, verso. © Society of Authors.

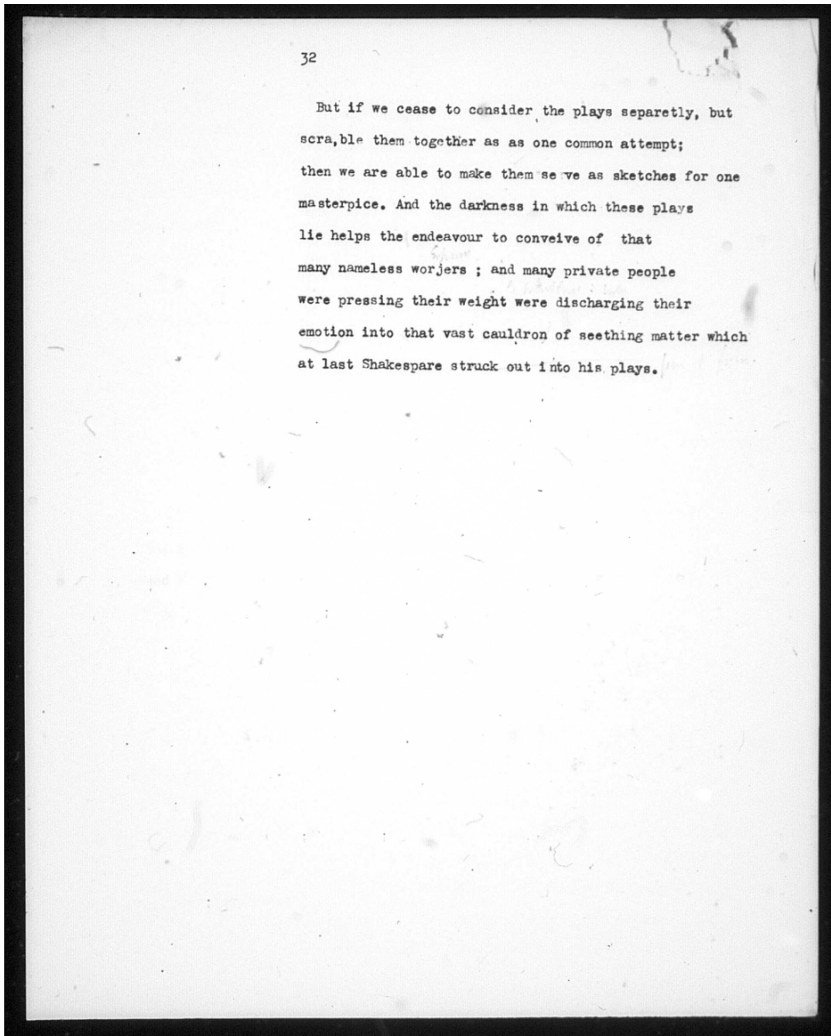


Figure 2. Virginia Woolf. 1940–1. M.111: Typescript Draft of “The Reader”, Berg Coll. MSS Woolf, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English Literature, New York Public Library. Set III, p. 32, recto. © Society of Authors.

My analysis of this folio, however, begins not with a reading of what is typed on the paper, but with a discussion of the substrate Woolf used: of Woolf’s paper. The English word “substrate” derives from the term “substratum” which itself is borrowed from an identical Latin term meaning “underlying layer” or “background”. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists an

array of possible senses in which the English word "substratum" has been used: it is the "underlying principle on which something is based; a basis, a foundation, a bedrock"; it is used in philosophical discourse (including in Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*) to indicate a "permanent underlying thing or essence in which properties inhere"; it is used in geology to indicate an "underlying stratum", especially one that lies "beneath the soil or any other surface feature"; it is used in linguistics to indicate a "language spoken in a particular area at the time of the arrival of a new language, and which has had within that area a detectable influence on the elements or features of the new language". In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995), Jacques Derrida notes that the term "substrate" indicates a certain temporal and ontological priority, a certain directionality, a model of influence. The substrate lies beneath and comes first. He writes that the "figure" of the substrate "marks the properly *fundamental* assignation of our problem, the problem of the fundamental. Can one imagine an archive without foundation, without substrate, without substance, without subjectile?" (1995, 26–7). Derrida figures the substrate as a material surface on which inscriptions are made but, crucially this surface is not secondary to the marks made on it. Rather, the substrate makes writing possible and conditions the form that writing can take. And just as it makes writing possible and conditions its form, it makes possible and conditions later encounters with that writing: Derrida writes that "the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future" (1995, 17). The medium is the message, certainly, but the medium also conditions the ways in which later readers can understand the message.

In one sense, the substrate Woolf uses is hardly remarkable: she types on generic loose-leaf foolscap paper. But in another, it is remarkably specific: she types on generic loose-leaf foolscap paper on which she has already typed out a significant portion of a draft of *Between the Acts*. This portion of the draft of *Between the Acts* becomes the substrate for Woolf's writing on literary history, supporting it and conditioning it. The typescript page from the *Between the Acts* draft reads as follows:

the horse had a green tail. . . What had happened tp her?
When she looked out again, the flowers had vanished.

Bartholo mew flicked on the reading lamp. The circle of
readers was lit up. There in that hollow of the sun baked
field were congregated the grass hopper, the ant, and the

beetle, rolling pebbles of baked earth through the glistening stubble. In that rosy corner of the sun baked field, Bartholomew, Giles and Lucy, polished and nibbled, and broke off crumbs,

“A gentleman at Subriton has seen a comma in his garden” Bartholomew announced.

“The butterfly that looks like a leaf? Lucy queried, looking up from her letter.

The newspaper dropped.

“Done?” said Giles taking it from his father’s hand.

The old man relinquished his paper. He basked, silently, in the mixed light; one hand, caressing the dog, xixlxcx rippled folds of skin towards the collar.

The clock ticked; the house gave little cracks as if it were very brittle, very dry. Isa’s hand on the window sill suddenly felt cold. Shadow had obliterated the garden.

Roses had withdrawn for the night. Mrs Swithin, folding her letter, looked towards Isa and said; “I looked in and saw the babies; so happy; with the paper flowers on their cots.”

Giles looked up from his newspaper; Isa became a mother again, and also a wife.⁵

(WOOLF 1940–1c, set 3, p. 32, verso)

The sentence that opens this folio is present in both this autographic draft passage and its allographic, published counterpart. I do not intend to trace the development of this sentence through to its published version beyond noting that the sentence is equally allusive in both published and draft versions. In both states of the text, Woolf makes an allusion not to another literary text but to a current event. The “horse with a green tail” refers to the rape of a fourteen-year-old girl by a guard at Whitehall in June 1938. The guard had lured her into the barracks in Horse Guards Parade, where the arch the reader imagines is located, by promising to show her a horse with a green tail. The rapists were tried and the trial was reported in the *London Times* on 28 and 29 June 1938 (“Three Troopers on Trial”; “Two Troopers Found ‘Guilty’”). A second trial took place in July 1938.

5. It is worth mentioning at this juncture that I reproduce Woolf’s spelling mistakes and typos here, and hopefully without adding any of my own, and only seek to add clarifications where I believe they are helpful. However, for a more thorough theorization of the Woolfian spelling mistake, and the editorial act of correction, see RANDALL 2015.

The defendant this time was Sir Aleck Bourne, who was charged with the “unlawful use of an instrument” in order to “procure a miscarriage of a woman” — or to use modern terminology, performed an abortion. The woman was the girl who was raped by the troopers. At the time, abortion was only legal in order to “save the life of the mother” or to “save the life of the child” (“Charge Against Surgeon”). Bourne successfully argued that the abortion was necessary to preserve the health of the girl, “in order to save her from mental collapse”, and was acquitted (“Surgeon Found ‘Not Guilty’”). The case became a test case, setting precedent until 1967 (CLARKE 1990, 4).

Returning to the folio in Woolf’s archive and reading on, we find that this moment of intertextuality is part of a wider scene of reading, and that this moment models a community of readers. As Bartholomew turns on the reading lamp, “The circle of readers was lit up” (WOOLF 1940–41c, set 3, p. 32, verso, ll. 3–4). The presence not just of a single reader but of a reading collective is disclosed and given form at this moment. At this point, the narrator’s gaze expands to encompass the “hollow of the sun baked field” (WOOLF 1940–41c, set 3, p. 32, verso, l. 4) that Pointz Hall, the grand house that is the scene for *Between the Acts*, sits in. Pointz Hall is surrounded by “congregated” insect life, “the grass hopper, the ant, and the beetle, rolling pebbles of baked earth through the glistening stubble” (WOOLF 1940–41c, set 3, p. 32, verso, ll. 6–7). The bugs’ labor is not dissimilar to that of Bartholomew, Giles, and Lucy who “polished and nibbled and broke off crumbs” (WOOLF 1940–41c, set 3, p. 32, verso, l. 8). Are this folio’s bugs here drawn into the circle of readers, or is the readerly labor of Bartholomew, Giles, Isa, and Lucy rendered insectile? Bartholomew then announces the presence of another insect with a distinctly textual and typographic name, a “comma”. Lucy glosses this as a “butterfly that looks [like] a leaf” (WOOLF 1940–1c, set 3, p. 32, verso, ll. 9–11). Whether she means a leaf from a plant or a leaf of paper is unclear. A newspaper then drops — whether this is the same newspaper Giles takes from his father’s hand is not stated.

His hands no longer holding the newspaper, Bartholomew then caresses the dog’s neck, “ripp[ing] folds of skin towards the collar” (WOOLF 1940–41c, Set III, p. 32, verso, l. 16–17). Again, we encounter a slippage between the human and the non-human akin to the moment earlier in the page where the readers’ work becomes insectile and the insects’ labor becomes readerly. Woolf says that Bartholomew’s hand caresses the dog but stops short of saying that this act of caressing is what ripples skin towards the collar. As readers we once again encounter a moment of indecision — are these folds of skin furry canid skin or hairless hominid skin? And is the

collar the sort that a dog wears or is it the collar of a human's shirt? This moment of slippage is all too brief, however. As Mrs Swithin enters and starts to discuss the babies in their cots, Isa becomes "a mother again, and also a wife" (WOOLF 1940–41c, Set III, p. 32, verso, l. 25–26). However, neither Isa nor Mrs Swithin are depicted looking after the infants here. Mrs Swithin looks in on them and reports to Isa: we do not learn who takes care of them in their cots, who has placed the paper flowers upon the cots, who keeps them fed and happy. The page ends, then, with a jerk back to the anthropocentric, and from the possibility (however brief) of a pan-species collective of canid/insectile/human reading laborers to the striated economies of human reproductive labor.

Turning the page literally and metaphorically from one scene of reading to another, on the other side of the page I have been discussing is a single typed paragraph. Neither side bears a date but the fact that the *Between the Acts* side is in lighter type than "The Reader" side indicates that the *Between the Acts* text was composed later. The paragraph of "The Reader" reads as follows:

But if we cease to consider the plays separately, but scra, ble them together as one common attempt; then we are able to make them serve as sketches for one masterpiece. And the darkness in which these plays lie helps the endeavour to convey of that many nameless worjers ; and many private people were pressing their weight were discharging their emotion into that vast cauldron of seething matter which at last Shakespeare struck out into his plays.

(WOOLF 1940–1c, set 3, p. 32, recto)

This passage discusses Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, the early modern drama which "at last Shakespeare struck out into his plays". Although Shakespeare is the only proper noun in this paragraph, his name is invoked not as fundamental or authoritative; rather, he appears "at last", as a culmination or summation of a long process of anonymous and coactive creation. Woolf's argument here bears more than a passing resemblance to her argument in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), that "masterpieces are not single and solitary births" but rather are "the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice" (WOOLF 1993, 59–60). But unlike this passage in *A Room of One's Own*, this paragraph in M.111 traces a double trajectory, tracking labor both authorial and readerly. The former labor is one of "many nameless worjers ; and many private people" and is rendered in terms that are sensuous, bodily, and sexual: they press their weight, they

discharge their emotion into a "vast cauldron of seething matter" (WOOLF 1940–1c, set 3, p. 32, recto).

The historic model of coactive creation in this passage is supplemented by a model of reading that allows contemporary readers to look past the singular writer of singular genius and glimpse the many nameless workers and many private people laboring in anonymity who provide the "seething matter" which Shakespeare "struck out into his plays". This present readerly labor is rendered contingent by a structure of conditionals — "But if we cease, to consider the plays separately, *but* scramble them together [. . .] *then* we are" (all instances of emphasis mine) — and that initial "But" reminiscent of the explosive vocative marker that opens *A Room of One's Own*. Undertaking this readerly labor requires contemporary readers (whether in Woolf's time or our own) to disabuse themselves of a model of authorship that celebrates the author as a singular writing subject and the play as a singular dramatic object. This model does not allow for the possibility of anonymity or flux. Nor does it allow for the prospect that a literary work can be a common "endeavour" created not just by a singular named author but by "many nameless workers" whose contributions go unacknowledged but are recorded nonetheless in the form of the play-text that we receive centuries later. These "nameless" plays by "private people" remain in the "darkness", but reading these relatively unknown plays allows us to recover the anonymous voices of their co-creators.

Other fragments of "The Reader" expand on this model of authorship: briefly, Woolf posits in the "Reader" fragments that Shakespeare represents a watershed moment in the history of authorship. Prior to Shakespeare, Woolf argues, plays were influenced by their audience, who shared in their writing to a degree that was not the case after Shakespeare and after the birth of the singular author, who emerges in the later fragments of "The Reader". Rather, the co-creators of these early plays share in a common and anonymous well of emotion, "seething matter", an excess which has not been recorded directly but whose imprint is left on the plays of Marlowe, Kyd, and other such early playwrights and can be seen and felt centuries later if readers look in the right places (WOOLF 1940–1c, set 3, p. 32, recto, ll. 5–6). On this side of the folio Woolf posits a model of reading that seeks to illuminate the "darkness in which these plays lie" (WOOLF 1940–1c, set 3, p. 32, recto, l. 3) that is supplemented by the play of illumination that lights up the circle of readers on the folio's other side. Reading between these two scenes of readerly illumination, we find a model of readerly and writerly labor that generates a community of reader-creators that stretches across centuries and perhaps beyond the bounds of the human but is also very fragile. Here this readerly-writerly labor is couched, swaddled almost,

in conditionals as if to protect it against breakages; on the *Between the Acts* side of the page we see it broken by a snatch of dialogue from an interloper entering the circle of readers, by a glance upwards.

The language of this portion of “The Reader” with its vision of early plays as “sketches for one masterpiece” can be read alongside a discussion in “A Sketch of the Past”, Woolf’s draft autobiography written 1939–1940, more or less contemporaneously with *Between the Acts* and “Anon” and “The Reader”, and edited and published posthumously in the collection *Moments of Being* (1st ed. 1976). One of the most striking passages in “A Sketch of the Past” details what Woolf calls “a philosophy” of hers, or

at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that we — I mean all human beings — are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare; there is not Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself.

(WOOLF 1989, 81)

Although these passages display different rhetoric — the folio from M.111 is couched in an array of qualifiers and conditionals where “Sketch” is “constant”, “certain”, and “empathic” — they both advance a similar argument. Both “Sketch” and this portion of M.111 ask their readers to consider anonymity not as a lack of name but as something richly generative. In M.111, we are asked to “scra, ble” early plays “together as one common attempt”, and as “sketches for one masterpiece”. The “darkness” in which these plays “lie” is not to be mourned as a lack of knowledge but rather “helps the endeavour to convey” of the “many nameless workers” and “many nameless people” who helped coactively shape early drama (WOOLF 1940–1c, set 3, p. 32, recto). In “A Sketch of the Past”, Woolf’s figuration of anonymity as generative is expanded. Anonymous creation is not something that happened in the past, but rather is a continuing process in which “we — I mean all human beings” play a role (WOOLF 1989, 81). The “whole world” is figured as an artistic monad, a fractal form wherein the whole inheres in each part, and each part expresses the whole. Individual works of art such as “*Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet” express the “truth” about this work of art, but crucially “there is no Shakespeare; there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God” (WOOLF 1989, 81). In Woolf’s anonymous artistic monad, “we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself” (WOOLF 1989, 81).

Thus far this article has focused on one single sheet of paper in Woolf's late archive and attempted a close reading of the words on that piece of paper and the substrate on which the words are written. I have contended that, within the space of this folio, Woolf's work on "The Reader" writes back to her previous work, which comes to act as a substrate, and that this act of writing back helps to further illuminate the *Between the Acts* draft's circle of readers. Now I want to expand my focus to historicize this phase of Woolf's archive. In the interest of space I do not intend to offer similarly close readings of other portions of "Anon" and "The Reader" but rather to give context to the reading I have given thus far and provide grounds for my last section, which offers a historiography of Woolf's late archive.

Approach II — Historicizing Woolf's Late Archive: What Did Woolf Write?

Woolf had been considering her literary historical project for some years: indeed, Elena Gualtieri writes of Woolf's interest in such a project as pre-dating the earliest drafts of *Melymbrosia*, and identifies the essay "Reading" (1919) as the "remnants" of a literary historical project that "weaves together different temporal planes, from the passage of time within a day to the course of human life [. . .] interlacing these different stages with the history of English literature" (2000, 32). As early as 13 January 1932, Woolf conceived in her diary of a project that would "go through English literature like a string through cheese" (WOOLF 1977–1984, 4: 63). It is unlikely that she is referring to *The Common Reader: Second Series* (1932), which would be published later that year and which was largely written by that point, but is rather more likely that she is gesturing towards a future work. Some six years later, Woolf picks up this thread once again, writing in her diary on 14 October 1938 of her intention to "collect, even bind together my innumerable T.L.S notes: to consider them as material for some kind of critical book: quotations? comments? ranging all through English lit: as I've read it & noted it during the past 20 years" (WOOLF 1977–1984, 5: 180). On 12 September 1940, while "blackberrying", Woolf "conceived, or remoulded, an idea for a Common History book — to read from one end of lit. including biog; & range at will, consecutively" (WOOLF 1977–1984, 5: 318).

On 23 November, Woolf's thoughts "turn, well up, to write the first chapter of the next book (nameless). Anon, it will be called" (WOOLF 1977–1984, 5: 340). On 1 February 1941, Woolf wrote her confidante, the

composer Ethel Smyth, that she was “reading the whole of English Literature through”. She continues: “By the time I’ve reached Shakespeare the bombs will be falling. So I’ve arranged a very nice last scene: reading Shakespeare, having forgotten my gas mask, I shall fade far away, and quite forget. . .” (WOOLF 1975–1980, 6: 466). This work occupies Woolf for much of the rest of her life: on 1 March she writes again to Smyth that she is struggling with the work, telling Smyth that she is “at the moment trying, without the least success, to write an article or two for a new [third] Common Reader. I am stuck in Elizabethan plays. I cant move back or forwards. I’ve read too much, but not enough” (WOOLF 1975–1980, 6: 475). On 8 March, she writes in her diary “Suppose, I bought a ticket at the museum; biked in daily & read history. Suppose I selected one dominant figure in every age & wrote round & about?” (WOOLF 1977–1984, 5: 358). Only three weeks later, on 28 March 1941, she would take her own life.

From 24 November 1940 to her death on 28 March 1941, Woolf wrote a number of fragmentary pieces towards this Common History, ranging from two to twenty-six pages in length, although many of the fragments are just that, fragments of longer documents which are no longer extant. Some draft material is extant in holograph in a notebook kept 1938–1939, which also contains drafts of contemporaneous essays, short stories, and portions of *Between the Acts*. The remainder of the material encompassed by this project was written, either by hand or typewritten, on loose-leaf paper. Woolf tended to number these pages, which is helpful for contemporary readers in the archive, but almost never dated them, which is somewhat less helpful. Earlier fragments collected as part of “Anon” were handwritten, including the only dated fragment, while later fragments of “Anon” and the majority of the fragments designated as part of “The Reader” were typed.

Woolf collected all of these loose-leaf drafts in one of three Lifeguard Multigrip folders, somewhat like a modern-day ring binder. The first of these Woolf labelled “Turning the Page”, and the folder contained an eight page holograph draft headed “Anon Introduction” (WOOLF 1940–1f).⁶ The document in this folder probably corresponds to M.45.⁷ The second folder contained 41 typescript pages. On its front is pasted a monochrome print

6. I am grateful to Emma Davidson at the NYPL for photographing these folders for me.

7. My supposition here draws on classificatory aides produced by the auction house Sotheby’s, who helped to handle the accession of Leonard and Virginia Woolf’s voluminous archive following Leonard Woolf’s death in 1969. I am grateful to Julie Carlsen at the NYPL’s Berg Collection for sending me a copy of this aide.

of two roses lying by an urn (see Fig. 3). The number “2” is written on the urn in red ink — an ink that Woolf almost never used, indicating that it might have been written by someone other than Woolf — and on a slip of paper pasted on the spine of the folder Woolf wrote in black ink “Spare sheets T. of P.” The third folder contained “c. 50” sheets of typescript, and six pages of holograph writing (WOOLF 1940–1e). Woolf pasted a piece of paper on which she had written the title “Turning the Page” on the folder’s spine, while on the front are pasted two pieces of paper. The topmost piece



Figure 3. Virginia Woolf. 1940–1. Multigrip Folder: “Turning the Page” (2), Berg Coll. MSS Woolf, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English Literature, New York Public Library. © New York Public Library.

of paper bears the title “Turning the Page”, while the piece of paper below bears the titles “Transformations” and “The Lectures”, both written by Woolf and cancelled in blue crayon. Below that, a different hand has written “Sotheby” and the number “3” in a circle (WOOLF 1940–1g). According to Berg Collection curator Julie Carlsen, who offered meticulously detailed replies to my emailed questions about these documents, this different hand most likely belonged to Trekkie Parsons, who helped to prepare the material for accession following Leonard Woolf’s death (CARLSEN 2020, n.p.).

In 1973, these three folders acceded to the Berg Collection. Carlsen writes that they came to the Berg “intact and were subsequently separated by Berg librarians into ‘sets’ of ‘Anon’ and ‘The Reader’” (CARLSEN 2020, n.p.). This separation was undertaken based on internal evidence — cataloging notes on the folders the fragments are stored in cite paper stock and Woolf’s typewriter ribbon. In curating this mass of loose-leaf material, the curators identified (or perhaps created — a distinction I will discuss in the third section of this article) sixteen separate manuscripts. Ten of these, designated M.45–54, were labelled as fragments of “Anon”. Of these, the first three (M.45–7) are holograph, while the rest are typescript. M.45, 48, and 50 are titled “Anon”, while M.45 is the only fragment to bear a date: “Nov. 24, 1940”.

Unusually for Woolf, she did not always type on fresh sheets of paper: as wartime shortages began to bite, both Woolfs found themselves short of paper. Leonard Woolf wrote of the war as a “publishing nightmare for the Hogarth Press” and noted that the “blackest spot in the nightmare, perpetually playing on our minds, was the shortage and rationing of paper” (1969, 106). Meanwhile, Virginia Woolf found herself forced to type on the backs of older documents when a fresh supply of paper was not readily accessible. One of these documents was a typescript of *Between the Acts*. This is not, in and of itself, new information: Brenda Silver mentions it in passing in the textual apparatus of her 1979 edition of “Anon”, but it seems to me too simplistic to say that Woolf “tended to use the backs of discarded typescript pages when no other paper was readily available” and move on (SILVER 1979, 367–68). Indeed, one of Woolf’s acts of wartime recycling provided the substrate for the analysis in the first section of this article. We have seen one case in which Woolf used her later work on “The Reader” to write back to her substrate, and any one of the recycled pages in the archives of “Anon” and “The Reader” might provide the springboard for more such materially informed analysis. Two of the “Anon” fragments “dovetail”, to use the original curators’ phrase, with other works. The first of these is M.49 — two pages of this fragment were written on the back of

a holograph draft titled "People one wd. have liked to have met" (WOOLF 1940–1a, 8–9). I have been unable to trace a print version of this work and it may exist only as part of M.49, a fragment within a fragment. The ninth page of M.54, meanwhile, is written on the back of a piece of writing that is unidentified by the Berg catalogue but that I believe to be another page of "Anon" and "The Reader".

The remaining six fragments, designated M.108–113, are cataloged as fragments towards "The Reader", although Woolf rarely uses that title herself. The only fragment that bears a title is M.111 and is divided up by the curators into three sets. Page 31 of the second set is titled "The Reader", while p. 31 of the third set is titled "Some speculations on the life of the Reader". (WOOLF 1940–1c, set 2, 31; Set 3, 31). All of the "Reader" fragments are typed, save for a portion of M.109, and this set of documents is far more permeable than the earlier documents: four fragments out of the six have portions typed out on the verso of other works — including the page I discussed earlier. For instance, p. 30 of M.109 is cataloged as part of the *Between the Acts* typescripts, just as p. 185 of the *Between the Acts* typescript is cataloged as part of "The Reader", while the manuscript pages of this fragment are written on the back of typescript drafts of the 1941 essay "Mrs Thrale", the last essay Woolf would publish in her lifetime.⁸ The first page of M.113 is written on the back of a typescript fragment, unidentified by the Berg curators but which Bryony Randall has identified as a page of the posthumously published short story "A Legacy" (1944).⁹ There are further examples of such permeability that I have not discussed here, any of which might lend themselves to the kind of materially informed close reading I undertook in the first section of this article.

The final section of this article asks how the bibliographic detail I have spent the past few pages recounting helps us to read "The Reader". In so doing this article will sketch out a historiography of Woolf's final literary-historical project and examine a moment where Woolf anticipates such a historiography.

8. This essay was published initially in the *New Statesman and Nation* on 8 March 1941 and was later reprinted in the posthumous collection of Woolf's essays titled *The Moment and Other Essays* (1947); Cf. WOOLF 1986–2011c, 4: 20–38.

9. This story fragment is not referenced by Susan Dick in her edition of Woolf's *Collected Shorter Fiction*. I am grateful to Prof. Randall for identifying this page.

Approach III: The Mediating Archive

It is now worth noting that “Turning the Page”, the title Woolf had inscribed on the Multigrip folders the Berg received in 1973, has all but vanished, as has the tripartite structure of this material implied by its division into three separate folders. The Berg curators’ intervention in this portion of Woolf’s late archive has produced a set of documents known by the dual title of “Anon” and “The Reader”, and what emerges from this intervention has come to provide the ground for virtually all later encounters with Woolf’s final literary-historical project. In the opening pages of *Archive Fever* (1995), Jacques Derrida diagnoses the archive as fundamentally Janus-faced, looking simultaneously backwards in time and towards the future. He reads etymologically, noting that the word “archive” derives from the Greek word “*arkhē*”, which “names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*” (1995, 1). Derrida traces the root of the word *arkhē* to “*arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded” (1995, 2). The *arkheion* was not just the place where the law resided, but “on the account of their publicly recognised authority”, it is the place where the archons’ documents, official documents, are filed. The archons are “first of all the documents’ guardians”, but they are more than that:

They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such archons, these documents in effect speak the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law. To be guarded thus, in the jurisdiction of this *speaking the law*, they needed at once a guardian and a localization. Even in their guardianship or their hermeneutic tradition, the archives could do neither without substrate nor without residence.

(DERRIDA 1995, 2)

The archive becomes both the place where the law begins, its point of commencement, and the place where it is spoken and interpreted, a place of commandment. But just as the archive is shaped by the immutable law of its commencement and its commandment, its relationship to the future is determined. The “technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and its relationship to the future” (DERRIDA 1995, 17). The archive is concerned not just with the law of the *arkhē* but constitutes the grounds for the possibility of its endurance: “The archivization produces as

much as it records the event" (DERRIDA 1995, 17). The archive does not just maintain traces of documents but collects and orders these documents and governs the ways in which they are intelligible.

In the case of this portion of Woolf's late archive, this is literal: I refer to "Anon" and "The Reader" as distinct sets of documents throughout this essay, but this is somewhat of a bibliographic-administrative fiction. Indeed, I am not overly convinced that there is a work called "The Reader" given that its title appears so infrequently in this archive. These documents were categorized as such several decades before I came to them, and I use the dual titles more out of convenience than to refer to two distinct works. Referring to the ways in which Silver edited the fragments I have been discussing is instructive here. In constructing her edition of "Anon", Silver interpolated one of the "Reader" fragments into her edition of "Anon" and appended significant portions from two more "Reader" fragments onto the end of her "Anon". On this basis, Silver dubbed what remained of "The Reader" a "series of beginnings, none of them clear as to where the essay, or the history, wanted to go" (1979, 363–65). The "Reader" fragments Silver interpolated into "Anon", which correspond to M.108, M.111 and M.113, fit the chronology described in "Anon" but they speak to different histories and different modes of literary production. The "Anon" fragments describe the death of the anonymous poet-singer at the hands of the printing press and the named author. Meanwhile, the "Reader" fragments delineate the slow creation of the private spectator-reader in the crucible of the nascent Jacobean and Elizabethan theatre. The two are not to be conflated.

Silver chooses to end her edition of "The Reader" with the final sentence of M.112, "We are in a world where nothing is concluded" (WOOLF 1940–1d, set 3: 37). Coming to a definitive if ironized end with that statement, Silver's eclectic edition is not entirely adequate either to the content of Woolf's draft fragments, nor to their form: the form of this constellation of documents forecloses definitive conclusions and conclusivity itself. Whether she was right to do so or not, that Silver's edition does this speaks to the contingent nature of these classifications. Archival classifications both in the case of Woolf's late archive, and more broadly as Derrida argues in *Archive Fever*, generate a past as much as they do shelter and preserve the past.

Woolf points up the historiography of her literary-historical project within the typescript pages of the project itself. She discusses the structures of power that produce history and make it legible, describing in the early fragments of "Anon" a "nimbus" of interpellating forces, a "steem of influences" (WOOLF 1940–1a, 3). Woolf's typo "steem" is instructive

here — these influences exist in a zone of undecidability between the lexis of the natural, “stream”, and the lexis of the mechanical “steam”, as in the steam that powers a steam engine. She gives names to these forces, dubbing them Nin, Crot, and Pully. This trio is birthed at the moment of Anon’s doubtful death as Caxton prints his first pages in 1477:

~~But~~ +With+ the printing press ~~brought~~ +came+ into existence forces that cover over the original song — books themselves and the readers of books. If science were so advanced that we could at this moment x ray the singers mind +[as she moved?]+ we should find a nimbus surrounding the song; a steeam of influences. Some we can name — education; class; the pressure of society. But they are so many, and so interwoven and so obscure that it is simpler to invent for them nonsense names--- say Nin Crot and Pully. Nin Crot and Pully are always at their work, tugging, obscuring, distorting.

(WOOLF 1940–1a, 3–4)

Silver passes over these names rather too quickly. Nin, Crot, and Pully do not appear in the body of her addition of “Anon” but rather in the introduction, where she takes Woolf’s statement that their names are “nonsense names” at face value. Silver refers to Nin, Crot, and Pully as “fanciful names for the complex of political, cultural, and personal forces that influence the writer” (1979, 360). She is right to describe them as a complex of political forces, but I want to dwell on their names for a moment in order to come to an understanding of how this complex of forces operates.

All three of Woolf’s names are defined in Joseph Wright’s *English Dialect Dictionary*, a work with which Woolf was evidently familiar — Mitchell Leaska convincingly argues for Wright’s influence on Woolf’s work in the 1930s and 1940s in his introduction to *The Pargiters*, his transcription of the first two manuscript volumes of the drafts of *The Years* (in WOOLF 1978, xii). According to Wright’s dictionary, “Nin” is a Cornish dialect verb meaning “to drink” but is also cross-referenced to “none”, whose usage in various dialects bears similar valences to standard English usage (Nin). “Crot” meanwhile refers to a “dwarf” or a “boy or girl stunted in growth” but is also a “very small part” (Crot). The 1893 first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* records an older usage, however: in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries “crot” was used to denote a “particle, bit, atom [or] individual piece”, citing the c.1400 poem *Cursor Mundi* (crot | crote, n.). Meanwhile the *Middle English Dictionary* defines “crot” as a “lump or a clod of earth”, (crōt(e n.) citing the Paston Letters, about which Woolf wrote

in her essay "The Pastons and Chaucer", published in the first *Common Reader* (1925) (WOOLF 1986–2011d). Pully (or Pulley, as it is spelt in some fragments) is probably the most familiar to modern anglophone audiences. Wright defines it as the "wheel placed over a pit over which the rope for drawing coals is passed". The *OED* records historical usages dating back to the 1350s ("pulley, n.1"). Reading between these various definitions we encounter a distinctly mechanical form of control, one where the levers, wheels and "pull[e]ys" of power are in the water we "nin" and saturate every atom, every clod of earth, every single "crot".

Nin, Crot, and Pully are not directly knowable through the literature that they shape, for they are "so many", they are "so interwoven", and "so obscure". Rather, they form the ground upon which literature is written, the unspoken "forces" that "cover over the original song" (WOOLF 1940–1a, 4). Woolf implies that we cannot turn to literature for a thorough reading of literature's prehistory, of the influences that pre-exist literature — certainly individual literary works and perhaps literature more broadly as an institution — and interpellate its writers as subjects. Instead we must turn to historians: "To follow his firtunes further, we must turn ~~to an outside~~ one of those commentators who tell us so much about the invisib influences; about Nin Crot and Pulley" (WOOLF 1940–1b, 4). As readers in the twenty-first century, we are, of course, subject to our own time's Nins, Crots, and Pulleys, our own invisible nimbuses of interwoven and obscure influences that shape what is written, what is read, and how we encounter it. Recovering "Anon" and "The Reader" thus constitutes not just an act of reading but an act of negotiation that is at least a double move: reading a history that seeks to account for the unrecorded excess that escapes the historian's pen — and realizing the impossibility of this task — while also simultaneously accounting for the mediations of the archive that govern how we encounter this history.

Conclusion: How Should One Read "The Reader"?

How then should one read "The Reader"? Reading in Woolf's late archive is a tall order. These documents trace a literary history which has at its heart an anonymous excess that necessarily escapes the historian's grasp but which must nonetheless be recovered, which is itself expressed in a constellation of draft fragments that simultaneously work through literary history and what it means to write a history of literature. In "How Should One Read a Book?", which was initially published in *The Yale Review* in

1926 and republished with significant emendations as the final essay of *The Common Reader: Second Series* (1932), and which is the essay that gives this article its title, Woolf asks her readers to practice an idiosyncratic and heuristic mode of reading. “The only advice”, Woolf writes, “that one person can give another about reading is to take no advice, to follow your own instincts, to use your own reason, to come to your own conclusions”. Rather than relying on prejudice or “heavily furred and gowned” authorities, the reader should not “dictate to your author; [but] try to become him. Be his fellow worker and accomplice” (WOOLF 1986–2011b, 6: 573). In the first instance, reading — or at least reading in a Woolf-sanctioned manner — is an act of profound empathy and mutual, coactive creation premised on the reader’s unconditioned encounter with the text, premised on collecting impressions prior to aesthetic judgment. If Woolf’s reader opens their “mind as widely as possible, then signs and hints of almost imperceptible fineness, from the twist and turn of the first sentences, will bring [them] into the presence of a human being unlike any other” (WOOLF 1986–2011b, 6: 573–74). Reading, however, is only the “first process” and readers must “pass judgment upon these multitudinous impressions; we must make of these fleeting shapes one that is hard and lasting” (WOOLF 1986–2011b, 6: 579).

Woolf’s 1932 essay provides a practice of reading that is almost phenomenological in its method, a method that proceeds from a reader’s unconditioned encounter with the text. Woolf asks the readers of *The Common Reader: Second Series* to consider how they encounter books, specifically. The 1929 essay cites novels old and new, criticism, poetry, biography, and drama, but implicit in both the essay’s title and its choice of reading is the book as material form — a codex consisting of pages with type printed on them, bound by a spine and sandwiched between covers. But my article has not overly engaged with material published in codex form. Woolf’s argument in “How Should One Read a Book”, by contrast, deals with allo-graphic, published texts. This is not to say that Woolf’s unconditioned encounter with the text is impossible or undesirable here. Rather, it underscores that the unconditioned encounter with the text Woolf theorizes in 1932 is conditioned by the material form of the text. What happens when we do not encounter Woolf’s fleeting shapes in codex form, but rather in a constellation of draft fragments? “Anon” and “The Reader” do not present their readers with a straightforward narrative, or even a complicated narrative in a relatively straightforward format with a clear-cut path from beginning to end. So, how should one read “The Reader”?

The passage of M.111 I discussed in the first part of this article bears a vision of flux and fluidity that is apposite to the form of the “Anon” and

"The Reader" fragments more broadly, and which teaches us to read in this archive, which teaches us how one should read "The Reader". This archive is a constellation of documents which should not be read in isolation but rather viewed as "one common attempt" and perhaps even "sketches for one masterpiece" that remains stubbornly unrealized and unrealizable. And this is buttressed by Woolf's chosen substrate — a page from the typescript of *Between the Acts* that gestures outwards to the world. This folio highlights what is at stake when we read in Woolf's late archive. This article has sought to offer a historical and bibliographic overview of the "Anon" and "The Reader" fragments, and to provide a close reading of a small but richly allusive portion of this archive. In so doing I have made the case for future scholars to turn back to Woolf's final project and read it as a constellation of material objects which intersect and dovetail with each other and other works in generative ways, in ways that spark off new readings like the one I proposed in the first section of this essay, which read modes of canid/insectile/human labouring community across the drafts of *Between the Acts* and "The Reader". I further hope that I have made the case for a new edition of the "Anon" and "The Reader" fragments according to modern editorial principles, according to principles of transparency and completeness. Such an edition would be one that allows scholars who do not have access to either the Berg's holdings at the NYPL or the facsimiles of these holdings to undertake such work. There is much left to discover in Woolf's late archive, and such an edition would make this work a "common attempt".

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