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<th>The ‘missing’ letters of Leonard Woolf to Nancy Nolan 1943-1969</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>Byrne, Anne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publication Date</strong></td>
<td>2020-01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publisher</strong></td>
<td>Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Link to publisher’s version</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.viriniawoolfsociety.org.uk/virginia-woolf-bulletin/">http://www.viriniawoolfsociety.org.uk/virginia-woolf-bulletin/</a></td>
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<td><strong>Item record</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10379/16096">http://hdl.handle.net/10379/16096</a></td>
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17. Virginia Woolf and 'Tiswas Shandy' (2016) by Frances Spalding
16. To pin down the moment with date and season (2014) by Hermione Lee
15. Virginia Woolf, Fame, and 'la gloire' (2012) by Michael Whitworth
6. 'The Exhibition is in ruins': Virginia Woolf and Empire (2005) by Anus Smith
5. The True Nature of Woman' from Woolstonecraft to Woolf (2004) by Lyndall Gordon
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Two booklets in a folder: (1) Two Stories, replicating the 1917 original; (2) introduction and appendices. £18.75 (£21 to Europe; £22 outside Europe) including (airmail) p&p.

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Hardback omnibus edition of the three books translated by Virginia Woolf and S. S. Kotelsky. £18 (£22 overseas) including (surface mail) p&p.

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A5-sized, 48 pages of plain paper, card covers. The front cover features a glossy black-and-white photo of Monk's House garden. £3 each (£5 overseas) including (airmail) p&p.

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Black-and-white photo similar to that on the lower wrapper of this Bulletin. Set of 5 costs £2.50 (£3.50 overseas) including (airmail) p&p.

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£2 each (£3.50 overseas) including (airmail) p&p.

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Dark-green Cordex binders, each holding at least nine issues (i.e. three years of the Bulletin). UK increased price of £7.50 each (£10.50 overseas) including (surface mail) p&p.

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THE ‘MISSING’ LETTERS OF LEONARD WOOLF TO NANCY NOLAN 1943–69

Anne Byrne

Monk’s House, Rodmell,
near Lewes, Sussex.

25/2/43

Dear Mrs Nolan,

I must apologise for leaving your letter so long unanswered, but I have been particularly busy the last ten days. It interested me very much. When I received your letter, I instructed The Hogarth Press to send you a copy of MRS DALLOWAY and I hope you have got it by now. Winifred [sic] Holby wrote a book about my wife, but it is I believe, out of print. The Hogarth Press hope to publish one by Edwin Muir this spring.¹

As regards your question about epistolary friendship, I dont really know. There must be people who would be too only glad to correspond about books. The difficulty would be to get in touch with them.

Yours sincerely

Leonard Woolf [signature handwritten in ink]²

This is the first letter from Leonard Woolf to Nancy Nolan, who had written to him from Dublin, enquiring about a copy of Mrs. Dalloway, unavailable in Ireland. In her letter of 9 February, she had reflected that she had seen ‘a good many question marks in this’ (her letter). In reply, Leonard did not respond to Nancy’s questions about the uncertainties that surrounded the censorship of books in Ireland and England or the lure of the written word for avid readers. His was more of a practical response: he sent her a copy of Mrs. Dalloway, informed her that Winifred Holby’s biography of Virginia Woolf was out of print and he acknowledged her appeal for a letter friendship with others who loved books. This first exchange marks the beginning of an extended period of correspondence which endured until Leonard’s death in 1969 (see Byrne). Frederic Spotts has characterised Leonard’s prolific professional, social and personal letters as ‘matter-of-fact’ and written with ‘great spontaneity’: ‘They come straight from the heart and head, with no frills or artifice or weasel words, and little or no desire to entertain or amuse, but simply to convey feelings, ideas and information’ (Spotts xii).

Though Leonard frequently described himself as a ‘bad correspondent’ to Nancy, from the outset of their letter exchanges he wrote that he enjoyed reading her amusing letters. He reassured her that he was much interested in her observations about books and their authors, as well as her accounts of her family life in Dublin. Correspondences, such as Nancy Nolan’s and Leonard Woolf’s, characterised and archived as ‘fan-mail’, are not a feature of Leonard’s published letters (see Spotts). Fans did write to him, as the correspondence archive in the Leonard Woolf Papers in Sussex attest (SxMs-13). While there, I read and examined 125 letters from Nancy to Leonard between 1943 and 1969. I also observed that 300 letters are attributed to an American correspondent, Evangeline Levine. By volume alone, there is more to this type of correspondence than the term ‘fan-mail’ might convey.³ While fan-mail to Leonard may be regarded as a measure of readers’ interests in Virginia Woolf’s fiction and essays, or indeed of Leonard’s own political and autobiographical writings, they are also indicative of readers’ attraction to Leonard’s character and of his responsive interest in the lives of others. Nancy Nolan’s and Evangeline Levine’s letters are remarkable for the duration of the correspondence and are expressive of the interior lives of both women, conveying as they do the immediacy of the social and historical condition of the societies in which they lived (Ireland and the US). As a matter of practice, Leonard retained copies of his own letters, but in these cases the number of replies to both women in the Sussex archive are modest. In the absence of a substantial collection of Leonard’s replies, it is difficult to assess the interactive nature of this type of correspondence or his personal rather than professional interest in fan-mail. For instance, the Sussex archive has copies of only eight letters from Leonard to Nancy (three in 1949–50, five in 1964–9). These are short, typed, factual letters that report on the weather, Leonard’s work at the Hogarth Press, or brief references to an author or a book which they had both read.

Leonard sent gifts of books to Nancy, and later in the course of their acquaintance her children and grandchildren received large parcels of books from him. These were books sent to him for review, Hogarth Press and Chatto & Windus publications, or books that he simply had ‘to throw out because I no longer have the space in my house to keep them’ (LW to NN, 27 July)

¹Never published.
²This letter is in the care of the Nolan family, to whom I am grateful for access to their private archive of Leonard Woolf’s letters to Nancy Nolan. Permission to quote from Leonard Woolf’s letters has been kindly permitted by the University of Sussex and the Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of Leonard Woolf. Copyright © The Estate of Leonard Woolf, 2020.
³For an excellent analysis of fan-mail to Virginia Woolf, see Daugherty and Cuddy-Keane.
There is a marked contrast between Leonard’s short letters in the archive and Nancy’s extensive detailing of her domestic and caring work, her pride in her motherhood, her commitment to her children’s education, descriptions of their accomplishments in music, references to her relationships with her husband, mother, daughters and a few friends, her delight in her grandchildren, her unabashed revelations of being misunderstood, accounts of periods of illness, of emotional turmoil, all freighted by an unsated need for solitude and a life of her own among books. Spotts believes that ‘Correspondence is unwitting autobiography’ (Spotts x). Nancy Nolan’s letters truly permit the reader into the immediacy of her thoughts and concerns about her domestic life as a mother and wife working in the home in 1950s and 1960s Ireland. They also convey the impression of a person who sought out another kind of life, other than the one in which she found herself. All of this and more was shared with Leonard.

I recognised that the personal and familial content of her letters to Leonard were replete with material to understand the struggles and ambitions of the everyday lives of women in mid-twentieth-century Ireland. However, the paucity of Leonard’s replies to Nancy in the Sussex archive posed a challenge to understand the epistolary dynamic between them. Nor could I ignore Virginia Woolf’s wisdom concerning letter writers: ‘The letter writer is no surreptitious historian. He is a man of short range sensibility, he speaks not to the public at large but to the individual in private. All good letter writers feel the drag of the face on the other side of the page and obey it—they take as much as they give’ (E6 225). Without more extensive evidence, I could not gauge Leonard’s persistent interest in Nancy’s life as narrativised in her letters—a fact which also puzzled Nancy herself. I also believed that despite my interest in her life as an Irishwoman ‘common reader’, her passion for literature and for beloved authors such as Virginia Woolf, Charles Lamb and the Brontë sisters, I could not write about other aspects of Nancy’s private life. In 2013, I made contact with one of her granddaughters, who generously met with me and shared family memories of her grandmother. But I knew that without extensive consultation with Nancy’s descendants or an opportunity for family members to participate in the research, any sociobiographical work evaluating the fit of the correspondence with changing mores of Irish society would be a fraught exercise.

In September 2019, another of Nancy’s granddaughters contacted me, having read my 2014 Virginia Woolf Miscellany article about her grandmother (see Byrne). This led to a remarkable and much longed-for meeting with her mother, one of Nancy’s daughters. It transpired that like all good correspondents, despite numerous relocations, Nancy Nolan had looked after Leonard’s letters to her and had stored them carefully in a handsome red cardboard box. The Nolan archive contains fifty-eight letters from Leonard to Nancy, each one folded and replaced in its envelope, some of which include the exchange of photographs (of Monks House and Leonard’s dogs and cats, for example). All of the letters and envelopes are typewritten, addressed to ‘Mrs Nolan’ and signed in ink ‘Leonard Woolf’. It was not until the later years of their correspondence that Leonard changed his ‘Yours Sincerely’ to ‘Yours Affectionately’. For those letters written during the war in 1943 and 1944, the notepaper is thin and clipped to size, with torn envelopes that bear the mark of the English and Irish censors’ offices (e.g. ‘Opened by Examiner 502’ or ‘Opened by Censor’ or ‘An Scuduid D’Oscailt’). One envelope is missing its letter. Of the seven letters written by Leonard in 1943, six were opened, resealed and stamped by the postal censors before Nancy received them. She does not refer to the fact that his letters were scrutinised by censors—perhaps she was fearful that the correspondence might stop if she did? Many of the envelopes had been recycled by Leonard, bearing a Political Quarterly banner or those of local building suppliers. This new archive of his letters extends from that first letter written in reply to Nancy in 1943 until his last letter of 12 July 1969.

While his letters rarely extend to two pages, they are typically composed of two to three lengthy paragraphs, unlike the terse responses of five to six lines which I had come to expect from the eight letters archived in Sussex. In his letter of 19 March 1943, for example, Leonard empathised with Nancy’s sense of isolation and recognised that ‘it must be trying to live among people who take little or no interest in books’. He noted with humour that in London one has too much of a good thing, and it would be refreshing if one knew fewer people who talked about books or more people who talked less about them. He was surprised that ‘The Fountain’ was on the proscribed list of banned books by the Irish Government, a book he regarded as ‘sham’
Epistolary friendships

In her first letter to Leonard, Nancy inquired about an ‘epistolary friendship’ with people who liked to write about books and authors, whose ideas might nurture a meaningful life. Did Leonard ever imagine that he, the ‘bad correspondent’, would become that epistolary friend for Nancy or her for him? But sustained by each letter sent and received, a relationship developed. A sense of the significance of Nancy’s epistolary friendship for Leonard is suggested by three additional letters in the Nolan family archive. Virginia Browne-Wilkinson wrote to Nancy on Leonard’s behalf to tell her that he had enjoyed her letter as usual, was ‘most interested in all her news’, but was unwell and not able to reply himself (12 July 1969).7 Leonard was seriously ill. Browne-Nicholson promised to let Nancy know of any change to his health, but remained anxious that the public or press should not be informed of his illness. Nancy was an exception to that interdict; she had become part of a circle of close correspondents, epistolary friends, ‘whose letters have been a great pleasure’ to Leonard (VWB to NN, 4 August 1969). After his death on 14 August 1969, in a letter to Trekkie Parsons, Nancy revealed that she would miss writing to her friend Leonard. Trekkie responded with kindness and sympathy, reassuring her that her correspondence and long friendship with him mattered a great deal. Trekkie wrote that she would be ‘very glad’ if Nancy were to write to her from time to time (TP to NN, 28 September 1969). A month later, Nancy received a parcel in the post. Another gift of a book had arrived, the final volume of Leonard’s autobiography, The Journey Not the Arrival Matters. Published posthumously, the thoughtful gift of the book from Browne-Wilkinson signalled the epistolary friendships of Nancy Nolan and Leonard Woolf. ‘To | Nancy Nolan | in gratitude for the pleasure her | letters gave to Leonard Woolf over | so many years of friendship | VBW | October 6th, 1969’ (see overleaf).

7Virginia Browne-Wilkinson met Leonard Woolf in 1959 and became a close friend, particularly in the latter years of his life. She assisted Leonard with the correction of the proofs of The Journey Not the Arrival Matters. Browne-Wilkinson published in the Cornhill Magazine and authored at least two books on family history. (For more on Browne-Wilkinson, see Glendinning.)
NOTES AND QUERIES

The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen: A Tragic Influence

One of the best things about research is making unexpected discoveries. The discoveries are not always directly useful, yet for the researcher they can be valuable and deeply moving. This is the story of one such discovery.

With the help of AbeBooks, I obtained a copy of The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen (1906). It’s a worn copy, with dark yet faded and battered cover, and warped pages showing signs of foxing. The book was sent by a book dealer in Lincoln who specialises in selling books withdrawn from academic libraries throughout the UK. My book, a Duckworth first edition, came from Bristol Polytechnic, but before that, as the ornate, slightly whimsical, ex libris bookplate announces, it belonged to Humphrey Owen Jones.

The bookplate, dated 1909, shows an image of Clare College, Cambridge, the college from which Jones had graduated in 1903, and where he stayed on as a fellow in the chemistry department. From 1901 he was Jacksonian...