

P R E F A C E

by *Wayne Chapman*

Virginia Woolf International, a special issue of *The South Carolina Review*, features thirteen scholars who presented the eleven major addresses that made up the centerpiece of Virginia Woolf and the Arts: The Sixth Annual Virginia Woolf Conference, held at Clemson University on June 13-16, 1996. Their chief aim then was to provide a primarily American audience with exposure to points of view that prevail today on Virginia Woolf and her works in other parts on the world. These presentations were assembled into five plenary units that, in fact, constituted the world's first International Symposium on the Reception of Virginia Woolf, giving voice to countries where interest in her work is known to be significant. The exchange of views and edifying experience of the symposium participants and general audience alike, as I judge from responses to conference questionnaires, might well mark an important development in a subfield of literary studies that is maturing behind one of the major writers of the twentieth century.

The perspective of this first-ever international symposium on Woolf ranged from the U.S. to England, Europe, and the Far East. As conference organizer and volume editor of *Virginia Woolf International*, I believe an exciting consequence of bringing together the American Woolf conference and international symposium has been a greater understanding than we have had of cultural differences that influence the way we respond to literature, and, specifically, I think we do gain a greater appreciation of Woolf as a writer whose work is demonstrably universal in appeal.

Because integrating the symposium with the conference involved speaking to the issue of Woolf's reception in North America, two prominent American scholars, Jane Marcus and Susan Friedman, helped launch the symposium after an important keynote address by Jean Moorcroft Wilson (Mrs. Cecil Woolf) on the Woolf family perspective. Biography, feminist and other politics, and literary works were prominent in the formal presentations and informal discussions led by these and other symposium participants. England, Woolf's homeland, was particularly well represented because, paradoxically, her reception there remains a seriously divided issue. Surveys of British criticism, of biographical perspectives (old ones seen in light of forthcoming new biographies), of the textual issues of canonicity and ethics in the complicated post-copyright world outside the United States are all matters the British scholars, Sybil Oldfield, Marion Shaw, and Julia Briggs, put before the conference and now before our readers. Thereafter, European perspectives of Woolf in Scandinavia (especially Sweden), Germany, and France were given, respectively, by Catherine Sandbach-Dahlström, Vera and Ansgar Nünning, and Pierre-Eric Villeneuve. As the fifth symposium session dealt with the exotic, and even problematic, case of communist China's response to Woolf—particularly remarkable considering the difficulty all non-European translators face in her Modernist experiments with the English language



genres and considering the crackdown on Western literature in China during the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s—Patricia Laurence, Melba Cuddy-Keane, and Kay Li bear witness to the irrepressibly universal appeal of Virginia Woolf well beyond her own geographic region.

On the whole, perhaps there is in this collection (the China session aside) an Anglo-American bias not unlike that of the eurocentricity of Modernism itself. Nevertheless (and sorry to say), we have still not had the confrontation that is past due between the too easily sympathetic American side of the “Woolf industry” and the persistent, more reactionary side of English opinion. Perhaps one day, at another conference and possibly on English soil, that confrontation might yet take place. In the free-discussion period of the international symposium that closed the Sixth Annual conference, participants acknowledged, however, that an important, if practical beginning had been made in the reassessment of Woolf’s artistry in international terms—that her readers elsewhere (say, in the Ukraine or Latin America) might be heard after this. As a seminal issue, too, *Virginia Woolf International* gives valuable insight and often rare account of the critical literature and translations of Woolf’s work, as one finds in the comprehensive bibliographies attached to several essays. Two of the contributors supplement with illustrations, including facsimiles from Woolf’s private papers. In short, this issue establishes an example the editors would like to follow, from time to time, on special topics.

The spring 1997 issue of *The South Carolina Review* will return to its usual format.