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Beyond Bloomsbury: In Conversation

Caitlin Doley, Emery Davidson, Nicholas Dunn-McAfee,
Jonathan King

This collection of short essays is an opportunity for members of the University of York's History of Art department, including current postgraduate students and alumni, to reflect on the York Art Gallery's 2022 exhibition *Beyond Bloomsbury: Life, Love and Legacy*. *Aspectus* chose to facilitate a conversation about this exhibition for our fourth issue for several reasons. First, we wished to generate conversation and engagement with a York-based exhibition and to highlight the strength of York's excellent Art Gallery. Second, British art is one of our department's great strengths, and this presented us with an opportunity to give a platform to many voices in the field. Finally, we hope that this conversation piece creates a diversity of manners of writing in the journal. It is a space for creative expression and more personal writing that falls outside the traditional confines of academic writing, but still maintains strong standards of criticism and analysis.

The four authors whose work follows below have chosen a variety of artists and themes from the exhibition to focus on. They share an interest in class dynamics, the search for balance between biographical study and visual analysis, and the limitations and potentials of curatorial practice in a group show. The relevance of these themes reach far beyond this exhibition and are key to discussions facing the discipline of art history today.

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Black in Bloomsbury: Race, Intimacy, and Distance in Duncan Grant’s Portrait of Patrick Nelson

Caitlin Doley

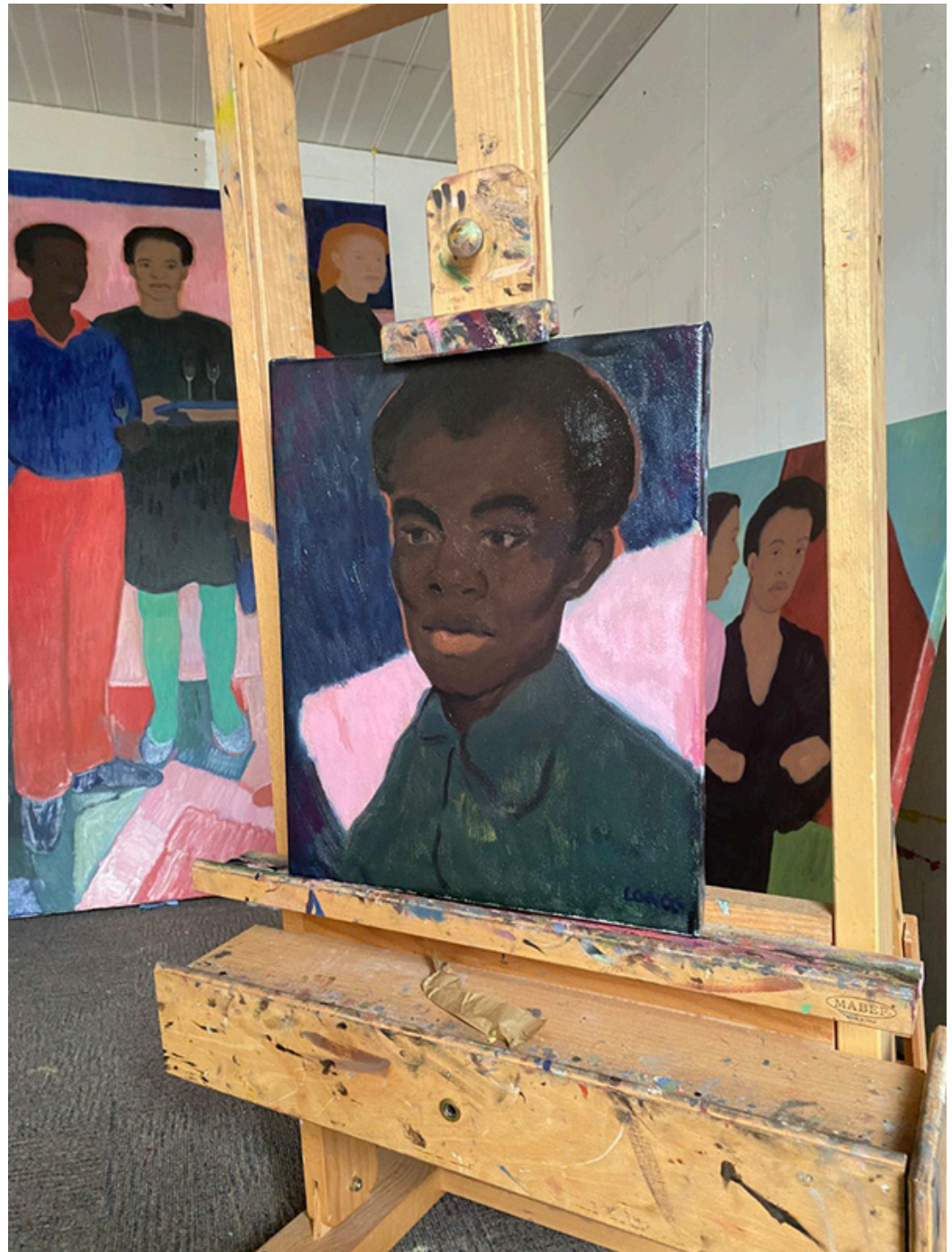
Figure 1. Duncan Grant, *Male Nude (Pat Nelson)*, 1930s, oil on canvas, 73.6 x 53.3 cm, St Peter’s College, University of Oxford © Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2022 Photo Credit: St Peter’s College, University of Oxford.



The first room of the *Beyond Bloomsbury: Life, Love and Legacy* exhibition at York Art Gallery (March 4 to June 5, 2022) featured a particularly striking artwork. Amidst a sea of portraits of white faces was a painting of a nude Black man’s back (Fig. 1, 1930s). Depicted

with his head bowed, this man's face is not visible to the viewer; instead, the painting shows the figure's dramatically sloping shoulders, his back, his buttocks, and his thighs. For centuries black people appeared in European art as either slaves or exotic novelties. In this painting it is clear that this man is being presented as the latter: he is positioned against an exoticising rich green background and is posed in such a way that enables the viewer to admire his body freely without having to risk meeting his gaze. This rear-facing pose also renders the painting undeniably erotic.¹

Figure 2. Sahara Longe, *Patrick Nelson*, 2021, oil on jute, exact dimensions unknown. Photo credit: Courtesy of the artist.



Produced by Duncan Grant (1885—1978) in the late 1930s, the painting is today titled *Male Nude (Pat Nelson)*. But who was Pat Nelson? The exhibition label that accompanied the painting read:

Grant depicts his lover Nelson (1916—1963) naked, viewed from behind, his head bowed. Nelson's stance is evocative of an intense vulnerability. Letters between the two evidence their loving and supportive relationship.

However, the way that Grant depicts Nelson in this painting should be seen in light of the contemporary prevalence of exoticism. This form of racist stereotyping involves the fetishisation of black subjects by white artists. *Male Nude* poses questions about the nature of Grant's erotic attraction and the way he painted Nelson and his other black lovers.

Whilst this label does highlight the essential need for awareness of the objectifying white, imperial gaze that continued to dominate cultural output in Britain throughout the twentieth century, the limited word count means that Nelson's own life experiences and queer desires are not properly explored. The twenty-first century has witnessed many productive projects working to rectify the ways queer artists have been overlooked by art history.² But in this instance the experience of the queer model has been overlooked; whilst Nelson was "given a face" (Fig. 2, 2021) when contemporary artist Sahara Longe (b. 1994) was commissioned to respond to the *Beyond Bloomsbury* exhibition, his "intense vulnerability" as a queer black man living in the twentieth-century was still not properly considered.³

Those looking to learn more about Nelson must instead turn to Gemma Romain's thoroughly researched biography, *Race, Sexuality and Identity in Britain and Jamaica: The Biography of Patrick Nelson, 1916–1963* (2017): this book reveals that Nelson lived a rather incredible life.⁴ Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Leopold St. Patrick Nelson would go on to be an aristocrat's valet in rural Wales, an artist's model and law student in London, a recruit to the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps, and a prisoner of war during the Second World War. Alongside all of the above, Nelson tried to covertly fulfil his desire for loving, long-term relationships with men. But here it is important to note that Nelson left few archival traces of his own. Indeed, if Nelson had not modelled for Grant—something that resulted in a brief affair and a prolonged (if at times stilted) written correspondence—it would be almost impossible to chart the story of his life in any detail, let alone gain access to some of his inner thoughts and desires. Romain identifies "what gets saved in archives" as a key problem for studying queer black lives.⁵ Her chief sources were the letters that Nelson wrote to Grant, a correspondence that lasted from their meeting in London sometime in 1938 until Nelson's death in 1963. As a wealthy member of the Bloomsbury Group, Grant left numerous papers behind when he died; these have been deemed important for posterity's sake and many of them are now preserved in public collections, including letters from Nelson.⁶ By contrast, Romain struggled to find many sources that had belonged directly to Nelson.

Taken together, Romain's biography of Nelson and Grant's painting of him tell us a lot about how perpetually tricky it was for queer black men to live and love in London in the interwar and post-war years. In the introduction to her biography, Romain states that Nelson's "story truly exemplifies how important it is to remember diverse histories and lives within mainstream historical and public memory relating to modern British history."⁷ Grant's sexual orientation meant that he too was part of a minority group in twentieth-century Britain; however, his painting of Nelson demonstrates that a queer artwork produced by a queer person is not necessarily one free of bias. Whilst both artist and sitter were queer, one was a wealthy white Briton and the other a working-class black migrant: this imbalance of power and privilege is all too visible in Grant's painting, with the finished work supporting Frances Spalding's belief that "As a painter, Duncan was fascinated by the colouristic possibilities of dark skin tones, but it also had for him an erotic attraction, that of the forbidden fruit."⁸ Nelson and Grant's relationship might have been "loving and supportive," but it was always on Grant's terms. Grant once declared that "in Europe always it occasioned a certain scandal to unite oneself with a black."⁹ It is clear that Grant never really did unite himself with Nelson, choosing instead to support him (at times very sparingly) from a distance. The last few years of Nelson's life were evidently rather lonely and when he died of a heart attack in July 1963 his funeral was attended by just five people: Grant was not among them.

Emery Davidson (they/them) is a freelance museum queering consultant and aspiring historian. Emery works with the Fine Arts Curator at York Art Gallery to develop the *Queering the Burton* exhibition. Emery holds an MA in Medieval Studies from the University of York and will start a PhD in 2023 in the field of transgender medieval studies. They are interested in LGBTQIA+ history, particularly in the Middle Ages and in twentieth-century art history respectively.

Carrington: A Portrait of Radical Queerness in Bloomsbury London

Emery Davidson

The exhibition *Beyond Bloomsbury: Life, Love, and Legacy* explores queer identities and relationships in the Bloomsbury Group. One of the artists Beyond Bloomsbury introduces us to is Carrington, a painter, textile artist, and dear friend of Lytton Strachey.¹⁰ The exhibition labels that discuss Carrington mention a few aspects of her queerness, such as her repulsion towards heterosexual sex, her romantic involvement with both men and women, and her ambivalence towards her assigned female gender. The exhibition labels, partly by nature, acknowledge the queer ways that Carrington lived in a cursory manner and do not fully explore the radical queer potential of Carrington's life and art. This short essay will linger on Carrington and dig further into the queer ways she lived and saw herself.

This is an important contribution to the study of Bloomsbury as it helps us expand our understanding of Bloomsbury's queerness beyond the scope of homosexuality and counter-cultural polyamory by joining asexuality and genderqueerness to the conversation on the artistic radicalism of the Bloomsbury artists. One of the main areas of research on Carrington's queerness that has been neglected is her relationship to gender. There have yet to be any scholarly analyses of Carrington that utilise transgender theory. Embracing trans theory to the fold of Bloomsbury studies can help us ask new questions, like what was kept at the fringes of Bloomsbury? What kinds of queerness went "too far" for Bloomsbury's middle class, dandyish tastes? Such questions allow for a more complete exploration of Carrington's queerness and artwork and propose some tentative answers to why Carrington's character and artwork were never quite embraced by Bloomsbury. Carrington pushed Bloomsbury's boundaries both socially and artistically. Uninterested in (most) sex, boyish beyond what was fashionable, and dabbling in surrealism, Carrington's queerness, and art, has yet to be fully appreciated in the context of the group's radicalism. My exploration of Carrington's

Figure 1. Carrington, *Lytton Strachey*, c.1916, oil on panel, 508 mm x 609 mm. London, National Portrait Gallery. © National Portrait Gallery.



queerness here can lead to further analysis of her artwork that is informed by the fullness of her radical existence. It will touch on questions of the applicability of modern gender and sexuality labels for LGBTQ+ history while stressing the importance of queer historical representation.

Carrington's Sexuality

Unsurprisingly, biographers, art historians, and popular culture have tended to focus on Carrington's relationships with men. Commentators have seen Carrington in terms of her fraught relationship with Lytton Strachey rather than as an important artist and queer individual in her own right.¹¹ Not only does this reading of Carrington's life deprive her of agency, but it erases important aspects of Carrington's identity in favour of a palatable, easily intelligible cis-heteronormativity.

An inability to understand Carrington's love for Strachey underpins much of this traditional view of Carrington. Why would a woman want to marry a gay man? Spencer Reed addresses this question in "Bloomsbury as Queer Subculture," arguing that such relationships, which were common in the Bloomsbury circle, allowed women to have significant intimate friendships with men that were "free from conventions of femininity, heteronormativity, and coupledness."¹² This was certainly true for Carrington: unlike her other male friends/romantic interests, Mark Gertler and Gerald Brenan, Strachey did not expect sex from her. This relationship also provided a space for Carrington to explore her gender and androgyny more fully through camp and gender play with Strachey.¹³ Another simple factor in their relationship that is often overlooked is that Strachey loved Carrington back. This has tended to elude Bloomsbury contemporaries and scholars alike because both have been fixated on the apparent problem of mismatched sexuality.¹⁴ Just because they were not sexually attracted to each other does not mean that they did not have an intimate partnership. Carrington loved Strachey deeply, constantly longed for his company, and devoted her life to building a home with him. For an example of Carrington's artistic rendering of her love for Strachey, see Carrington's sensitive portrait of the writer, which is both gentle and intimate in its tight framing and domestic setting (Fig. 1). He also loved her, saying on his deathbed that he always intended to marry her.¹⁵

Cis-heteronormativity generates "compulsory sexuality," which is the assumption that everyone must experience attraction in the way that heterosexual men and women are attracted to each other.¹⁶ Based on this, our society has created a false binary of relationships as either platonic or romantic/sexual. This is a division that Carrington's relationship with Strachey challenges, and in so doing, challenges compulsory sexuality and cis-heteronormativity.¹⁷

Carrington had passionate relationships with women, including American heiress Henrietta Bingham, Lady Ottoline Morell, and Poppet John, but she did not consider herself a lesbian.¹⁸ In a letter to Gerald Brenan, Carrington explains that she remained, at least romantically, attracted to men. Carrington writes that "if one was completely S[apphic] it would be much easier. I wouldn't then be interested in men at all, and wouldn't have these conflicts."¹⁹ Carrington writes about enduring a lifelong "struggle in [her]self between two characters."²⁰ Perhaps she would identify as bisexual if she were alive today, but questions like this miss the point. Carrington's sexuality is too complex to be boxed into one label to be easily digested and understood. She felt love and attraction intensely and in unconventional ways that challenge black and white, binaristic understandings of sexuality. I believe that this unintelligibility is part of the reason Bloomsbury kept her at arm's length, unsure what to make of her sexuality. I believe that this unintelligibility is part of the reason Bloomsbury kept her at arm's length, unsure what to make of her sexuality.

Carrington's Gender

One of the reasons why Carrington's sexuality challenges modern readers and art historians is that it was inextricably linked to her gender identity. Today, we tend to see sexuality and

gender as two separate facets of a person's identity. This relatively recent construct can bias our understanding of the ways historical queer people understood themselves.

Throughout her life, Carrington was at odds with her assigned female body and social treatment as a woman. These experiences align with what trans people call "gender dysphoria" today. Carrington wrote most explicitly about her feelings regarding her gender in a letter to Gerald Brenan in an attempt to explain why she did not want to have sex with him:

You know I have always hated being a woman. I think I mind much more than most women. ... I am continually depressed by my effeminacy. ... And I cannot literally bear to let my mind think ... of my femaleness. It is partly because R [Ralph Partridge] treats me not like a woman now that the strain has vanished between us. All this became clear really last summer with Henrietta. ... Somehow it is always better if I am treated negatively, a little as if I was not a female, then my day-dream character of not being a female, is somehow pacified. ... Always this struggle with two insides, which makes one so disjointed, unreliable, and secretive.²¹

In a deeply historical sense, Carrington's conflicted gender identity was informed by her complex sexuality. When Carrington writes about being torn "with two insides," she refers not only to her divided attraction to men and women, but to a sense of being both feminine and masculine in her gender. Queer circles like the Bloomsbury Group were aware of contemporary Weimar sexology which posited a theory of homosexuality as a form of "gender inversion."²² Male homosexuality was explained as a feminine gender inversion, whereas female homosexuality was the inverse.²³ Sexuality and gender identity were not easily divisible categories—they were linked forms of queer embodiment and existence in the world. If Carrington was torn between two sexes in her attraction, what did that mean for her gender identity? In her letter to Brenan, Carrington acknowledges that she has "a female inside," but feels divided and lingers on a "day-dream character of not being a female."²⁴

Carrington also expresses an androgynous and mixed sense of her own gender identity when discussing moments of what could be called gender euphoria in trans theory, when Carrington feels joy and a sense of rightness in her gender presentation. Carrington describes cross-dressing as a boy while on a long walk with Lytton Strachey with a euphoric nostalgia, and details the joy she felt once when she tried on Strachey's underwear: "I feel like a strong man with electric sparks flying out."²⁵ This kind of gender play is characteristic of their relationship, but also speaks to a larger, lifelong journey of gender discovery for Carrington.²⁶ It is important to not only focus on Carrington's moments of gender dysphoria when exploring the trans possibilities of her life but to appreciate how androgyny and gender play affirmed her.

A trans analysis of Carrington's life and work has yet to be published. Trans aspects of her life and identity in particular have been ignored until very recently. I have only been able to fleetingly outline the queer potential for further study on Carrington's sexuality and gender. Further analysis ought to also explore queer forms of family making in Carrington's household, another aspect of her queer radicalism. Carrington's queerness pushed Bloomsbury's boundaries much like her artwork: Carrington's most characteristic work is closer to surrealism than the French post-Impressionist style preferred by the greats of the Friday Club. Her art and her queerness were not easy to categorise and assimilate to Bloomsbury's acceptable level of artistic and queer counter-culturalism. Because of this, the richness of Carrington's life has been neglected by scholars and galleries. However, just because we cannot neatly label someone's sexuality or gender does not mean that we should leave queerness out of critical discussions and representations of the past. Queerness has never been about hard facts and labels, but rather a sense of otherness that challenges the cis-heteronormative status quo. Carrington's life exemplifies this value and deserves adequate queer research and representation in galleries. Using a plurality of intersecting experiential queer frameworks, as I have done here, can allow us to better understand Carrington as she understood herself.

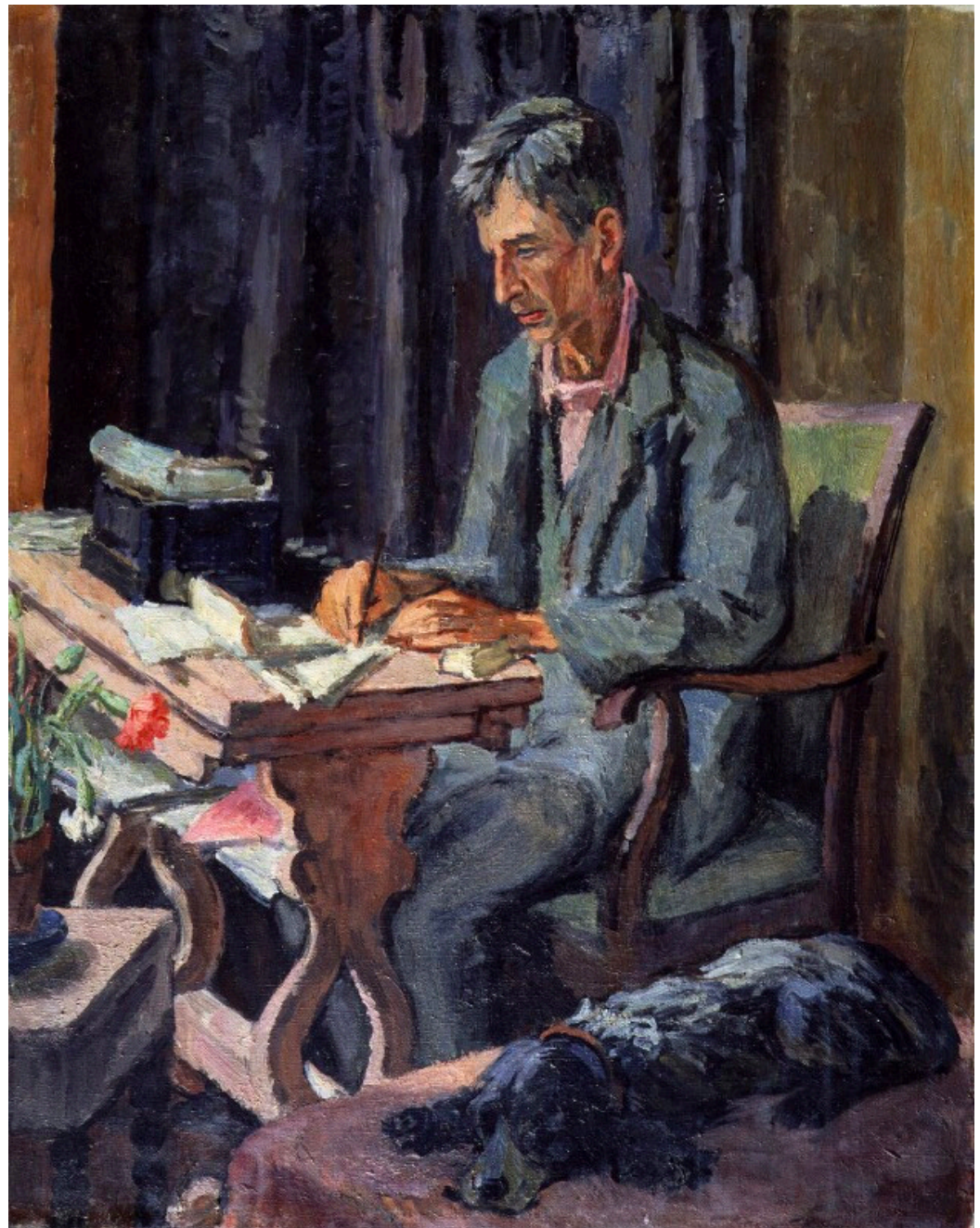
Nicholas Dunn-McAfee is a doctoral researcher at the University of York. His work—funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council—explores the relationship between desire, image, and word in the visual-verbal “double works of art” of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the principal figure of Pre-Raphaelitism. His research has been published in *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* and *Vides*.

Reading, Writing, and the (In)Accessible Word: Vanessa Bell’s *Leonard Sidney Woolf* (1940)

Nicholas Dunn-McAfee

Beyond Bloomsbury: Life, Love and Legacy aims to illuminate the compelling work of an avowedly avant-garde interwar group of artists, writers, and thinkers. The set’s boundaries were porous and the influence of their output has been prodigious. Their contributions to painting, prose, economics, criticism, and taste test the limits of our neat disciplinary divides. It throws into relief a foundational issue any exhibition considering their legacy must contend with—not simply “which art best represents the Bloomsbury Group?” but “can visual art accurately convey the work of a multidisciplinary, loosely-defined coterie?”

Figure 1. Vanessa Bell, *Leonard Sidney Woolf*, 1940, oil on canvas, 81.3 x 64.8 cm. London, National Portrait Gallery. © National Portrait Gallery.



The non-visual work of Virginia Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, and E. M. Forster, for example, remains prominent in both public and academic discourses about the Bloomsbury Group. I want to suggest that Vanessa Bell's *Leonard Sidney Woolf* (Fig. 1, 1940) serves as a useful lens for thinking about the visual representation of the verbal.

The caption notes the subject's literary contribution—noting his “ground-breaking 1913 novel, *The Village in the Jungle*”—but is the diegetic reading, writing, and labour that I find so compelling here.

In closest proximity to the viewer, the sleeping dog on the footstool (literally) foregrounds rest: the loose, thick brush strokes and shadowy blacks and greys add a languidness to the scene. To the left, wilting flowers (the white more so than the red) give form to the passage of time. The two upright buds signal the cyclical—the old will give way to the new. The figure seems engrossed in his work. Though a question, like the drooping petals, hangs over the scene: has the figure even noticed the passing of time?

Attending to the middleground, the warm, earthy browns and gentle curves of the carved desk and chair are distinguished from one another by light streaming in from an unseen source from the left or top-left. The desk, saturated with sunlight, takes on almost fleshy tones. L. S. Woolf shares that same light, casting inky shadows onto the yellowing-green back of the chair as he stoops and labours. There is a sense of discomfort: his arms are tight at his side; his elbows are bent at right angles; and his body leans away from the back of the chair. The curtain, closing off what we imagine to be a window to the outside world, is rendered with thick layers of blue-black oil paint. The impasto of the picture plane echoes the physical division represented in the fictive space. By building up layers of colour on the surface of the picture and with the paint appearing to come out of the canvas, Bell toys with the idea of barriers: difference becomes material. Form and content align—materiality, doubled.

His gaze is directed towards his sun-mottled hands, the writing instrument he holds in his right hand, and the writing paper he holds steady with his left hand. Indeed, his hands are the fulcrum of the scene—sitting as they do in the centre of the canvas and representing the scene's only movement. In sensitively rendering L. S. Woolf's body, hands, and gaze, however, Bell engenders the picture with a sense of cerebral dynamic—a man caught in thought, a mind in motion. Papers and work underneath, too, gesture to this sense of perpetual intellectual work: his writing, reading, and labour on the desk done only to be replenished from the shelf below.

In a subtle and, I think, sympathetic manner, the light renders the wooden border or frame of the chair (observe the top and visible corner) in a shade of pale purple-pink similar to L. S. Woolf's shirt. Bell's use of colour brings them into dialogue—suggesting Woolf “belongs” in or to the space. There is nothing discordant about the subject seen at work: his work is him and he is his work. Supporting this observation, the pink cover of another inanimate object—a booklet underneath the desk—further connects the man and the labour of reading and writing. Moreover, the surface of the desk shares that same colour, and Bell seems to be signalling an insoluble connection between Woolf and the concrete objects around him.

As the Gallery's caption reminds us, L. S. Woolf's financial situation, class, and even race were in stark contrast to both his wife's family and the wider Bloomsbury Group. I want to suggest that the most striking element of Bell's depiction of this intense inner life is the absence of written language. That is: word is missing from the image—even though we can see the act of writing taking place. We see a host of objects that refer to or contain written language—papers, booklets, and the writing instrument. We know that words are being written and read from the incredible attention Woolf gives to the act of writing and reading in the scene.

Try as we might, we cannot put words on the paper, titles on the booklets, or letters on the typewriter's keys. Its presence commands the fictive scene but it is absent from the real, flat picture plane hanging in the first room of the exhibition at York Art Gallery.

Word, in short, escapes us, even if we can see its shadow.

In the fictive space of the scene—in the world the painted Woolf inhabits—written

language is obviously there. Woolf is not simply sitting, he has sat down to read. Woolf's hand is not merely holding the pen, he is in the middle of writing. The typewriter keys are not missing letters, the letters are seemingly unavailable to us. The books are not blank, it might simply be that the viewer is not the intended audience. Woolf's gaze is directly towards the words that litter the objects on his desk. He is intellectually engaged with *something* even as the viewer sees *nothing*. In Bell's *Woolf* oil painting, the subject is the only possible reader.

Dr Jon King obtained his PhD in History of Art from the University of York in 2022, for which he completed a WROCAH-funded thesis entitled "A Bit Frivolous? Vanessa Bell, Charleston, and the Motherly Affiliations of Queer Domesticity." He currently lectures on the topic of Bloomsbury and works as a Researcher for Ben Uri Gallery & Museum in London.

The Bloomsbury Cottage

Jonathan King

Before a reading of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) at Charleston in 2018, artist and writer Lauren John Joseph reminded an uncomfortable audience that "the louche lives of the Bloomsbury Group (all of their experiments in art and in sexuality) were made possible squarely by the economic privileges they enjoyed"; the "lives of impoverished queer people," by contrast, have been "recorded in police records, rather than coffee table books."²⁷ Joseph's statement, both facetious and apt, indicates how forays into "queer history" often amount to encountering an abundance of records in some cases and ghostly, ephemeral, or absent traces in others.²⁸ A disparity determined by class, along with any conversation around Bloomsbury's *Life, Love and Legacy*, as seen at the York Art Gallery exhibition, comes with manifold tensions. Frustrated longing and exclusion brims under the surface of every painting. Insofar as Bloomsbury has a stake within a queer genealogy, this cannot be sundered from their privileged position within it.²⁹

As we learn in the first room of the exhibition, the very origins of so-called "Bloomsbury" arise from the acquisition of real estate. That is, after the death of her father in 1904, Vanessa Stephen (later Bell) left the more fashionable Kensington and moved herself and her siblings, Thoby, Virginia and Adrian, into 46 Gordon Square in Bloomsbury. Virginia Woolf later reflected on this move: "We were full of experiments and reforms. We were going to do without table napkins ..., we were going to paint; to write; to have coffee after dinner instead of tea at nine o'clock."³⁰ Permitted by rooms of their own, the professional successes of the Stephen sisters were arguably unnecessary for their continued experimentations in their respective arts, as their creative pursuits needed only to supplement the private incomes inherited from their upper middle-class families.³¹

It was Gordon Square where weekly "at homes" were held, comprising intellectual discussions with Thoby Stephen's Cambridge friends, and where Lytton Strachey famously pointed at a stain on Vanessa Bell's dress and enquired "Semen?" "With that one word," Woolf recorded, "all barriers of reticence and reserve went down. A flood of the sacred fluid seemed to overwhelm us. Sex permeated our conversation. The word bugger was never far from our lips."³² Other more rural homes would later offer sites of social, sexual and artistic experimentation for the group, such as Asheham and Charleston in East Sussex. It was as early as 1914, when Bell began exchanging titillating and bawdy letters with her male friends, that she wrote to John Maynard Keynes at Asheham imagining "all the ecstatic preliminaries of Sucking Sodomy" with "one or more of the young men we left for you."³³ At Charleston, Bell and fellow painter Duncan Grant would live in a brief, and at times uncomfortable, *ménage à trois* with Grant's lover David Garnett during the First World War. As emulated by Lydia Capriani in her mural at the centre of the York exhibition, the interiors of Charleston followed the legacy of the by-then defunct Omega Workshops (started as a socialist enterprise). They signalled the group's break from social and sexual mores as the post-impressionist painting broke free from the canvas to cover the walls.

Bloomsbury's re-working of the domestic interior speaks to what Christopher Reed calls their queer, "ragged" spaces of "psychological interiority."³⁴ In other words, houses such as Charleston reflect the queer experiences and subjectivities of their inhabitants. Nevertheless, queer interiority might seem relatively inconsequential for the queer lives outside of Bloomsbury's milieu, even if they do show that social disruptiveness was at

the heart of their thinking about living, loving, and creating. This feeling of exclusivity is expressed potently in the response of D. H. Lawrence, who after meeting Grant, Keynes, and Frances Birrell in 1915, wrote a scathing letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell:

To hear these young people talking really fills me with black fury: they talk endlessly, but endlessly—and never, never a good or real thing said. Their attitude is so irreverent and so blatant. They are cased, each in a hard little shell of his own, and out of this they talk words. There is never for one second, any outgoing of feeling, and no reverence, not a crumb or grain of reverence.³⁵

For working-class Lawrence, who had grown up in a coal mining town in Nottinghamshire, Bloomsbury was an exclusive group that possessed an unrelatable, bourgeois frivolity. Yet alongside class disparity, this frustrated feeling of exclusion is perceivably wrapped up in his own complicated, and more repressed, relationship with homosexuality.³⁶ The “hard little shell” of Lawrence’s Bloomsbury complicates this further with implications of domesticity, speaking to the fortified “shell,” or “cottage,” of the dream home described by Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* (1958). For Bachelard, the dream home is a fantasy that at once includes and excludes.³⁷ It is therefore what I call their “queer privilege” that has led many like Lawrence to roll their eyes at the hermetically sealed freedoms found within the Bloomsbury Cottage; an enviable, irreverent, queer dream of home and dynamic not afforded to those who were (and still are) unable to forge their own chosen family.

Nevertheless, while it is important to be conscious of the privileges found in the Bloomsbury Cottage, at all costs we should avoid “Bloomsbury Bashing”; a catchy appellation given to acts of disparaging criticisms of the group that, like Lawrence’s frustrations, are rooted in homophobic, misogynistic rejections of domesticity and interiority as much as they are class divisions.³⁸ Rather, we should ask ourselves what it is that draws us into the Bloomsbury Cottage time and time again, and how we may address it to critique, as well as claim, a queer past haunted by class oppressions.

References

Caitlin Doley, **Black in Bloomsbury:**

Race, Intimacy, and Distance in Duncan Grant's Portrait of Patrick Nelson

- 1 Patricia Lee Rubin has considered how artistic representations of the male posterior have been read as erotic throughout history, as well as their ability to generate discussion about broader issues of representation. See Patricia Lee Rubin, *Seen from Behind: Perspectives on the Male Body and Renaissance Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).
- 2 For example, *Queer British Art, 1861–1967* curated by Clare Barlow at Tate Britain (April 5–October 1, 2017).
- 3 Becky Gee, “Queer Connections: The Bloomsbury Group,” *National Portrait Gallery Blog*, February 17, 2022, accessed September 12, 2022: <https://www.npg.org.uk/blog/queer-connections-the-bloomsbury-group>.
- 4 Gemma Romain, *Race, Sexuality and Identity in Britain and Jamaica: The Biography of Patrick Nelson, 1916–1963* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).
- 5 *Ibid.*, 136.
- 6 Only two of Grant's own letters back survive.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 8 Frances Spalding, *Duncan Grant: A Biography* (London: Vintage Digital, 2011), 302.
- 9 Duncan Grant in conversation with Eddy Sackville-West, quoted in Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 302.

Emery Davidson, **Carrington: A Portrait of Radical Queerness in Bloomsbury**

- 10 I refer to the artist Dora Carrington here only by her surname Carrington. From her enrollment at the Slade, Carrington dropped her forename Dora, deeming it “sentimental,” preferring to go only by her androgynous surname, Carrington. She continued to use Carrington even after she married Ralph Partridge. In transgender studies, it is imperative to respect the ways people wanted to be known in their lives and in posterity. This grants trans people of the past dignity and control over how they are known, just as it is imperative to respect the chosen names of trans people today.
- 11 See the 1995 biographical film *Carrington*, starring Emma Thompson, in which Carrington is portrayed as a straight woman who is tossed between Lytton Strachey, who cannot possibly love her back, and her future husband Ralph Partridge.
- 12 Christopher Reed, “Bloomsbury as Queer Subculture,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Bloomsbury Group*, ed. Victoria Rosner, 71–89 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 82.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 85.
- 14 *Carrington's Letters*, 32. Carrington's relationship with Strachey puzzled Bloomsbury figures such as Virginia Woolf and Lady Ottoline Morrell, who could not understand what the relationship offered the gay Strachey and, to them, prudish Carrington; Reed, “Bloomsbury as Queer Subculture,” 78.
- 15 *Carrington's Letters: Her Art, Her Loves, Her Friendships*, ed. Anne Chisholm (London: Penguin Random House, 2017), 393.
- 16 Luke Brunning and Natasha McKeever, “Asexuality,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 38, no. 3 (2021): 497–517, 509.
- 17 Particularly in light of Carrington's frequent expressions of sexual repulsion towards men, an approach to studying Carrington's queerness that makes use of asexual theoretical models could help illuminate just how radical Carrington's life was.
- 18 Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, “[T]here were so many things

I wanted to do & didn't: The Queer Potential of Carrington's Life and Art,” in *Queer Bloomsbury*, eds. Brenda S. Helt and Madelyn Detloff, 189–209 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 205.

Carrington's Letters, 296.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 70–72.

This idea formed the basis of Radclyffe Hall's 1927 novel *The Well of Loneliness* and, to a less obvious extent, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*.

Carrington's Letters, 296.

Ibid., 69; Quoted from Reed, “Bloomsbury as Queer Subculture,” 79.

Holbrook Gerzina, “Queer Potential of Carrington's Life and Art,” 195.

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- 27 Lauren John Joseph published this account under their previous name. See La John Joseph, “All Pomp is Built Upon Corruption,” *Charleston Press* 1 (2018): 28–35.
- 28 For more on queer history, archives and the ephemeral, see Charles E. Morris and K. J. Rawson, “Queer Archives/ Archival Queers,” in *Theorizing Histories of Rhetoric*, ed. Michelle Ballif (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 74–89; José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 65; and Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
- 29 As Kathryn Simpson writes, “for those who see this group as overprivileged and snobbish, their work is perceived as indicative of an elitist outlook,” while for others “the work of its central figures played a role in the destabilization of traditional hierarchies of class, value, and taste.” See Kathryn Simpson, “Bloomsbury and Class,” in *The Handbook to the Bloomsbury Group*, ed. Derek Ryan and Stephen Ross (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 167–182.
- 30 Quoted in Frances Spalding, *The Bloomsbury Group* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2013), 7.
- 31 See Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace, “Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell,” in *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (Im) Positionings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 56–89.
- 32 Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, ed. J. Ferrone and Jeanne Schulkind (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 173–174.
- 33 Vanessa Bell, *The Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. by Regina Marler (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 163.
- 34 Christopher Reed, “What Do We Want from Artists Houses? A Reflection,” *British Art Studies* 9 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-09/creed>.
- 35 Quoted in Quentin Bell, *Bloomsbury* (London: Futura, 1974), 48.
- 36 For more on this subject, see Hugh Stevens, “Normality and Queerness in Gay Fiction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian and Gay Writing*, ed. Hugh Stevens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 85–87; and Howard J. Booth, “D. H. Lawrence and Male Homosexual Desire,” *The Review of English Studies* 53:209 (2002): 86–107.
- 37 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1994), 45–46.
- 38 For more on “Bloomsbury Bashing” in terms of the homophobia of critical scholarship in the 1980s, see Christopher Reed, “Bloomsbury Bashing: Homophobia and the Politics of Criticism in the Eighties,” *Genders* 11 (1991): 58–80. For more on the “Bloomsbury Bashing” by the group's

contemporaries, including Lawrence, see Bell, *Bloomsbury*, 40–48. Also see Christopher Reed, *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996).