

VIRGINIA WOOLF, ETHEL SMYTH AND 'DOT, DOT, DOT', '...', 'ETC.'

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'Everything starts from a dot' (Wassily Kandinsky).

Several critics have commented on Woolf's use of ellipsis in the typographical form of three dots . . . ,¹ a fluid signifier which she uses not only conventionally to indicate omitted words, but also, as feminist critics have observed, in politically charged writing (notably *A Room of One's Own*, *The Pargiters* and *Three Guineas*) to mark female disruption or scepticism, male evasion or censure of women's voices, or of sexual violence towards them (Bowlby 137–45, Toner 160–4). Henry Woudhuysen has pointed out too that she uses the form in her diary as well as in some fiction to mark 'incompleteness and indeterminacy' (234). Indeed, as Woudhuysen notes, the very last diary entry (24 March 1941) is followed by an instance, which conveys 'no clear sense of what the three dots signal', although, as he acknowledges, they may not be authorial (234),² and Barbara Lounsbury has recently claimed that there are only two dots which, she suggests, mark 'a hesitant farewell' (323). Interestingly, it is in relation to death that in an entry some six months earlier (2 October 1940), Woolf uses what Woudhuysen calls the 'vocalised dot', that is, the verbal phrase 'dot dot dot', at the end of an attempt to 'imagine how one is killed by a bomb' (*D5* 326; Woudhuysen 234). For Lounsbury as well as Woudhuysen, the verbal form is interchangeable with the typographical, but, as Anne Toner has observed, at 'some point in the twentieth century, "dot, dot, dot" became a phrase in common parlance as an equivalent to etcetera' (151), citing the one example in Woolf's fiction—in the early short experimental piece 'An Unwritten Novel' (1920). She does not take discussion of the phrase further, turning her attention rather to the development of the typographical form, its formal fixing as three (as distinct from four or even five) dots and the use made of it in modernist drama and fiction, including Woolf's writing, although, like Bowlby, she focuses on the feminist polemical essay *Three Guineas* in which, 'accompanied' as it frequently is 'by the verbal signal of dispute "but"', 'the ellipsis becomes a sceptical space in which doubts becomes manifest' (162).

It is worth dwelling on the distinction between the verbal and the

¹To avoid confusion, *VWB* editorial ellipses are (as a usual part of our house style) three unspaced dots, while those in quotations are spaced.—*Editor*.

²In private correspondence (2 January 2018) Woudhuysen elaborates: 'I suppose I thought that the final three dots might represent material that LW excised from her diary for some reason'.

typographical forms of ellipsis, since Woolf uses 'dot dot dot' (with and without punctuation)³ not only in 'An Unwritten Novel', where it appears to be the first instance in English fiction, and the diary entry of 2 October 1940, but also in two letters from 1930 and 1934, the first to and the second about Ethel Smyth (1858–1944)—the highly colourful composer, writer and active feminist with whom Woolf had an intense, ambivalent but also liberating and productive relationship from 1930 until her death in 1941, as Christopher Wiley and Hermione Lee (585–607) have fully documented.⁴ Looked at together as well as individually and in comparison with her uses of the typographical form, the four instances in Woolf's writing of the verbal form 'dot dot dot', which data searches elsewhere reveal to be 'exceedingly rare',⁵ suggest that for her it was not merely interchangeable with the typographical, but carried differences as well as likeness of meaning, sometimes even an oppositional sense—of the determined or inevitable rather than the indeterminate or unknown—a sense nearly but not quite equivalent to 'etcetera', as Toner suggests. Indeed, the three forms of representation of the unsaid furnish a resource of fluid, overlapping signifiers for Woolf with which to create, as she habitually does, finely calibrated nuances of meaning.

In this there is a contrast with Smyth, as Woolf hints when, in an edgy comment on the style as well as the character of her new friend in the letter of 1930, she suggests that Smyth is so indiscriminate in her use of dots that, like her use of 'etc.', it amounts to an unthinking habit, or tic (L4 145). As I take up later, Smyth's writing (public and private) is as littered with the typographical form as (according to Woolf) her speech was with 'etc.', a speech habit which even found its way into one of Smyth's titles—*A Final Burning of Boats Etc.* (1928). There is, however, one place where Smyth (uncharacteristically) comments on her own writing strategies, specifically drawing attention to and explaining her recourse to 'dots and paraphrase'. This is in the opening of 'An Adventure in a Train', a striking episode that stands out from the other episodes collected in *Streaks of Life* (1921)—the volume of memoirs reviewed by Woolf in April 1921 (E3 297–301). The piece was first published in the October 1920 issue of the monthly *London*

³My thanks to Stuart Clarke for help in tracking down these instances.

⁴Wiley observes: 'Over a quarter of Woolf's letters written in the last twelve years of her life and published in the latter three volumes of *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* were written to Smyth, substantially more than to any of her other correspondents during this period' (Wiley 2004 391).

⁵Andreas Jucker (University of Zurich) in private correspondence. My thanks to Professor Jucker for helping me with this search. As he points out, by far the most instances of the phrase are in representations of Morse code. This is interesting given Woolf's use of dashes (of varying lengths) as well as dots, which 'one early reviewer (of *Jacob's Room*) called her "dot-and-dash method"' (Woudhuysen 236), perhaps recognising what may be an oblique allusion to this early form of electronic communication.

Mercury, but the place and date of composition Smyth appended (as she habitually did) was 'Paris, July 1920' (676). This is the month that 'An Unwritten Novel' was published for the first time, also in the *London Mercury*, the editor, John Collings Squire, having 'pressed' Woolf to write something in January of that year (D2 15). Likewise an adventure in a train, with evident parallels to Smyth's piece as we shall see, this is an adventure above all in literary writing—'the great discovery' as Woolf retrospectively described it to Smyth (L4 231, 16 October [1930]). Among the innovations is 'dot, dot, dot' to represent that which is deliberately not written (or un-written) by the would-be writer of 'Modern Novels'—to recall the title of Woolf's seminal essay of April 1919 (E3 30–7). In what I want to suggest is a conscious critical response to Woolf's experimental piece—encouraged perhaps by Squire, with whom Woolf rapidly fell out (Arnold 5)—Smyth explicitly and emphatically differentiates her own documentary mode from the literary, claiming to use dots to signal obligatory censorship with respect to the human body, particularly male control of women's sexuality. In other words, she claims for her use of the typographical form a political rather than a literary significance.

As I take up later, the typographical and the verbal form both have a literary significance in 'An Unwritten Novel'. It is indeed for literary purposes that the typographical form tends to be used—where it is not used for the conventional purpose of indicating omitted words—until *A Room, The Pargiters* and *Three Guineas*. This is the period of Woolf's relationship with Smyth who, it is worth remembering, 'introduced herself because of *A Room of One's Own*' (Lee 585), the first work in which Woolf uses the typographical form of ellipsis to carry a political (specifically feminist) charge.⁶ It is one aspect of 'the manner' of the still more polemical *Three Guineas* (1938) that may have 'owed something to Ethel' (Lee 603) just as, Christopher Wiley has persuasively argued, aspects of Woolf's arguments here were influenced by Smyth's feminist work *Female Pipings in Eden* (1934) (Wiley 2013 279–84). Indeed, Elicia Clements has argued at length that *Pipings* is itself a rejoinder to *Room* as, I am suggesting, the earlier 'An Adventure in a Train' is a rejoinder to 'An Unwritten Novel'. What is more, Smyth's comments on her use of dots in 'An Adventure' find echo in the third essay section of *The Pargiters* (completed by November 1932), which draws attention to the constraints on the novelist imposed by censorship with respect to sexual violence done by men to women. The use of the typographical form to mark the censorship of this reality recurs in *Between the Acts*, Woolf's last,

⁶They first met (pace Lee 585) at a reception given by Lady Londonderry on Tuesday 28 January 1930 when, as Woolf wrote to Sibly Colefax, 'I am plunged into the arms of Ethel Smyth. I feel them already hugging tight. It is a breathless rapture' (L4 132).

unrevised novel, in which the form is also used as it is in earlier fiction for the literary purpose of marking the indeterminacies of inner lives. Among the many figures whose subjective ruminations are marked with the form is Miss La Trobe—a figure taken by many to refer to Smyth (Lee 590). Still more tellingly, La Trobe is the one character associated with the form 'etc.'. In this Woolf may be remembering her half-playful threat to Smyth to do her character 'in that style' of '...' and 'etc.' in her letter of 1930 (L4 145, 27 February).

For, as I have indicated, Smyth's use of dots was more often than not an unthinking habit of her written style just as 'etc.' was of her spoken style, habits which could become tiresome, like character traits of this 'trying, if exciting friend'.⁷ Their differences of character as well as of their writing and speech styles are highlighted by Woolf in this letter, which is the one place in her writing that features all three forms of representation of the unsaid: '...', 'dot, dot, dot', 'etc.'. It is dated 27 February 1930, almost a month after Woolf's first letter to Smyth (L4 130-1, 30 January) and a week after Smyth's first visit (20 February), which had been postponed by Woolf because of a bout of flu—a forced postponement during which she had reread the two volumes of Smyth's *Impressions that Remained* (1920), describing them warmly to her as 'one of my favourite works' (L4 137, 13 February 1930). In the letter of 27 February, Woolf reflects first on the lingering impact of the flu on her inherited fragile 'nervous system', which has prevented a second visit, and then on the topics she wants 'to talk and talk and talk' about with Smyth (L4 144-5). These include Countess Russell, a novelist friend of Smyth's (and Katherine Mansfield's cousin) to whom Woolf refers again in a letter two days later (1 March), apparently in response to a (lost) letter from Smyth, acknowledging she had 'mistook' Russell in reading 'hate and scorn' on her face (L4 147) on the occasion of what may have been their only meeting, which, as we learn from Russell's diary, took place at the home of the hostess Sibyl Colefax, though exactly when is unclear.⁸ In the letter of 27 February Woolf asks Smyth to 'indulge' her by telling her 'what [Russell] said that's so interesting', then appears to respond to an observation Smyth has made about herself (in a letter now lost): 'Yes. I think you are a kind woman, besides

⁷The verdict in a diary entry of 27 August 1930 by another of Smyth's new friends, Countess Russell (De Charms 327). See further below.

⁸From her entry of 5 March we learn that Ethel showed Woolf's letter of 1 March to Russell, who was horrified, no doubt by Ethel's slyly manipulative behaviour as well as by Woolf's view of her: 'Ethel S. rang up enthusiastically longing to see me. Full of pleasure I motored to her after lunch. First, really'n honestly thinking I'd be delighted she showed me a letter of Virg. Woolf's saying hatred and contempt was written all over me the day I met her at Sibyl's!! Well, I was amazed, horrified and shocked' (Russell). My thanks to Arai Morex and Lisa Caprino for their assistance. For more on Woolf's relationship with Countess Russell, see Coda below.

being such a etc etc. Those two happy dodges of yours come in useful on occasion, dot dot, dot—et cetera. I will write your character in that style one of these days' (L4 145). Here Woolf first turns the tables by withholding even as she implies a critical opinion, presumably like Countess Russell's opinion that Smyth has withheld from her, then (characteristically) reflects on what she has written, taking up and reiterating her representation of the unsaid but with less common forms, replacing the typographical form with the verbal phrase 'dot dot, dot' and the abbreviation 'etc.' with the longer 'et cetera'. Taking critical distance from 'Those two happy dodges', as she labels them, she suggests that these are strategies habitually used by Smyth to avoid difficulties, whether in the negotiation of personal relationships or more importantly in writing with conscious attention, which is, for Woolf, a condition of writing well.

Smyth is indeed usually indiscriminate as well as profligate in her use of three (sometimes two, sometimes four) dots in her published writing and her private correspondence. They generally have no apparent significance, except (sometimes) marking a dramatic pause with an effect of emphasis on what follows. On the other hand, as far as I have been able to establish, she does not use the verbal form 'dot, dot, dot', which, I want to suggest, Woolf uses here to hint at Smyth's unthinking use of the typographical form, which becomes tiresomely predictable. Smyth also uses 'etc.' (rather than 'et cetera') in her writing, though less prolifically than she uses dots. On the other hand, from 'notes' made in October 1930 by Woolf 'for a portrait' of Smyth 'as she talks', her speech appears to have been peppered with 'etc.'—'My vivacity &c—' as well as with 'Well ... a characteristic word' (D3 325–6, emphasis in original). It is indeed the spoken form that is suggested by Woolf's replacement of the more common written abbreviation 'etc.' with 'et cetera' in her letter, which also hints that, like Smyth's use of dots, this is a stylistic habit that risks becoming tedious and tediously predictable through overuse, like character traits with which they are associated in Woolf's half-playful threat to 'write' Smyth's character 'in that style'.

Both before and after their first meeting, Woolf's recorded comments on Smyth's character and on her writing are invariably mixed. As Lee notes, in the diary entry immediately after her first visit, Woolf is 'making up a balance sheet ... and turning her into a "character"', 'something fine & tried & experienced about her besides the rant & the riot & the egotism' (Lee 592; D3 292). In the review of *Streaks of Life* published nearly ten years earlier, Woolf had been warm in praise of the 'vitality' which was 'the prevailing quality in Miss Smyth' (E3 299) but commented too that she did not possess 'extraordinary literary power' and did not analyse 'her soul to its essence' (298), a comment that acquires resonance in the context of the intertextual

relation between 'An Adventure in a Train' and 'An Unwritten Novel', as we shall see. Woolf is blunter in private correspondence, writing (of an earlier volume of Smyth's memoirs) to Lytton Strachey in November 1919 that Smyth 'can't write' (L2 405) and in her diary: 'not knowing how to write, she's muffed it' (D1 315). To Smyth herself, once they had met, she was more enthusiastic, as in the letter of 13 February 1930 quoted above, and, as Wiley notes, she encouraged her to write more (Wiley 2004 397). But the 'rant' and 'egotism' finally proved too much. Smyth's insistent and loud talk about herself was redolent of the characteristically masculine style critiqued in *A Room* (Wiley 2004 396–9). As a character trait, too, it could be trying. To Vita Sackville-West in May 1930 Woolf wrote, 'My head spins: ears ache: Ethel (Smyth) just gone' (L4 162); and on 19 February 1933 to Vanessa, 'Its like being a snail and having your brain cracked by a thrush—hammer, hammer, hammer' (L5 160), an image she takes from her diary entry on Smyth's visit: 'it was like being a snail shell & having a thrush tapping till the beak of her incessant voice broke my skull' (D4 147). 'Ethel', she wrote in her diary in October 1940, 'must must be heard' (D5 330).

In the second letter in which Woolf uses the verbal form 'dot, dot, dot' (here with commas for added emphasis), it has indeed become a shorthand for Smyth's tiresomely familiar haranguing style. After a serious falling out over Vita in April (L5 289, 291), Woolf took a breather from Smyth, and in a letter to Vita of 10 May 1934 asked her not to tell Smyth she was back from her holiday in Galway, adding: 'I wish you'd settle her goose; I get strangulated heart cries about you,—dot, dot, dot, indicating revelations of unspeakable horror' (L5 302). Perhaps recalling her threat to do Smyth's character in 'that style', Woolf is here sardonically ironic, deriding even as she evokes Smyth's hyperbolic outpourings that are only too familiar—the incessant banging on, as we would say today, about herself and her sufferings.

It is to represent what is only too predictable and familiar—and what the writer of 'modern novels' (to recall that essay of April 1919) wants to 'eliminate' (277) that the verbal form 'dot, dot, dot' is introduced in 'An Unwritten Novel'.⁹ Part of a running metanarrative commentary given by a self-conscious telling *I* (eye), which foregrounds the writer at work in the construction of narrative, it is specifically the predictable details of the material interiors (as distinct from the elusive interior lives) of the English lower-middle classes that 'dot, dot, dot' represents. In the fantasies of the subjective life and material circumstances that this narrator projects onto a female figure encountered in a train (as I discuss further below), the telling *I* imagines her returning to her sister-in-law's home in Eastbourne: 'She opened

⁹I quote from the original version in the *London Mercury*, rather than the version in *CSF*.

the door, and, putting her umbrella in the stand—that goes without saying; so, too, the whiff of beef from the basement; dot, dot, dot’ (277). Such details are dwelt on by those whom Woolf labels ‘materialists’ in her 1919 essay, calling for the writer of fiction to seek instead ‘to convey’ the ‘incessantly varying spirit’ that she calls ‘life’ (E3 33). ‘An Unwritten Novel’ is arguably her own attempt to respond to this call, as the telling *I*’s comment that she has ‘[her] eyes upon life’ (273) signals. The formal strategies mobilised to serve this project include the typographical form of ellipsis, the three full stops, which are used throughout. Not always clearly carrying a determinate meaning—hence a sign of uncertainty or indeterminacy at the level of the metanarrative—this form is used to mark pauses in the narrator’s discourse, thus indicating the (infinite) possible directions the narrative might take as well as what is not said by the imagined characters (James Moggridge, for example). They mark, that is, a permeable frontier between articulated words and inarticulate ‘impressions’—to recall again the essay. The typographical form, then, evokes the elusive ‘semi-transparent envelope’ of ‘life’ (E3 33) in contrast to the verbal form, ‘dot, dot, dot’, which evokes rather familiar and predictable material realities reproduced by the ‘solid ... craftsmanship’ of ‘materialists’ such as Arnold Bennett, who does not leave ‘so much as a draught between the frames of the windows, or a crack in the boards’, but who fails to capture ‘life’ (E3 32). It is these material realities that the writer of modern novels wants to ‘eliminate’ (277) in pursuit of the ‘incessantly varying spirit’ of ‘life’ (E3 33).

‘An Unwritten Novel’ is singled out from the pieces collected in *Monday or Tuesday* (1921) in a letter Woolf wrote to Smyth on 16 October 1930 when their relationship was still in its intense early stages. Conceding that the more radical experiments (‘Green and blue and the heron one’) were mere ‘tangles of words’, Woolf explained how those short pieces provided her with a ‘diversion’ from *Night and Day*, her ‘exercise in the conventional style’ (L4 231). ‘An Unwritten Novel’ was, however, more than this, ‘the great discovery’ of a ‘method of approach’ that would lead to ‘Jacobs Room, Mrs Dalloway etc.’—perhaps an unconscious lapse into Smyth’s stylistic habit that allows Woolf to avoid attending closely to where/when she found the limits of this approach. The importance she places on ‘An Unwritten Novel’ in this version of her ‘writer’s life’ (L4 231) may owe something to a conversation reported three weeks earlier (L4 218, [22] September) when Smyth’s work was praised by E. M. Forster, whose ‘opinions’, as Lee notes, ‘were extremely important’ to Woolf, although they ‘circled warily around each other all their lives’ (Lee 272, 273). Describing Forster’s work as ‘very good ... though impeded, shrivelled and immature’, and acknowledging his influence on her work, Woolf told Smyth how he had heaped praise on

Smyth's work, singling out (perhaps in order to needle Woolf) 'An Adventure in a Train': 'She should write pamphlets—my word (he said) how good her thing in the train was—how I laughed—what a born writer' (L4 218). Like 'An Unwritten Novel', 'An Adventure in a Train' was reprinted in a collection, *Streaks of Life*, published likewise in 1921. As I mentioned earlier, this had been reviewed by Woolf, who makes no explicit mention of this piece, citing rather the stories told about the great and powerful, which do indeed occupy more of the collection than this story which is focused, like 'An Unwritten Novel', on a middle-aged woman of the lower-middle classes. If, however, there is no explicit mention, Woolf's general remarks quoted above about Smyth's lack of 'literary power' take on a particular resonance when the intertextual relation is recognised. Indeed, Woolf's avoidance of the piece in the review is as telling as the assertion ten years later of the value of 'An Unwritten Novel' shortly after Forster's praise of 'An Adventure in a Train'.

For the likenesses between the narratives cannot have escaped Woolf or Forster or indeed any attentive member of the readership of the *London Mercury* or of the larger constituency of elite readers to which they belonged. Both tell of a train journey taken by a telling *I* from London through the home counties of Surrey and Sussex (Woolf) and Surrey (Smyth) along routes familiar to the authors, as the named stations signal: Three Bridges, Lewes, Eastbourne in the story by Woolf, whose second home (from 1919) was near Lewes; Waterloo, Vauxhall, Woking, Aldershot in the story by Smyth, who lived in Woking. In both narratives, the telling *I* shares the carriage with a number of passengers (scrupulously described by Smyth, less so by Woolf) who rapidly (Woolf) or gradually (Smyth) leave, except for one—a middle-aged woman of the lower-middle classes, who is travelling to Eastbourne (Woolf) or Aldershot (Smyth), where she is met by her son. This comes as a surprise for Woolf's telling *I*, who has passed the time inventing narratives and a vivid subjective life for the female figure who is silent until the revelation, which brings closure even as it ironises the imaginary projections of the telling *I*, though not her affirmation of the infinite possible narratives that open up as she watches mother and son, '[m]ysterious figures' (280), disappear. By contrast, there is no surprise for Smyth's *I*, who learns about the son (a soldier based at Aldershot) from the mother, whose talk takes up most of the narrative. It is indeed the purpose of Smyth's telling *I*, self-described as a 'chronicler bent on accuracy' (673), to reproduce the woman's discourse without attempting to imagine her subjective life. There is comedy in the chronicler's self-presentation—perhaps what made Forster laugh—as she struggles to keep up with her interlocutor, 'writing for dear life' (673) in the 'notebook I had just bought in town' (669). This is 'still a precious

possession' (667), and, as she recounts in a brief coda (676), she shared its contents with a friend in the month prior to writing up the journey, which took place, as she announces at the outset, '[o]ne day, in the year 1902' (667). Prompted, I suggest, by the appearance of Woolf's story in the July issue of the *London Mercury*, as she hints through the appended place and date 'Paris, July 1920', irked by an idea of 'life' and a writing style that posed a threat to the possibilities of documentary realism and the political action it might serve, Smyth works up the notes made in 1902, perhaps deliberately shaping her narrative—though we cannot check this as the notebook no longer exists—to highlight parallels in order to emphasise differences, notably with respect to 'life' and who might more justly claim to have their eyes on it.

These differences are foregrounded in what is (for Smyth) a highly unusual introduction, which asserts 'that anything which purports to be a record of an event that really happened'—as Woolf's narrative is implied to be by the telling *I*—'is spoiled by the very slightest admixture of fiction' (667). 'The following adventure', Smyth continues, 'has not been worked up into literature', an assertion which lends specific resonance to Woolf's remark in her review about Smyth's lack of 'literary power'. As Forster's opinion that she 'should write pamphlets' underlines, Smyth's strength lies in the authenticity of the chronicler to which she lays claim here, and which is then emphasised by her admission of obstacles. First, there are class and regional differences, which have prevented her from 'retaining with accuracy' certain specificities of the speech of her 'heroine' (667). Second, there is the historically as well as class-specific obligation to omit descriptions of the human body, especially the ailing or mutilated body, an obligation which has been imposed by the upper-middle class (to which, of course, Woolf belonged). This has required the authorial chronicler 'to fall back upon dots and paraphrase' (667), a constraint archly underscored when she remarks that 'better-bred people' like to talk about their ailments as much as the uneducated, '[b]ut . . . in these it never makes one laugh' (667). In this, the most self-conscious use of the typographical form *I* have come across in her writing, Smyth highlights how class determines collective and individual responses as well as what may and may not be written or spoken.

In the narrative itself the obligation to such censorship is highlighted at two moments. Three dots and a statement of omission are inserted when the heroine goes into details about the physical 'devastation wrought' by a beam that fell on her husband in an accident at work (673). More strikingly prominent, however, is an earlier declaration by the telling *I* of an obligation to break off the flow of the (grotesquely anti-Semitic) discourse of her heroine—a break signalled by three dots—and to 'paraphrase' her description of a 'technical procedure in Israelitish communities at an interesting and

critical moment in the lives of married ladies'. This is followed by an account of the case of a young Jewish woman who called for 'an *ENGLISH* woman' and the response of the heroine whose words about 'the methods employed on such occasions in Christian sick-rooms' are also 'omitted', an omission again signalled by three dots (671). The nature of the ritual/medical practices evoked here have eluded my investigations, but it is evident that they have to do with the regulation of female sexuality dictated by men in different religious/ethnic communities.¹⁰ Interestingly enough, the only changes made to the text when it was reproduced in *Streaks of Life* (1921) are to the dots, notably at this moment when the dots that pepper the heroine's discourse in the first version have been removed, except for those that mark this censorship. There is indeed a tidying-up of the dots throughout the second version, where they are used only when their significance is verbally signalled as marking 'emphasis' (123, 129), a 'pause' (125), the 'dying away' (125) of the heroine's voice or this obligatory censorship (126). It is a carefully controlled use of dots that, as far as I have been able to establish, Smyth does not practise again. This is because, I suggest, it is only here that their use is attached to high stakes—the threat in 1920 of a new 'modern' mode of telling lives as well as more generally of producing art forms.¹¹

The importance of Smyth to Woolf's development as a writer and as a political activist in the 1930s is now generally recognised, as is the crucial significance to this development—and more generally to 'the history of twentieth-century feminism' (Lee 598)—of the public performance on 21 January 1931, when they shared a stage to talk about the obstacles faced by women in their respective fields of music and literature. From this event 'sprang' Woolf's next writing project, as she announces to herself in her diary entry of 20 January (*D4* 6), although, as Lee points out, she did not 'foresee' the 'long and painful process' which would take her from this talk through the novel-essay she called *The Pargiters* to the novel finally called *The Years* and the long essay *Three Guineas* (Lee 599). This process was marked by the intractable tension between 'facts' and 'vision', as Woolf repeatedly put it (*D4* 129 and 151–2), a tension highlighted in Anna Snaith's detailed plotting of the genesis of *The Years* in her very fine introduction to her Cambridge edition. We might formulate this tension here in terms of an attempt to 'combine' (*D4* 151) the chronicler of 'An Adventure in a Train' with the visionary *I* of 'An Unwritten Novel', especially given that when in November

¹⁰Lee comments that Smyth's 'anti-Semitism' allowed Woolf to vent her feelings about her in-laws (597). The anti-Semitism of the authorial chronicler here, however, is mild compared to that of the protagonist, which, in my view, is implicitly critiqued.

¹¹As Lee observes, like other friends of Woolf's, Smyth, though a political pioneer, was among the 'anti-modernists' (587) and 'not an experimental artist' (588).

1932 Woolf began work on *The Pargiters* she looked back to '1919—& N[ight] & D[ay]' (D4 129). The voice of the speaker in the 'first essay' of *The Pargiters* does indeed resemble the voice of Smyth's chronicler: 'This novel "The Pargiters," moreover is not a novel of vision, but a novel of fact. It is based upon some scores—I might boldly say thousands—of old memoirs' and 'There is scarcely a statement in it that cannot be verified' (P 9). The *I* here assumes the voice/role of the chronicler as Woolf herself adopts what Anna Snaith calls a 'sociological approach to her writing in the 1930s' (TY lii), trawling through a 'vast array of sources' (TY li), including but not confined to Smyth's preferred genre of the memoir evoked here. Indeed, Smyth was herself one of the sources to which Woolf turned for 'facts' (L5 141; TY lxii).

Strikingly, when the project was first conceived by Woolf, she described it as 'about the sexual life of women' (D4 6), just as, in the talk in which it has its origins, Woolf's speaker draws attention to the 'conventions' of censorship dictated by men 'when a woman speaks the truth about her body' (P xxxix, xl). Woolf herself was freed from silence about the body and specifically sexuality very largely through her relationship with Smyth, as Lee and Gordon have highlighted (Lee 590, 596; Gordon 255–6). The point she made in the January talk is taken up in *The Pargiters* through the episode of 'the man exposing himself' (D4 130, 10 November 1932). This is commented on in the third 'essay' by a speaker who, again sounding like Smyth's chronicler, observes that 'the three dots used after the sentence, "He unbuttoned his clothes . . ." testify' to 'a convention supported by law, which forbids, whether rightly or wrongly, any plain description of the sight that Rose, in common with many other little girls saw' (P 51). In the chapter itself three dots follow: first, the description of the man who 'began to undo his clothes . . .' (P 43), then Rose's recollection of 'what she had seen', which she 'could not possibly tell Eleanor': 'He had undressed . . .' (48). Interestingly, when the episode is reworked in *The Years*, three dots no longer follow the description of the man 'unbuttoning his clothes' (TY 26). They are used rather to mark Rose's inability to tell her sister Eleanor 'the truth': "'I saw . . ." Rose began. She made a great effort to tell her the truth; to tell her about the man at the pillar-box. "I saw . . ." she repeated' (37). This change in the use of typographical ellipsis signals how the focus of the fiction has shifted—as the voice of the chronicler has been channelled into *Three Guineas*—from the censorship imposed on writers to the self-censorship of women unable to name their experience of sexual abuse, to tell the truth about their bodies. Woolf, of course, knew only too well how this felt.

Three dots mark a woman's self-censorship in *Between the Acts* when Mrs Manresa is about to tell an 'anecdote . . . about a public lavatory'—'how the

Mayor . . . Could she tell it? No. The old lady, gazing at the swallows, looked too refined' (BTA 74)—a reminder of the determining influence of class on what may and may not be said about the body, which Smyth's chronicler highlights. Three dots are used, too, of the censorship with respect to sexual violence towards women—here rape—that determines what may be written not only by writers of fiction but also by journalists, supposed chroniclers of facts. The young married woman Isa picks up her father-in-law's copy of *The Times* and reads of a case which echoes reports in *The Times* of June and July 1938 (BTA 173). Isa is confronted here with the 'real' that is rape (BTA 15), a reality that returns to haunt her at the end of the day: 'She had screamed. She had hit him. . . . What then?' (BTA 155). Here this reality and the attendant silence of censorship merge with her reveries, which are littered with three dots, as are the subjective meanderings of many of the characters. Marking the indeterminacies or vagueness of inner lives, notably fading memories, especially of mothers (BTA 4, 7, 115), three dots are also used with verbal indications to mark more objective erasures (as in the second version of Smyth's 'Adventure'), where, for instance, the wind 'blew away' words (BTA 59, 91) or a voice 'petered out' (BTA 69).

The many characters whose subjective meanderings are marked by three dots include Miss La Trobe, the organiser and director of the pageant who, as I mentioned earlier, has been taken by several critics to refer to Smyth. A description of her stern direction, giving the audience 'ten seconds to settle their faces', then flick[ing] her hand' to bring on a 'pompous march' (BTA 115) is followed by a quoted phrase, apparently from her script, which ends with 'etc.' and three dots: "'Firm, elatant, bold and blatant", etc. . . .' (BTA 115). Still more explicitly, she is later described, 'with her eye on her script. "After Vic." she had written, "try ten mins. of present time. Swallows, cows etc."' (BTA 129). Used otherwise only once where 'etc., etc.' closes a list of 'facts which everybody knows to be perfectly true' (BTA 97), although these are (rather ironically) only familiar images and phrases, this form of the unwritten is specifically associated with La Trobe, a trace perhaps of Woolf's half-playful threat to do Smyth's character in her habitual 'style' of those 'two happy dodges': 'dot dot, dot—et cetera' (L4 145).

By way of conclusion, I want to return briefly to the two (or three) dots that close the final diary entry and the 'dot dot dot' that closes Woolf's attempt to 'imagine how one's killed by a bomb' in the entry nearly six months earlier (D5 359, 326). Taken as interchangeable by Lounsbury and Woudhuysen, as I mentioned at the outset, these two forms of representation of the unwritten may be taken—given what precedes—as implying different views of death, if, that is, the dots following the final entry are related to Woolf's decision to take her own life (which is not certain, especially given that she took her life

as much as three days after the entry). In the earlier entry, the immediate prompt to the attempt at imagining death by a bomb is a request from Lady Oxford to write about what she believes, but a conversation with Leonard about the bombing that has occurred in the vicinity and her not wanting 'to die yet', which she describes in the previous lines, feeds into the imagined experience—the thought 'oh I wanted another 10 years'—before the failure of imagination when she 'shant, for once, be able to describe' death, although she can imagine the pain and terror prior to the 'suffocating nonentity' which she represents as 'dot dot dot' (D5 326–7). The use of the vocalised form carries then a sense of the bleak inevitability of this state of non-being. This is in contrast to the two or three dots after the closing entry, which, if related to her decision to take her life, may carry rather a sense of death as an unknown that she goes to meet as an open-ended adventure, such as she projects in her diary for the end of the story that will be *Orlando*: 'it is to end with three dots . . . so' (D3 131, 5 March 1927).¹²

Coda: Virginia Woolf, Ethel Smyth and the Countess Russell

A figure on the periphery of Woolf's circles of friends and acquaintances, Countess Russell (1866–1941), also known as Elizabeth von Arnim, established herself as a novelist with *Elizabeth and her German Garden* (1898). She is mentioned by Woolf in early letters as a friend of Kitty Maxse's, to whose generation Russell, like Smyth, belonged (L1 190, 294), and subsequently only in letters to Smyth with whom Russell was associated by Woolf. Thus, in September 1930, Woolf wrote how, in a conversation with E. M. Forster, praise of Ethel's writing, 'by a natural transition, passed to Lady Russell', whom Forster could not be persuaded to like, an 'inflexible opinion' (L4 218), which tends to contradict Jennifer Walker's recent rosy portrait of Forster's relationship to the Countess and his time as tutor to her children in Nassenheide (Germany) in 1905 (77–83). The two women writers appreciated each other's work, although conscious of their differences. Earlier in September 1930, Woolf wrote to Smyth that she had read fifty 'enchanted' pages by Russell, who was at times 'as good as Dickens' (L4 209), although there is no record of this in her diary or other letters. Russell in turn expressed her enthusiasm for *A Room of One's Own* and *To the Lighthouse* in various letters, and, as early as 1920, astutely connected the work of Woolf to that of Katherine Mansfield, who was Russell's young cousin (Maddison 143–6). Extraordinary as it may seem, the only recorded meeting of the two at the

¹²In the published text, the final words of Orlando herself are followed by a full stop and three dots—'The wild goose. . . . '—but the novel itself closes with a date: 'Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen hundred and Twenty Eight.' (O 300).

house of Sibyl Colefax, mentioned in Russell's diary entry of 5 March 1930 (quoted above), is not mentioned by biographers or scholars who write on Woolf or Russell. Perhaps this is because of the content of Woolf's letter and the apparent relish Smyth took in sharing Woolf's letter with Russell. Was this one of Smyth's 'dodges'—a way of making sure that these two new (and famous) friends of hers would remain wary of each other and so never get round to discussing *her*?

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