ESSAY

PUBLISHING ON THE BRINK OF WORLD WAR II:
THE WOOLFS, THE HOGARTH PRESS, AND THE REFUGEES

Diane F. Gillespie

I. Introduction

In 1917 Leonard and Virginia Woolf began typesetting and printing as a hobby. Little did they know that printing their own and their friends’ short literary experiments would burgeon into the Hogarth Press, a commercial publishing house they created, developed, and diversified throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Increasingly, however, as J. H. Willis Jr. points out, Leonard Woolf’s “political and social interests” influenced Press publications (Willis 212). Many reflected ominous international developments. During the 1930s especially, from the time Adolf Hitler became Chancellor in 1933 until Britain declared war in 1939, events abroad increasingly demanded attention. Leonard Woolf recalled that, in 1935, “people were just beginning to understand” how “sinister and menacing” Hitler and the Nazis were (Downhill 192). He recalled feeling helpless as “a powerful nation completely subservient to a gang of squalid, murderous hooligans” destroyed civilization (Downhill 248). Determined to experiment with satirical exposés of authoritarian ideologies—in Germany, Italy, and Spain as well as at home—the Woolfs published Leonard’s Quack, Quack! in 1935 and Virginia’s Three Guineas late in 1938 (Laurence 126).2

In recent years, scholars have encouraged an enriched view of both Hogarth Press and period by emphasizing, not “better-known names and titles” (Southworth 15), but publications on sometimes unexpected topics by lesser-known or forgotten voices.3 Among Press publications encouraging political discussion, in addition to the Woolfs’ relevant books in the thirties, were the “Day to Day” pamphlets, including one on fascism by Mussolini in 1933 and one on communism by R. Palme Dutt (1938), as well as Sally Graves’s book A History of Socialism (1939) (Willis 251–52). Not surprisingly, discussions of political ideologies also emerged in Hogarth Press literary publications.

In March of 1938, eight months before Virginia Woolf’s Three Guineas appeared, the Hogarth Press published The Refugees, a novel by Jewish American writer Libby Benedict. Among many groups targeted by Hitler’s regime, she introduces us to Jews, left-wing Social Democrats, and Communists who fled Germany in the early 1930s. Some of these refugees risked writing, printing, and disseminating anti-Nazi propaganda. Benedict presents these flawed efforts as uncoordinated, fraught with disagreements over strategy and ideology, compromised by class and gender biases, and impeded by individual agendas and personalities. By associating these ideologies with fictional characters, Benedict is able to convey why a complex diversity of sincere early efforts to stop Hitler were unlikely to succeed.

Leonard Woolf’s central role in the Press’s political emphases notwithstanding, I want to focus on the women’s works of 1938, especially Libby Benedict’s forgotten novel The Refugees in the context of her other writing and of Virginia Woolf’s much discussed epistolary essay, Three Guineas.4 These two writers, a Jewish American woman and an English woman married to a Jew,5 had different backgrounds and experiences as well as different
creative methods. The Hogarth Press, as we shall see, packaged their books accordingly. Both authors, however, had the ability and means to research, comprehend, and then define in writing the crucial historical moment in which they lived. Both focused on impending war and its complex causes. Both perceived how uniforms and symbols could perpetuate social hierarchies and competition for power as they spawned and encouraged authoritarian regimes. Finally, both women offered, from different perspectives and to differing degrees, the perspectives of outsiders.

II. “Libby Benedict’s Fable on Libby Benedict” – Virginia Woolf

Libby Benedict’s novel had just appeared when Virginia Woolf sold her share of the Hogarth Press to John Lehmann in April of 1938. In that year of transition and possible war, the Press published a mere sixteen volumes, only three of which were fiction (Willis 337, 404). Still, “Our last Leonard & Virginia season is perhaps our most brilliant,” Virginia Woolf noted in March. “All the weeklies I think single out Isherwood, Upward, & even Libby Benedict for the highest places” (D 5 129–30 and n. 6; my emphasis).6 In fact, The Refugees, dubbed “a remarkable first novel,” tops the Hogarth Press advertisement in The Observer with a recommendation from writer and critic V. S. Pritchett: “Sober, dignified, simple, The Refugees is the most moving and interesting book about politics I have read for a long time” (Pritchett 443).7 Another then well known fiction writer and critic, Frank Swinnerton, writes that the novel’s “account…of the bewildered discomfiture of the left wing leaders…is very intelligent” and that its author, while “anti-Nazi,” is “much more than a political partisan” (6).8 Swinnerton refers to the author as male. A Canadian reviewer notes, however, that Benedict’s “recognition of the human element” is rare for a “doctrinaire” novel, but probably there because a woman wrote it (W. 414).9 The dust-jacket review, possibly written by Leonard Woolf, is mixed. On the one hand, The Refugees “shows signs of immaturity.” On the other, the story is “moving” and “extremely interesting in its analysis and presentation of psychology” (jacket blurb).

Virginia Woolf recorded no response to The Refugees until early May 1938, two months after publication and on the very day Libby Benedict was due to visit. Setting aside Bernard Mandeville’s Fable of the Bees, Woolf quips, in a letter to Vita Sackville-West, that she now “must turn to Libby Benedict’s Fable on Libby Benedict” (L 6 226 and n. 2). However clever the echo, this label predicts moralizing and self-revelation, both of which Woolf tried to avoid in her own fiction. Perhaps, instead of Pritchett’s praise for Benedict’s convincing presentation of her characters’ “intellectual and emotional phases” in The Refugees (443), Woolf derived her dismissal of the novel as moralizing reportage in part from Swinnerton’s description of some characters (not the author herself) as “concentrated on pure doctrine” in a story based on apparently “first hand” experiences (6). As for Benedict herself, Woolf indulges in anti-Semitic stereotyping. “Here’s Leonard, to ask me what I think Libby Benedict looks like?” Virginia Woolf records in her diary. “I guess fat & Jewish; she’s thin & Jewish,” Leonard replies (D5 138). Virginia’s guess reflects what Maren Linett calls “a fleshiness common to anti-Semitic stereotypes” (2).

Literary scholars explain Virginia Woolf’s anti-Semitic remarks in a number of ways. They reflected a long tradition of anti-Semitism in England reinforced by reactions to late nineteenth-century Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe (Lassner and Spiro 64–5). They
were a defensive “Englishness” in the face of impending war, which also might have fostered an unreasoning “myth of rural England” and “nostalgia for childhood” (Schroeder 33). Another explanation is that Woolf’s sometimes “overtly anti-Semitic” treatment of Jews, especially in her writing of the 1930s, was due not only to “a wider cultural confusion about the figure of the Jew in this historical period” (111), but also to a contradictory “network of interrelated anxieties” prompted by “Jewishness” (Simpson 111–112, 115). Woolf, according to this view, is both complicit in, and critical of, hierarchical class and racial prejudices. She desires money and commercial success and, at the same time, repudiates them. As woman and pacifist, she identifies herself with outsiders in a patriarchal, hierarchical, and militaristic society, but she also has some of the privileges of an insider. Woolf’s Jewish stereotyping, in other words, functions simultaneously and uneasily as self-analysis and self-criticism.

Some of these contradictions also seem to color Hogarth Press publications in the 1930s. Although not so involved since she sold her shares to Lehmann, Virginia Woolf was still aware of what was going on. In the same May 1938 diary entry as her brief comments on Libby Benedict, Woolf indicated that she had approved or “endorsed” publication of another middle-brow woman’s first novel, this one on an aspect of nineteenth-century, East End London, Jewish life (Sullivan 69). Although John Lehmann did not think Kathleen Nott’s Mile End was sufficiently “in the movement” (DS 138), the Press published it in October 1938.10 The dust-jacket blurb was, as usual, unattributed, but its writer notes that this first novel “is all the more remarkable as an imaginative achievement, as […] the author] has no Jewish blood herself.” Having spent “much of her time in social and clinical psychological work in the East End,” however, Nott, we are told, has been in “contact with a large number of Jewish homes” (jacket blurb).

In the case of Libby Benedict’s first novel, dealing with the plights of Jewish as well as political refugees from Germany, the blurb on the flap of her book cover had not defined her as Jewish, or, for that matter, as Social Democrat or Communist. Neither had it indicated what kinds of experiences enabled her to write the book. From a marketing point of view in the 1930s, was it someone’s conscious decision to present a novel dealing with Jewish experiences as written by a non-Jew? Did Libby Benedict’s Jewish identity go unmentioned for a similar reason? Virginia Woolf’s surprise at The Refugees’ success, plus her determination to think of Libby Benedict as a stereotypical Jew unimaginatively using her own life to teach a lesson, remain odd given the varied situations and psychological quandaries of the novel’s diverse characters. These brief May 1938 letter and diary entries contain Virginia Woolf’s first and last references to Libby Benedict and to a novel it is hard to believe she even finished reading.

Many facts about Benedict’s relationship with the Hogarth Press and her life in general remain unclear. Not only is she absent from the usual literary and Jewish reference sources, but also from Hogarth Press correspondence at the University of Reading. There is no surviving acceptance letter, nor are there letters suggesting revisions. Perhaps, like several of the refugee characters in her novel, she lived in Bloomsbury long enough to consult personally with Leonard Woolf and staff at the Press.11 Although facts about Benedict’s life are also difficult to find, there are enough bits and pieces to frame and identify her written voice. A death record indicates that a “Libby Benedict” was born on June 17, 1903 and died on January 15, 1990 in Far Rockaway, NY (Social). An author
identification appended to a review article she published in the mid 1940s (“Disillusionment” 4) gives Missouri as her birthplace. In 1944, an obituary in the *New York Times* for “Meyer Goldberg, Ex-Director of United Palestine Appeal” lists “a daughter, Libby Benedict, author” as one of his survivors (“MEYER” 23). Goldberg, with the same address in the Bronx as on some of Benedict’s surviving letters, was “born in Russia seventy years ago” and “lived in this country since 1901, in Kansas City, MO, until his removal to New York in 1919” (“MEYER” 23). Does the difference between Libby Benedict’s surname and Meyer Goldberg’s indicate, perhaps, a husband or a pen name? I have found no evidence of either.

Although Libby Benedict’s early education remains a mystery, we can pick up her trail in the early 1930s. In 1931, living in New York City, she wrote a letter from an address in the Bronx to writer and critic Waldo Frank after hearing him lecture on contemporary fiction. Noting that “Joyce, with his stream of consciousness, and Hemingway, with his swift dialogue, seem equally thin,” she confided, “I think, therefore I write” (Letter 1931). She must have been pleased with the reviewer’s description of *The Refugees* as “full of thought” and “very intelligent” (Swinnerton 6). In the early 1930s, Benedict recalled, she and others “went to Europe…to get continental university titles.” Reactions to her “American voice” in Germany and England, she noted, had helped her to understand some difficulties of refugee adjustment (“Aspects” 13). By 1933, Benedict was sending articles to the *New York Times* from Germany. One covered women’s reactions to Nazis marginalizing or ousting them from roles as workers and professionals (“Women”). Another contrasted Berlin’s deceptively clean, busy streets with food scarcity and Jewish unemployment (“Berlin”). In 1934 she was giving talks in England and New York about travels in Germany and Palestine (“Journalist” and “Libby”).

Libby Benedict’s written voice, throughout her publishing career in the 1930s and 40s, reveals careful research in the U.S. and abroad, keen observation of both political movements and individual psychology, familiarity with several languages and cultures, and sympathy combined with candid advice for refugees from totalitarian movements. During the 1930s, she wrote short stories set in several countries, and, in 1936 and 1937, published some in *The Menorah Journal, The London Mercury,* and *Time and Tide*. An example is “Wedding in Berlin: A Story,” published in the *Menorah Journal*. Benedict depicts the attitudes and reactions of a Jewish man and woman, strangers to each other, who leave Berlin and all their “ambitions” and education to do manual labor in Palestine (“Wedding” 52). To get from the British government a scarce entry permit for two, however, they have to agree to a sham marriage, separation upon arrival, and housing in temporary camps until work is found for them.

Lady Rhondda and *Time and Tide*, her feminist, left-wing weekly, may have been one link between Benedict and the Hogarth Press. In that journal, Libby Benedict published “The Decision.” In this story, two university students argue about whether you can incorporate Communist ideas into exams in chemistry, an “absolute science,” or in economics with its “human elements” (“Decision” 1088). The decision of the title, however, is whether to get back to studying or give in to physical attraction. Virginia Woolf’s assumption that *The Refugees* is autobiographical may have come in part from another of Benedict’s *Time and Tide* stories, “Blind Man’s Buff.” This psychological study of a “well mated” couple broken
III. “Hitler’s great offensive had begun” – The Refugees

Libby Benedict was thirty-five in 1938 when her longer piece of fiction, The Refugees, appeared. She sets the novel primarily in Berlin, Paris, and London and divides it into four chapters. The first, “Encirclement,” identifies left-wing men and women in Berlin, where on February 27, 1933, news of the burning of the Reichstag disrupts a social gathering. Those present think Hitler ordered the blaze so he could blame the Communists (Refugees 38). They, and other dissidents, realize “that Hitler’s great offensive had begun,” and that, “whether as Jew or…Social Democrat or…Communist—he or she was classified with the enemy” (Refugees 39).

Parts II and III, “Dispersion” and “Search,” follow several refugees to Paris and London where they look for ways to publicize and work against what is happening in Germany. Benedict’s characters include some who are suspicious of Hitler’s rise to power, but hope to stay safe in Germany by keeping a low profile. Benedict’s narrative moves back and forth between those who stayed and those who, knowing they would be arrested, have fled. These are the refugees of Benedict’s title and her primary focus. She creates them as she later describes refugees, as “individual human beings” with varied backgrounds and psychological responses to stress (“Aspects” 12). Four examples include Karl Ruhmann, doomed because, to the Nazis, a psychoanalyst is “a kind of magician” who follows Freud, a Jew (Refugees 46). Barely surviving starvation and illness in Paris, Ruhmann gets involved with a working-class group printing anti-Nazi Communist propaganda. Class biases and mistrust keep both sides uncomfortable. Ruhmann has doubts about the “microscopic leaflet” medium, about an uncompromising Communist message not “inviting” to Social Democrat workers (Refugees 162), and about all the isolating “secrecy” and “intrigue” among those producing and distributing the propaganda (Refugees 234). Still he goes in disguise several times to disseminate the materials in Germany. There he tries to work with anti-Nazi undercover operatives who have a “feeling of antagonism” towards refugees like himself “who had gone out” (Refugees 182).

Meanwhile two other refugees, Leo Reinemann and Laura, his long-time partner, get to London. Along with other German refugees, they initially find a room in Bloomsbury. Leo, from a working-class background, is a well-known lecturer and uncompromising advocate for Communism. Ironically, it is their practical, working-class chauffeur, Hans Korb who, faithfully yet contemptuously, gets these two word-intoxicated intellectuals first to Holland, then to England. There, Sir Cecil Grebham, motivated by “humanistic liberalism” (Refugees 73), invites Reinemann to head an English “Special Committee for the Relief of Refugees” and to create a bulletin that provides “first-hand information and direction for carrying on the propaganda against the Nazi methods” (Refugees 64). Although Grebham envisions relief for political refugees now in England (Refugees 76–78), Reinemann plans to use the committee’s funds, secretly if necessary, to form a group and spread Communist doctrine among workers back in Germany. Laura, upon her conversion to Communism, had left a son with her parents and the upper class life she has renounced. Less radical and more cosmopolitan, tolerant, and compromising than Leo,
however, Laura is comfortable with, and attracted to, Sir Cecil.\(^{25}\) She doesn’t want him to “drop the whole arrangement” because of Leo’s subversion (\textit{Refugees} 85). Although Leo accuses her of “a kind of superficial bourgeois morality” (\textit{Refugees} 120), Laura works, as linguist, translator, and editor, to moderate his extremist language.

A fourth example is Dr. Sophie Leitner, a professional sociologist who, although a Jew, had not identified herself with Jewish activities in Germany. In London, however, she receives support from a “newly formed Jewish relief committee” in return for work in the British Museum to gather statistics “for legislation having to do with the Jews” (\textit{Refugees} 116). Although a Social Democrat, she has “argued herself” into accepting Leo Reinemann’s extreme Communism (\textit{Refugees} 91) and, for a time, Reinemann himself as lover. To him she brings “data about the insurance and other workers’ funds which had accumulated,” but had been seized by the Nazis (\textit{Refugees} 120). In the opinion of Reinemann’s partner Laura, Sophie Leitner, with all her information and writing ability, moves “too rapidly forward in her ideas;” Laura adds, “half-mutely, even to herself,” that Dr. Leitner is also “too Jewish” (\textit{Refugees} 126–27).

Sophie Leitner has rented a room in Bloomsbury, in Tavistock Square where, during the period of this novel, the Woolfs themselves lived and ran the Hogarth Press (1924–1939). Peter, a tom-cat who is part of Bloomsbury’s “heavy feline population,” is Sophie’s closest companion. To him she reads \textit{The Times} to practice her English and to work out “her political difficulties” (\textit{Refugees} 118). In her lodging house, she has to compete with other residents for the single bathroom. No “phobic,” insecure, and impecunious Sara Pargiter (\textit{Simpson} 116), however, complains about being contaminated by a “Jew having a bath” as in Woolf’s \textit{The Years} (339–40).

As Jewish refugees continue to arrive in London, Sophie Leitner’s Tavistock Square room becomes a gathering place for many of them. Some are penniless and starving. Many are Jews and professional people with ties to the Social Democrats. They argue with her about the potential for dictatorship in both Capitalism and Communism. All of these refugees’ stories—patterns of migration, employment, and marriage—have a “tragically tone of sameness” about them (\textit{Refugees} 229). Dr. Leitner feels their “occasional helplessness… but most of all her own oddness in relation to her surroundings” (\textit{Refugees} 230). With its enclave of German political refugees and of Jews no longer associated primarily with London’s East End, Benedict’s Bloomsbury Group is different from the one we know as Woolf scholars.

Part IV, “Hope and Reality,” offers more reality than hope. It bookends burning the Reichstag with the “Night of the Long Knives.” June 30, 1934 marks the beginning of Hitler’s ruthless purge of critics, left-wing members of the Nazi Party itself, and leaders of the S.A. (Sturmabteilung), the proletarian army of war veterans and unemployed workers. “Look at the colour they have chosen,” Ruhmann thinks of the S.A. “Brown. Could anything better… represent… an indelible mass that moves relentlessly on its way”? (\textit{Refugees} 94). Still, the power of the S.A. is short-lived. Replacing it with the intimidating, black-uniformed S.S. (Schutzstaffel)—described in the novel as a “bourgeois, capitalist” force—Hitler, Reinemann concludes, “has [thus…] discarded the last trace of his socialist principles” (\textit{Refugees} 287).\(^{26}\) Dissidents still in Germany define National Socialism as “the capitalist system in its last throes” because of the “mulishness and the shortsightedness” of its leaders (\textit{Refugees} 261–62). Although Ruhmann feels the increasingly deep “hatred
of the Nazi regime among the populace” and knows that hatred “has strength,” he also predicts Communist failure to mobilize it (*Refugees* 281–82). In England, the Woolfs read about the Nazi purges. In her diary, Virginia Woolf tried “ineffectively,” she says, to describe her reaction. Their own lives continued, she realized, while “these…bullies go about…acting this idiotic, meaningless, brutal, bloody, pandemonium…I read articles with rage, to find […] Hitler called a real leader” (*D 4* 223).

IV: “THE IMMATERIAL INSIDE OF A BOOK” –LEONARD WOOLF

The unidentified designer of *The Refugees* cover places, among many small ones, two large, barbed-wire swastikas (Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Cover design for *The Refugees* (1938) by Libby Benedict. Published by the Hogarth Press. Courtesy of Manuscripts, Archives and Special Collections, Washington State University Libraries. Reproduced by permission of the Random House Group Ltd.](image)

Barbed wire had been used in warfare before, by the British themselves during the 1899 war, to surround Boer concentration camps. In WWI, it had protected soldiers in trenches from direct enemy charges. The Nazis, however, electrified it as part of concentration camp architecture. Under the Nazis, too, the swastika, an ancient symbol of blessing or well-being, becomes the sign of an authoritarian cult. In *Quack, Quack!* Leonard Woolf sees the swastika as an indication “that the wearer has accepted the inspiration either directly or indirectly” from a “God-inspired leader” (46–7). Perhaps Leonard Woolf’s book was in part what led Libby Benedict to the Hogarth Press. In her novel, psychoanalyst Karl Ruhmann also sees multiplying swastikas as signs of a submissive
religious impulse. German people are “hiding” beneath what he calls “the emblem of the twisted cross…chanting the assent[,] and offering the sacrifices that were demanded” (Refugees 177). The cover’s background reflects Ruhmann’s later description of early Nazi uniforms as more “garishly yellowish” than brown (Refugees 178). The red lettering, associated with blood and revolutionary politics (especially Communism), does little to lighten the effect. Leonard Woolf gives Hogarth Press priority to “the immaterial inside of a book” (Downhill 80), yet the packaging of The Refugees and Three Guineas sets the tone for the texts within.

Virginia Woolf, however controversial Three Guineas may have been as a solution to impending war, did not have to worry about Hogarth Press acceptance, and the artist of the dust jacket is easily identified (Figure 2). Unlike the painfully threatening cover of The Refugees, Vanessa Bell’s familiar, “mild” (Marcus xliii), even cheerful rose-and-blue colored design for Three Guineas is, in Virginia Woolf’s words, “quite lovely, and also practical” (L 6 251). Bell does not draw the three obsolete gold coins of the title. Nevertheless, their traditional class, wealth, and imperialist connotations remain, and three bank checks suggest similar significant amounts (Marcus 223–24). Virginia Woolf’s revisions of their uses, however, give conditional support for peace as well as for women’s education and professional options. Woolf, who assumed that Benedict’s The Refugees would be an autobiographical fable (D5 138), is ironically aware, even though she is not writing a novel, that in Three Guineas, she is risking both “autobiography in public” (D5 141) and “preaching” (D4 152). She tries, as Elizabeth Evans points out, “to counter dictatorship without resorting to its methods” (75).

The Refugees includes no illustrations. Supplementing the cover of Three Guineas, however, are five photographs of patriarchal costumes and rituals. The photo of a smiling, medal-bedecked, elderly representative of the military (Lord Baden-Powell) inspires amusement and disguises the hierarchical values he represents. That is the point. Woolf asks patriarchs in England to note tables being turned. Instead of conferring outsider status, they may have to experience and understand it themselves. “Abroad,” Woolf writes, “the monster has come more openly to the surface…The whole iniquity of dictatorship…against Jews or against women, in England, or in Germany, in Italy or in Spain” should now be “apparent” since “now you are being shut out, you are being shut up, because you are Jews, because you are democrats, because of race, because of religion” (TG 102—103).

V. “AS A WOMAN, I HAVE NO COUNTRY.” –VIRGINIA WOOLF

In Three Guineas, Virginia Woolf, who describes herself and women like her as “educated men’s daughters” (TG 5), also famously describes herself as an outsider: “as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.” If feeling remains for England, she adds, the outsider will try “to give […] first what she desires of peace and freedom for the whole world” (TG 109). As Susan Friedman puts it, the “daughters of educated men” are “both of and not of the educated classes, just as they are both of and not of the nation-state” (31).

“Educated men’s daughters” (TG 5) traditionally had been outsiders so far as formal education, voices in public affairs, and control of their own money were concerned. “And
Figure 2: Cover design by Vanessa Bell for *Three Guineas* (1938) by Virginia Woolf. Published by the Hogarth Press. Courtesy of Manuscripts, Archives and Special Collections, Washington State University Libraries. Reproduced by permission of the Random House Group Ltd.
since we are different,” Virginia Woolf concludes, “our [help to prevent war] must be different” (TG 143). Daughters of educated men, she suggests, should try to take into the public world of education and the professions, values from the private world, ones that do not lead to war. That means women should earn only enough money “for the full development of body and mind,” refuse to “sell…[their] brain[s] for…money,” prefer “ridicule, obscurity and censure” to “fame and praise,” and rid themselves of “pride” and “unreal loyalties” (TG 80). The daughters of educated men, Woolf concludes, can co-operate with organizations soliciting their help to prevent war, to promote women’s education, and to help women enter the professions by linking these three aims and “by finding new words and creating new methods,” in pursuit of peace (TG 143).

Libby Benedict, although she did not define herself as an “educated man’s daughter,” was an educated Jewish American woman with the resources to travel in Europe and Palestine. She could also return home to New York. She was, nevertheless, vocal about the plight of Jews, political theorists, women, and others who did not fit Hitler’s narrow vision for Germany and who were potential and actual casualties of Nazi brutality. Their vulnerability in the 1930s is more immediate than that of Woolf’s “educated men’s daughters” (TG 5). Dr. Leitner had already moved into the public world in Germany but now cannot find, as a Jew, any dual outsider/insider identity or voice that will enable her to improve her country from within. In Germany, Benedict’s character had researched, published, and lectured on the status of women. She was the first professional woman from a “purely Frankfuritian and Jewish” family who, since the mid-1500s, “had not married out of the faith but who kept none of its other observances” (Refugees 142). She has, therefore, a physical appearance “which a superficially minded world has come to call Semitic” and a personality that is both very “stable” and “volatile” (Refugees 142–43). Her study of how “women of the war age…had adjusted themselves economically in Germany” had earned her the editorship of a sociological journal. Interested in “women and industry,” she had begun to write for Social Democratic publications (Refugees 145).

Now, Sophie Leitner says, just as Jewish women like herself “‘had…acquired intellectual freedom and the position that comes with it,’” they have found themselves “neither…at home” as refugees nor, “as Jews, able even to ‘love Germany any more’” (Refugees 227). She feels “‘thrown centuries back’” (Refugees 332) by the Nazis who, ironically and in one sense, have become what Jews have been historically, dissociated from all that has made Germany great. By burning, disowning, or denying the literature, art, philosophy, science, and social advances that have defined the country, the Nazis essentially “‘have dispossessed themselves’” (Refugees 335–6). As a Jewish woman refugee who now literally has no country and no influence, “‘the whole world’ is not Sophie Leitner’s either. With widespread traditions of anti-Semitism and increasing restrictions on Jewish refugees in many countries, even in British mandated Palestine, she belongs nowhere.

Among the first wave of refugees, Karl Ruhmann may reject the “rigid and doctrinaire” communist ideology and go to Vienna to try to resume psychiatry, but with a difference (Refugees 295). Psychoanalysis, he concludes, is “too much preoccupied with the early formative years,” neglecting a “much longer period of formation” that includes “the economic element” (Refugees 291). He thinks, given the chance, he can now practice “more intelligently, more humanly” (Refugees 291), having experienced and been retrained, he says, “in the most effective school of mass psychosis that had ever existed” (Refugees 323).
Leo Reinemann, still uncompromising and increasingly militant, has dodged a Nazi spy who tried to trick him into returning to his death in Germany. He plans to go to America to continue his lectures on Communism. Laura Reinemann, who agrees to go with him, plans to attempt an autobiography about her class-traversing life.

Sophie Leitner, however, identifies with both a first and a second exodus, people who left, not only to escape “immediate death,” but more recently, “because there was neither a present nor any hope of a future for them in Germany” (Refugees 209). She increasingly despairs. She can identify neither with England nor with the English language. She can no longer, as she had in pre-Nazi Germany, live as “a normal human being” (Refugees 225, 332). Karl Ruhmann, who had known Sophie Leitner previously in Germany, tries to give her counseling and hope, but fails. Sadly putting Peter the cat out into Tavistock Square, she turns on the gas in her room. Her suicide note to Ruhmann is a symbolic wish, for her “own peace,” to “rest in Germany, even if […] only as ashes” (Refugees 341). Sophie Leitner’s cremation “at the Wilmersdorf Crematorium” (Refugees 343) concludes the novel. She is, ironically, another kind of victim of Hitler’s holocaust.

Both Libby Benedict and Virginia Woolf stress the need to learn what leads to the ascendancy of dictatorship. Sir Cecil Grebham, the English official in The Refugees, realizes that England has been too much preoccupied with colonial issues and too little with industrial unrest. With Oswald Mosley mobilizing his black shirts, England needs to consider alternate political ideologies, if only to apply them in English ways. Virginia Woolf similarly writes that England has “the example of the Fascist States…to instruct…a daily and illuminating example of what we do not wish to be” (TG 114).

VI. “THE REFUGEES…THE JEWS”—BETWEEN THE ACTS

In June of 1937, Virginia Woolf saw Basque children, refugees from Spain, “trudging” through Bloomsbury squares (D5 97 and n. 16). Two days later she and Leonard showed their support at an event at the Albert Hall to raise money to help them (D5 98–99 and n. 19). In January of 1939, she sympathetically mentions “refugees from Barcelona” (D6 203). Sigmund Freud, the Woolfs knew, was a refugee from Vienna living in Hampstead with his daughter Anna Freud (D6 202–3), and “an unknown German” visitor, Rene Podbieski” visited the Woolfs in March of 1939 (D6 208 n. 7). Virginia Woolf does not mention Jewish and other German-speaking refugees living in Bloomsbury in 1933 and 1934, or the Kindertransports of Jewish children arriving in London in 1938 and 1939. Around the time The Refugees appeared in the spring of 1938, however, Woolf already had begun to think about the book published posthumously in 1941 as Between the Acts (D6 133 n. 3, 135). In it, members of Miss LaTrobe’s audience do ask, “what about the Jews? The refugees…People like ourselves, beginning life again” (BA 121).

By September 1939, when England declared war, Libby Benedict was back in the United States, still voicing her concerns about refugees from Nazism. In the 1940s, she worked for Jewish and government committees and bureaus. As a journalist, she published articles and reports as well as encyclopedia entries for both Jewish and non-Jewish publications. Based in New York, again in the Bronx, she wrote articles like “Aspects of Refugee Adjustment” for the American Hebrew. Cultural differences, she realized, made adjustment of Jewish refugees to life in the United States difficult, but immigrants needed
to think of themselves, not only as parts of a Jewish community, but as “full-fledged citizen[s]” in “a free country” (17). Benedict noted in “A Case of Philanthropitis” the insensitive treatment of refugees, even by some Jewish philanthropic organizations, sadly plagued by understaffing and bureaucratic red tape. Tackling stereotyping, Benedict insisted that, as a minority group, Jews want “not the right to have geniuses among them,” which they have, “but the right,” like other groups, to have the inevitable proportion of “fools and scoundrels—without being condemned” for the actions of a few (“Right” 13).

Benedict also befriended Jewish refugees from Germany, like lawyer and poet Jacob Picard whom she helped to find publishers. To him she wrote, “I am honored to be able to say that Christopher Isherwood and I share a publisher, since Hogarth Press published my novel, ‘The Refugees.’ But I am afraid that in the matter of prejudices I oppose him. I am a little angry—as a native American—at the flattery he and his friends have handed out to this country. It hasn’t been good for our souls” (Letter 1941). Benedict saw Isherwood’s voluntary emigration as quite different from the forced displacement of refugees from Hitler’s regime. Although she documented protests in the United States against the extermination of Jews in Europe as well as listed sponsors of refugees from 1942 onward (“Reaction” 191), she often found America’s response wanting.

Libby Benedict never wrote another novel, but she continued to publish stories. One example is “A Mother for Maxim” (1947) about a French couple, the Mallards, who take in a little Jewish boy and protect him as their own when his mother is sent to a concentration camp in Poland and his father is executed by the Nazis. Six years later, when Madame Levy has barely and miraculously survived until the liberation, she returns to find her son. Seeing Maxim’s and the Mallards’ mutual affection, she makes the difficult decision to leave him where he is.

Libby Benedict also published a number of review essays and used them to express her political opinions. In 1945, after the end of the war, for example, she reviewed her countrywoman Gertrude Stein’s Wars I Have Seen. Its charming cover by Cecil Beton shows Stein and Alice B. Toklas and their flower-surrounded French cottage, with planes and parachutes overhead. Virginia and Leonard Woolf, categorized as intellectuals and/or Jews, planned suicides in the event of a German invasion. Stein and Toklas, “Jews and homosexuals living together in rural France,” however, “failed to acknowledge the very real danger to their safety, yet survived in good spirits” (Leick 131). To Stein’s comment, “War is never fatal but always lost,” Benedict responds in her review, “One can loathe war to the bottom of one’s heart…But to say that it must…be a lost war, when the beast that has been unleashed in a nation is annihilated by…sincere fighters for civilization— that is irresponsible cynicism” (“Disillusionment” 4). When Stein writes, “anyway everybody is a refugee and it is a puzzle a considerable puzzle how everybody goes on living and spending money and looking fairly well fed and well clothed,” Benedict loses her temper: “Didn’t Miss Stein ever see the harried, beaten, ragged refugees in Paris from 1933 on? Didn’t she know that…these refugees could…not have work permits? Did she never see them crowd the consulates…begging for a visa that would enable them to go somewhere and earn a living? Where are Miss Stein’s eyes, those eyes that can so unerringly discern the value of a Picasso?” (“Disillusionment” 4).
We can only guess what Libby Benedict’s candid reactions to Woolf’s anti-war stance in *Three Guineas* might have been, if indeed she ever read it. She might have identified with Woolf’s confidence in outsiders’ potential contributions to a more egalitarian and peaceful society, but probably not with any practical application to the current rise of Hitler. Given her comments on Stein, Benedict probably could not have sympathized with Virginia Woolf’s resistance to “the process of military rearmament in the struggle against Hitler” to which Leonard Woolf and other family and friends increasingly acquiesced (Simpson 113). To Benedict, fighting to prevent the annihilation of civilization is justified.

Leonard Woolf characterizes the 1930s as a period of the “erosion of life by death” of friends and family members, of civilization under impending war, and eventually, in 1941, of Virginia Woolf herself (*Downhill* 250, 248). We can only guess if Virginia’s last-minute reading of *The Refugees* took her as far as the resigned ending of the novel—Sophie Leitner’s suicide and cremation. Did Leonard Woolf possibly keep Libby Benedict’s novel manuscript from his wife not just because he knew she wouldn’t define political theories as appropriate for a novel, but also because he was concerned about the potential effect of Sophie Leitner’s suicide on Virginia Woolf’s tendency to despair? Mysteries thus remain about Libby Benedict herself and her relationship with the Woolfs and the Hogarth Press. Benedict’s forgotten voice, however, enriches our understanding of the pre- and post-World War II period in Europe and America from the candidly realistic perspective of an educated, articulate, well-traveled American Jewish woman. Although *The Refugees* may not be an undiscovered literary masterpiece, it is, along with Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas*, a dialogue-provoking example of the Press’s determination, on the brink of another world war, to air and grapple intellectually with the complex causes and effects of violent authoritarian regimes.

**Notes**

1. My thanks to Trevor Bond of Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections at Washington State University Libraries for the cover images, reproduced here by permission of the Random House Group Limited.
2. For a study of the Woolfs on war and peace, see Chapman and Manson.
3. See, for example, Gillespie on the Hogarth Press and the detective novel (“Virginia”), religion (“Woolfs”), etiquette (“Can”), and investing (“Adventures”).
4. Marcus’s introduction and notes for a recent edition of *Three Guineas* provide helpful overviews of the controversies and multiple contexts, the scholarly treatments, and complex structure of Woolf’s book. Marcus also argues persuasively for her own reading of what she calls Woolf’s “Communist Manifesto for Women” (I-liv). I have discussed *Three Guineas* in a number of essays, but see especially Gillespie (“Godiva”).
6. *Journey to the Border* by Edward Upward (1903–2009) deals with his conversion to Communism; *Lions and Shadows: An Education in the Twenties* by Christopher Isherwood (1904–1986) is also autobiographical.
7. Pritchett also notes in his review how “accurately observed” are the “intellectual and emotional phases” of Benedict’s characters. “Blind, right, wrong,” he adds, “they are never futile” (443). Victor Sawdon Pritchett (1900–1997) was known for his short stories and criticism, later for memoirs and biographies.
8. Frank Swinnerton (1884–1992) was a prolific English novelist, critic, biographer, and essayist.
9. A short notice in *Life and Letters Today* called *The Refugees* “a readable story” with “case histories” that are “well chosen.” It “is a book for…those who have learnt recently that people may be turned out of their homes for no reason at all” (Spalding 186). *The London Mercury* compliments Benedict for avoiding “sensationalism” and for being “intrinsically true, honest and impartial” (“Review” 667).
10. There is a file of correspondence between Kathleen Nott and Rosamund Lehmann, Leonard Woolf, and John Lehmann among the Hogarth Papers, University of Reading.

11. Random House apparently has a contract, but its representative would only provide the information that Benedict’s London address no longer exists. According to the World Catalogue, the Hogarth Press published four editions in English of Benedict’s novel as well as one in German in 1938. There is a Hogarth Press mock-up or dummy of the book used by people at Charleston in the 1940s for notes and drawings (Porter 14).

12. More than one of Benedict’s short stories was reprinted in *The Best Short Stories…and the Yearbook of the American Short Story* series. With the first one, a short biography may have been printed.

13. Others are his “widow, the former Fanny Milner…and a brother, M. Borasha Goldberg. Another brother, Abram Goldberg, who died in 1933, was editor of the Warsaw Hajnt” (“MEYER” 23).

14. Waldo Frank (1889–1967) was an American novelist and social critic. By the time Benedict heard him lecture in 1931, he had published about ten books, both novels and cultural studies.

15. Initially Benedict may have thought of plays as her genre. In 1932 she copyrighted a three-act comedy called *One Night in Yellowstone*. I have found no evidence that it was ever performed.

16. For a full biography, one might be able to document Benedict’s travels through trans-Atlantic ships’ passenger records.

17. In 1922 the League of Nations gave Britain control over Palestine, and in the 1930s a quarter of a million Jews settled there. Reflected in Benedict’s story are British restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine. The British withdrew after World War II. The State of Israel was founded in 1948.

18. *Time and Tide* bridged “high and middlebrow divides” (Sullivan 171). Lady Rhondda was Margaret Haig Thomas Mackworth Viscountess Rhondda. The Hogarth Press had published her *Leisured Women* in 1928, and *Time and Tide* published short excerpts of A Room of One’s Own in 1929. *Time and Tide*’s address in 1937 was 32 Bloomsbury St, London WC1.

19. Another story on male-female relationships, this one in *The London Mercury*, is “The Day of Triumph.”

20. Benedict continued to write short fiction. Also in 1938, a story called “While Millionaires are Made” appeared in *The London Mercury*.

21. The Reichstag was the lower house of Parliament of the Weimar Republic (1919–1933).

22. The Social Democrats, a Marxist political party in Germany, was formed in 1875 by combining two workers’ groups. The Communist Party in Germany, following Marx and others in advocating the ownership of all property and means of production by the community as a whole, was part of an international movement. The National Socialist German Workers’ Party (or Nazis) was founded in 1919 and abolished in 1945. Hitler made it the only German political party in 1933.

23. The Hogarth Press, already in 1924, had begun to publish volumes of Freud’s papers and books as well as other International Psycho-Analytical Society publications (see L. Woolf *Downhill* 163–169).

24. The English government’s position was a mix of two opposing traditions. On the one hand, there was a history of anti-Semitism and stereotyping. On the other, there was a humanitarian desire to welcome political refugees and to combat movements like Oswald Mosley’s black shirts, a pro-Nazi element in England. For a discussion of this contradiction, see Wasserstein.

25. Laura sees Grebham’s unmarried sister Dorothy as representative of the capitalist view of women, “decorative” playthings “neither aware of the rest of the world mentally nor of herself sexually” (*Refugees* 78).

26. The regime’s secret political and intelligence sections of the police force were called the Gestapo (Geheime Staatspolizei).

27. Woolf’s emphasis on refugees from Spain is understandable given her nephew Julian Bell’s death in 1937, a result of having volunteered to drive an ambulance during the Spanish Civil War.

28. Benedict is listed as a member of a special department of the American Jewish Committee (“Reaction” 191), as Editorial Assistant and contributor to *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (“Chaplin,” Contributors list), and, by 1945, as an employee of the News and Features Bureau of the Office of War Information (“Disillusionment” 4).

29. She did the entry on Charles Spencer Chaplin, for example, for *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* and, in connection with rumors of Chaplin’s “Jewish ancestry,” thinks that he “might have avowed his Jewishness had he emerged into fame later than he did, or at a time when international circumstances gave civilized peoples new appreciation of such heritage” (“Chaplin” 113).

30. To make the point about a larger community, Benedict also wrote a description of a Jewish funeral “on the day before Yom Kippur” in Warsaw, Poland. An oddly mixed crowd following the coffin represents, not just Jews, but “the unity of the working class” in mourning for a “perpetual political prisoner” whose experience ultimately caused his suicide (“Requiem” 138).


33. In a 1937 review of *Spanish Prelude* by Jenny Ballou, for instance, she ponders with the author types of revolutions and concludes with a question. Revolutionaries “have shown that they can choose a creed and die for it if they must. The question is, must they?” ("Overtones" 10). In a review of Abraham Moses Klein's *Hath Not a Jew* in 1940, Benedict notes that “such writing touches eternal verities, and is far from the Jewish apologetics which can be understood only by Jews, or are too superficial to be of any value to Gentiles. It is worth a thousand confessions and analyses” (quoted in Popham, ed., 76).

34. Whittier-Ferguson refers to a reviewer’s “furious response” but doesn’t mention Benedict's name (418).

**Works Cited**


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### Lyn Lifshin

**Sleeping with Horses**

though I never have, I dream

of such warm flanks,

pulse of blood deep
enough to blur night
terror. I want my own
mare, sleek, night
colored to block
memories of the
orchard of bones,
the loved-lost under,
leaves, under a quilt
of guilt. I think of
cats, long slept with
then gone, how
the Egyptians buried
not only wives but
their favorite pets
near them to cushion
their trip to the
underworld. I want
this mare, velvety
as the dream mare’s
nose, nuzzling my
skin in the black
that braids us into
one so I won’t
move unless she does