still talking,” she tells Louis, in a sort of affirmation. “For as long as we can. For as long as it lasts” (178–9). So the friends continue their storytelling, sharing that most beautiful and fundamental of human needs as long as they can, keeping the darkness at bay, if only for a little while longer, with the beautiful light of story.

Much as Haruf himself had done at the end of his own life through the telling of this extraordinary, and simple, tale.

WOOLF’S EARLY DIARIES


Reviewed by Elisa K. Sparks, Clemson University

V irginia Woolf seems to be having something of a cultural moment. Since December, 2014, no less than five treatments of her life, in varying degrees of fictionality, have been published: Priya Parmar’s invented journal in the form of a novel of Woolf’s supposedly put-upon artist sister: *Vanessa and Her Sister*; Norah Vincent’s psychologically lyrical but somewhat overwrought *Adeline: A Novel of Virginia Woolf*; the English translation of Viviane Forrester’s provocative French study *Virginia Woolf: A Portrait*; Maggie Gee’s exuberant and hilarious fantasy *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan*; and Amy Licence’s somewhat popularized *Living in Squares, Loving in Triangles: The Lives and Loves of Virginia Woolf & the Bloomsbury Group*. Immediately adapted into a BBC docudrama, *Living in Squares*, at the time of this writing, is currently playing in the UK and eagerly anticipated by American Woolfians who have been agonizing over whether it is possible to get British DVDs to play on American machines.

Published just before this wave of more-or-less creative non-fiction, Barbara Lounsberry’s academic study *Becoming Virginia Woolf: Her Early Diaries and the Diaries She Read* provides a welcome platform of reality from which to view the tsunami of these imagined lives of Virginia Woolf, allowing us to analyze Woolf’s own creation of herself in the succession of twelve diaries she literally made (she was a skilled though amateur bookbinder) and wrote in from the age of fifteen in 1897 to the age of thirty-six in 1918. The first seven of these have been published in chronological order in *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals 1897–1909*, edited by Mitchell A. Leaska. An eighth volume was uncovered in 2002 and is available under the title *Carlyle’s House and Other Sketches*, edited by David Bradshaw. And the last four diaries are included at the beginning of the massive six-volume collection of Woolf’s later diaries, edited by Anne Olivier Bell, assisted by Andrew McNeillie. In addition to detailing the form and content of these primary works, Lounsberry also carefully discusses the possible influences and affiliations the developing writer felt with fifteen key diaries she read (and often wrote about) before 1918.

Lounsberry’s book is quite systematically organized with most chapters beginning and ending with descriptions of Woolf’s individual diaries, bookending accounts of diaries Virginia was reading at the time. One of the greatest strengths of this treatment of
these early diaries is the presentation of them as separate books, each with its own material, as well as the aesthetic unity Lounsberry provides. Under Lounsberry’s careful close reading, each diary emerges as an aesthetically coherent collection of pieces, in which Virginia Stephen experiments (as in her later novels) with new formats and goals, while exploring familiar thematic juxtapositions such as country vs. city, masculine vs. feminine, cultural vs. natural. Particularly useful are Lounsberry’s early identifications of what will later become major themes in Woolf’s work: a concern with gate-keepers and boundaries, the importance of walking and of solitude in untrammeled spaces such as the downs or moors, her continued identification of and with feminine tradition and attitude, and her gradual appreciation and incorporation of unconscious as well as conscious thought and influences. In addition, Lounsberry’s careful attention to the way entries reiterate and mirror each other casts an important light on Woolf’s early awareness of structural form in writing.

A small, brown-leather daily record book with a key, the form of the first diary limits the musings of the fifteen-year-old Virginia to what can fit into the allocated space but nonetheless records her reaction against the tyranny of social rituals leading inevitably to the marriage plot. Pasted page-by-page into a handsomely bound tome on logic two years later, the next diary tries out new pens and inks and calligraphic styles and experiments with nature writing and parodies of newspaper reporting. Beginning to use her diaries to write set pieces, in the next three volumes she tests her skills as a portraitist and essayist and records her first forays into publication. A 1905 Cornwall diary, bound with blue instead of gray boards, commemorates the haunted enchantment of a trip back to St. Ives and is followed by two more travel diaries that record numerous trips around Great Britain as well as continental explorations of Greece, Turkey, and Italy. In 1909, Virginia returns to writing set pieces, this time using place to define character and intensifying her study of various female types. After a five-year break, she begins again, writing diaries which more completely integrate her interests in description, portraiture, and current events. For a while she keeps her country and city musings separate in the tiny burgundy notebook kept at her Sussex home of Asham and in the large blue-lined notebook for Hogarth House in suburban Richmond, but by 1918, she has fused her interests in country and city, portrait and description, event and idea into one flexible and capacious form.

Lounsberry’s focus on Woolf’s reading of diaries is equally detailed, analytical, and useful. Arguing that Sir Walter Scott and Fanny Burney are parental memoir mentors for the young Virginia, Lounsberry makes clear that the diaries and memoirs Virginia read were laced together by ties of influence, historical and social commonalities, and similar thematic concerns. Many of the diarists refer back to the common great ancestors of Scott, Burney, Pepys, and Boswell—all of whom Virginia had read by the age of twenty. Between 1908 and 1915, Virginia Stephen read three regency diaries—by Elizabeth Lady Holland, Charlotte Bury, and Mary Seaton Berry—providing her with a number of different perspectives on the circle surrounding Princess (later Queen) Caroline. She also read memoirs such as those by William Allingham and Lady Dorothy Nevill who had known her family, including the Freshwater circle of Tennyson, Julia Cameron, Ellen Terry, and G. F. Watts. A number of diaries she read provided her with models of unconventional courageous women such as Lady Hester Stanhope and Mary Coleridge who, having lost their mothers or suffered other early traumas, managed to educate themselves and earn
at least a modicum of social recognition. Diaries by men such as William Johnson Cory showed her the mixed privilege of British male public school and Cambridge life.

Lounsberry’s book also does an excellent job of incorporating and evaluating previous criticism on the diaries, showing a kind of measured judgment and reliance on evidence that often offers a helpful corrective to one’s use of the diaries to support ancillary, especially psychoanalytic, arguments. There are moments when even the Noble Homer nods: at times we learn perhaps more than we were interested in knowing about the details of Fanny Burney’s life or those of the misogynistic de Goncourt brothers; a few of Lounsberry’s tracings of influence are perhaps overeager and a tad tendentious (Did Woolf really get the habit of using ampersands from Sir Walter Scott?). But in general her study provides very useful insights into the evolution of Virginia Woolf’s fictional work. For example, the account of the diary Virginia wrote while staying at Blo’ Norton, a moated manor house in Norfolk, does a good deal to illuminate her early short story “The Journal of Miss Joan Martyn.” And Lounsberry also turns up a number of intriguing possible sources such as Carlyle’s affection for the lines from Cymbeline quoted in Mrs. Dalloway; the influence of William Allingham’s diary on Freshwater; or the possibility that the large collection of omnivorous plants and the silkworm-breeding Lady Neville describes in her Notebooks make her an early model for “Miss Oremond” and may have been the inspiration for Cassandra Otway’s hobby in Night and Day.

In short, Becoming Virginia Woolf is a useful and interesting addition to Woolf scholarship. When I finished it, I found myself wishing that someone would cast an equally analytic and discerning eye on the rest of the diaries, and so was delighted to discover that Lounsberry’s next installment, Virginia Woolf’s Modernist Diaries, will be published by the University of Florida in September, 2016. I predict that that volume, too, will be a must-read for serious Woolf scholars as well as curious common readers.