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*Snapshots of Bloomsbury: The Private Lives of Virginia Woolf
and Vanessa Bell* (review)

Patricia Gately

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the antithesis of current knowledge practices. The practice of self-learning inherent in active witnessing suggests “that those of us who claim to be knowers are in fact the ones being taught” (93). This process of active witnessing requires individuals to move beyond pointing out the mistakes of others and towards a spiritualized knowledge that welcomes mystery.

Mystery, in Western society, is not a concept readily embraced. Intangible ideas, like spirituality, that accept partial understandings are often rejected by academic and social justice institutions. For that reason, Fernandes’s book is a crucial component for academic classrooms because it expands the definition of knowledge, discusses ethical practices

for knowledge production, and accentuates how knowledge can be transformative. In many ways, the process of spiritual transformation that Fernandes proposes in *Transforming Feminist Practice* represents a missing link in social justice movements by beginning with a journey of self-transformation. In this case, beginning with ourselves is not a selfish start, but a starting point that ensures the sustainability of the changes we wish to see in the world. It is only by changing ourselves that we infuse the changes we desire to see in the world into everything and everyone we come into contact with.

SALLY SAYLES-HANNON

Humm, Maggie. *Snapshots of Bloomsbury: The Private Lives of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006. 226 pp.

Critical interest in the personal lives of Virginia Woolf and her sister, the painter Vanessa Bell, has increased exponentially in the last twenty years, as scholars apply newly articulated theoretical tools to map the dynamics of their position in British modernism. As daughters of historian Sir Leslie Stephen, they were raised in a stimulating, literary middle-class environment and grew into maturity and financial independence just before the Great War when their prospects for personal and creative freedom seemed limitless. They would go on to contribute significantly to modernist aesthetics while also brilliantly defining and undermining the role gender played in family, education, politics, and art. Yet Virginia would infamously claim in “A Room of One’s Own” that between

the vote and five hundred pounds a year, the latter was far more important, and the freethinking Vanessa would retreat for half her lifetime to the domestic sanctuary she created for herself and her blended family at Charleston Farmhouse in rural Sussex. Their modernity was decidedly of their own fashioning. Maggie Humm’s book asks what their use of amateur and domestic photography reveals about how they shaped their identities and aesthetic visions. By approaching Woolf’s and Bell’s photo albums as vehicles and means of identity construction, she dismantles the conception of albums as insignificant domestic (feminine) productions and shows how the albums “reveal two visually creative women articulating aesthetic, familial and fraternal experiences in a range of media” (4) as they illustrate, construct, and assess their own history.

The book is organized in three parts: an expository and critical history exploring Bloomsbury’s relation to photography

chronologically; a second, and the largest part of the book, reproducing Bell's and Woolf's albums and other photos; and a third brief section cataloguing Woolf's albums and photographs. In the expository chapters, Humm first describes the sisters' familiarity with cameras. The Stephen family participated in the popular response to the marketing of cameras at the turn of the century; the many siblings all had cameras, critiquing each others' shots "as if sharing a family drama of competing, performed identities" (5). The sisters' maintenance of a visual record of family and friends was thus a life-long and conscious one. Unlike today's amateur photographers, they needed to master the art's technologies of light, exposure time, and composition; and they developed the pictures themselves, a learned skill demanding time, attention, and patience. Humm also reminds readers of the "visual inheritance" (3) of their aunt, famed photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, whose portraits lined the hall of the grown children's first Bloomsbury home.

Having established the sisters' careful and conscious creation of a visual record, Humm takes an increasingly theoretical approach to the analysis of the composition of the photographs and their arrangement in albums, reflecting on them as "technologies of memory" (11). Establishing that photographs are historical moments framed by circumstances of time and place, and thus as reflective of cultural assumptions as a novel or painting, Humm then develops approaches to interpret and analyze them and their arrangement in albums as evidence of qualities of modernity as well as biography. For example, Humm interprets Bell's many pictures of her children naked—pictures

that invite speculation about maternity and about eroticism—as the artist's unfixing of the erotic by "revealing the domestic innocence of childhood as well as its sensuality," as the children collude with Bell as photographer, looking directly into the camera "suggesting a reciprocity of pleasure" (21). Woolf's love of mock biography is echoed in the pictures of her niece Angelica dressed as Orlando. The sisters' habit of double portraiture, pairing husband and wife and friends, suggests a dialogic practice of staged encounters, in which the space between, for example in the familiar double portrait of former lovers Duncan Grant and John Maynard Keynes, invites reflection on the past and present. Humm also links the composition of photographs to paintings, for example, in Matisse-inspired pictures of Vanessa and friend Molly McCarthy dancing that echo Bell and Grant's later work, and to a personal iconography, most notably in Bell's frequent use of an armchair in her portraits as denoting a sense of loss originating in the sisters' favorite portrait of their parents. The repetition in composition and subject in Bell's albums reveals that "repetition is not a simple act but indicates how loath Bell was to discard images; it is also important as a doubled act of remembrance" (10), since memory, according to Martha Langford, "is figured and absorbed through repetition." The large number of repeated group and individual portraits taken in the 1930s reflects the sisters' desire to stabilize their personal history as a way of resisting social and cultural changes of the era. At this time, indeed, Woolf despaired at the deaths of so many friends, and Humm convincingly argues that sitting for photos and photographing others provided a way of resisting and defying death.

Though her language is obscure at times, Humm's argument is that photographers' composition and framing of chosen subjects not only reveals what interested them, but leaves us with "technologies [photos] through which we can construct and situate a Bloomsbury past" (11). It is curious that after such effort to argue for the aesthetic integrity of the photos and albums and to construct interpretive contexts in which to place them, Humm includes passages from Bloomsbury diaries, letters, and journals following identifying information. Although they create access, these passages also seem irreverent, like a quaint voice-over or collage, as

though Humm couldn't help participating in the lives she has so carefully examined. Still, Humm has contributed a surprising interdisciplinary approach to material that could easily pass as peripheral to scholarship, curious only to devotees. This would be a very interesting source to present to students for what it teaches about interpretive strategies, for how it challenges students to reevaluate what deserves critical inquiry, and for the way in which it provides an empowering stimulus to frame and create their own histories through any medium.

PATRICIA GATELY