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Rejoinder
To Review by J. H. Stape, 55.3 (2012), 409–16.

TRANSPARENCY AND MAPPING are the guiding principles of the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Virginia Woolf which, as we make clear in our General Editorial Preface, puts before its readers a thorough account of the states of each text by mapping out published and extant proof variants from the first British edition (normally) as copy text, with minimal interference on the page where possible, and with no silent emendation. In annotation we aim to be more thorough than in any previous edition, with regard to historical, factual, cultural and literary allusions, in long overdue homage to the remarkable density and breadth of reference in Woolf’s work. We would emphasise the open-endedness of all such annotation, and we have conceived ours in dialogue with the work of past and present readers and scholars of Woolf, with the hope of enabling and continuing the dialogues of the future. In our role as editors, general and volume specific, then, we conceive of ourselves as readers in need of access to a transparent record of textual process, and to a conscientious engagement with the richly allusive texture of Woolf’s modernist prose, rather than as readers who arrive at interpretative conclusions or indeed as authorities who know better than our fellow readers or than Woolf herself.

We have no intention of imposing on our readers the kind of “firm” editorial “guidance” and “authority” that J. H. Stape finds lacking in the first two volumes of our edition, The Waves and Between the Acts, if what is meant by these terms is the sort of confusing and obscurantist guidance behind the Shakespeare Head edition of Woolf which he himself helped to shape, and which he modestly does not mention in his review. (The disappointment with this venture as a missed opportunity, felt by many Woolf scholars, was explained and expressed most forcefully by Julia Briggs in the Woolf Studies Annual some time ago.) Given the very different editorial principles and priorities of that edition, it is hardly surprising that Stape is baffled by ours. Our edition
is simply not interested in establishing or betting on, as he has it, one winning version of the text out of the available “contenders” (for the Shakespeare Head edition it has usually been discovered in the American proofs), but rather we want to do fellow Woolf readers and scholars the service of giving open and clear access to all extant versions without imposing a confected version of little use to anyone. Our decision to take as copy text the first British edition is therefore not argued by us in the arcane terms and rationale that Stape seeks but according to our clearly stated principle of mapping out from this all other extant versions in a standard and straightforward textual apparatus. It is an index of the bizarre mindset of his school of textual editing that he finds our method to be based on “supposition” rather than “hard facts” when we prefer actually to give our readers the hard facts without muddying them with the sort of speculation and unhelpful expert intervention advocated by Stape. He rightly points to Cambridge University Press’s “extensive history of offering reliable critical editions of both modern and earlier writers.” Certainly, all the materials for considering rival options for Woolf’s writings are reliably made available right there in our edition itself.

We would also wish to assure readers of Stape’s misleading review that the Woolf edition, in forging our editorial principles, has indeed drawn from the great reserve of editorial expertise at the press. Indeed one of our editors of The Waves is Michael Herbert, a seasoned editor of D. H. Lawrence for Cambridge University Press. We also draw on the expertise of our esteemed board of advisors, a team of leading scholars and editors of Woolf including Gillian Beer, Rachel Bowlby, and Stuart Clarke. In the several years devoted to preparing the edition we also presented our work at a number of international conferences on textual editing (not least under the auspices of the late Julia Briggs and Peter Shillingsburg), including one entirely devoted to editing Woolf, and such dialogue with textual scholars, modernist scholars and Woolf scholars continues.

Having invoked Cambridge University Press’s distinguished record, it is odd that Stape criticizes us for following standard Cambridge University Press practice in presenting substantives and accidentals “together in a single list,” a long established and uncontroversial, clear and unintrusive method. Actually, the Cambridge University Press Conrad edition, which Stape himself works on (although he does not mention this in his review) is an anomaly: the accidentals appear in
the main list when part of substantive variants, but also get a separate list of emended accidentals within the apparatus.

We regret that Stape’s review of the first two volumes of our Woolf edition devotes so much energy to misrepresenting our clearly argued rationale that he neglects to inform his readers of, amongst many things, the most significant achievement of Mark Hussey’s edition of Between the Acts which, because of its unique status among her novels as a posthumous publication, departs from our normal practice of taking the first British edition as copy text. Hussey’s carefully reasoned decision largely to ignore Leonard Woolf’s holograph interventions has meant that for the first time readers of Between the Acts may read the novel as Virginia Woolf herself left it—without huge sections of the text (the pageant scenes) being rendered in italics. But that, we suppose, is a matter for Woolf scholars to take up and will not be of interest to an editor of a rival edition.

We also regret the many disabling preconceptions that Stape brings to his impoverished reading of Woolf—for example that she “was no punster,” and that if she were capable of punning she would only do so according to her expectations of “contemporary readers.” In fact, as most readers of Woolf discover, she was an arch punster, not only capable of punning across languages as in the case of her novel, Orlando: A Biography, the subtitle of which puns on the first name of its dedicatee, Woolf’s lover, Vita Sackville-West, but also of giving insight into the psychotic dimensions of punning as when Septimus Smith, in Mrs. Dalloway, sneeringly puns on the deep unheimlich of his doctor’s name as he is being urged to enter “One of Holmes’s homes?”.

It may seem a little peevish to point out that he is also mistaken in thinking the International Virginia Woolf Society itself organizes the annual international conferences now in their twenty-second year (it does not), but such a misapprehension is indicative of his own aloofness from the broad community of Woolf scholars that our edition has evolved to serve amongst others. Stape is also mistaken in thinking The Waves to be one Woolf’s “last two novels.” In fact The Years is her penultimate novel, and, edited by the distinguished Woolf scholar, Anna Snaith, will be the next volume to appear in our Cambridge University Press edition.

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Cambridge Edition of the Works of Virginia Woolf