In sum, anybody who wishes to gain insights into Hardy the man and Hardy the writer will find throughout this book readily accessible keys to the Kingdom of Thomas Hardy, an intriguing territory on the literary map. I predict a long shelf life for *The Ashgate Research Companion*, and that is no small accolade in these times of books being published and perishing within what seem like breathtakingly brief spans.

**BENJAMIN F. FISHER**
Emeritus, University of Mississippi

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**Woolf & the Art of the Essay**


EVERY COUPLE OF YEARS, I teach an upper-level writing course, mostly for English majors, entitled “The Art of the Essay.” Focused on the historical development of the familiar (or personal) essay, the class introduces students to a more complex definition of this type of essay than straightforward narration of particular experiences in their lives, a definition nearly every student has encountered in his or her academic career. Articulating to students that the familiar essay can be more than straightforward narration, and getting them to adopt a wider range of strategies in their own personal essays, is the greatest challenge in teaching this course. There are many helpful textbooks that present these ideas in accessible language (I use Philip Lopate’s *The Art of the Personal Essay* and Sheila Bender’s *Writing and Publishing Personal Essays*), but these cannot replace monographs by specialists, whose work also informs my own thinking about the subject as I teach the course.

*Virginia Woolf’s Essayism* is a welcome addition to this store of information, since it uses Woolf to highlight some of the key issues regarding how we define the familiar essay (and since Woolf is one of the essayists I always teach in my class). Saloman’s main argument—that Woolf used the essay to “solve artistic problems” and explore the “deepest questions about herself as a writer, and about the writing process”—directly addresses how the essay is a unique form, unlike other genres in its ability to create a dialogue between author and reader, one of the key points stressed in Lopate’s anthology. Specifically, Saloman argues that the essay is unlike the novel in its ability to “work without an attention-grabbing plot or a clear, linear narrative, trusting in the random acts of life, together with the essayist’s ability to extract
thought and meaning, to create order.” According to Saloman, the essay can be distinguished from the novel by its ability to “make connections and engage its readers,” whereas the novel takes away the authority of the reader by adopting a more controlling narrator. With the novel, the reader’s role is to “interpret and reflect” on characters rather than “participate or contribute” to the narrative by filling in the gaps left by the narrator, as the reader must do when reading an essay.

Certainly, there are objections one can make to Saloman’s rigid definition of the novel, and it is surprising that Saloman does not address Mikhail Bakhtin’s argument about the “heteroglossic” nature of the novel anywhere in her book, though she does refer to Bakhtin’s work on speech genres in her concluding chapter. Still, if readers can overlook this and accept that Saloman has important ideas about the unique qualities of the essay, the arguments in the chapters of her book are very informative. Chapter one lays out the foundation for comparing and contrasting Woolf’s essays and novels by focusing on one of Woolf’s best-known (and frequently taught) essays, “Street Haunting,” and its fictional counterpart, Mrs. Dalloway. Saloman places her analysis of the two works within the context of the development of the novel, and she shows how the essayistic qualities found in “Street Haunting” can be seen in Mrs. Dalloway as well. Although I do not find every claim Saloman makes about Mrs. Dalloway convincing (for example, that readers of Mrs. Dalloway are “never allowed to abandon a passive position and engage dialectically with the book, as one might an essay”), I appreciate her analysis of “Street Haunting,” in which she provides new insight on the figure of the shoe-buying dwarf in the essay, a figure students frequently want to discuss in my class.

Chapter two brings attention to the specific qualities of the essay that make it such an engaging form for the reader, especially the relationship of trust between the essayist and the reader, with the essayist pledging to “grapple in an honest manner with whatever the issue at hand may be” and the reader “demonstrat[ing] the patience and goodwill required to help in the process, to take ownership of the essay, rather than to approach it as a passive recipient.” Using essays from Woolf’s two Common Reader collections, Saloman also analyses the “voice” adopted by the essayist to achieve this relationship with the reader; a key point, since voice turns out to be especially important to Saloman’s analysis of Woolf’s novels in the later chapters of the book. In chapter three, Saloman turns to Woolf’s “longer essay ‘manifestos,’” A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas, and shows how specific types
of readers are empowered by these manifestos. Readers are empowered not because Woolf sets out to prove a particular point about gender or war (the main topics in these essays), but because she uses the inherent qualities of the essay to encourage “speculation” on the part of readers. For example, in *A Room of One’s Own*, the undergraduate women who make up Woolf’s immediate audience can see the “process of self-realisation” they might adopt, even as they recognize that the conditions of their lives are distinctly different from Woolf’s. Particularly interesting to me in this chapter is Saloman’s discussion of real readers who recognized their difference from Woolf, including Kathleen Raine, who wrote about Woolf’s speech to women undergraduates in her 1991 book *Autobiographies*.

Finally, chapters four and five consider Woolf’s novels; chapter four focuses on *The Voyage Out*, *Night and Day*, *Jacob’s Room*, and *To the Lighthouse*, and chapter five focuses on *The Pargiters*, the “essay-novel” that influenced *The Years*. Of the novels discussed in chapter four, Saloman argues that *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* retain the essayistic voice explained in chapter one, while *Jacob’s Room* and *To the Lighthouse* move away from this voice, using a more controlled narrator who “guides” readers to an understanding of the main characters in the novels. Much of Saloman’s analysis is meant to help us rethink how these novels have been discussed by earlier critics, who see the novels as “failures” because they do not contain the elements typically found in successful fiction. By recognizing Woolf’s use of the essayistic voice, Saloman argues, we have a better understanding of the development of Woolf’s thinking about the important roles of different genres. This issue of “failure” is particularly important in chapter five, where Saloman recovers the essay-novel *The Pargiters*, seeing it as evidence that Woolf wanted to “confront openly the division between the novel and the essay” rather than as one of Woolf’s least successful works. In both chapters, Saloman illuminates the qualities of the essay well, though I wished for more explanation of the distinction between “essayistic techniques” and “essayistic voice.” Saloman claims that Woolf’s later novels, such as *To the Lighthouse*, retain essayistic techniques while abandoning the essayistic voice, but it would be helpful to see examples of this in the short section about *To the Lighthouse*.

Overall, this is a book that becomes more interesting and more convincing over the course of its chapters, and Saloman should be commended for bringing more attention to an aspect of Woolf’s writing that is sometimes overlooked and often misunderstood. Further, for those
interested in the broader tradition of the essay and how the complexity of this genre might be better taught to undergraduates, this book will be particularly valuable. My own teaching of the genre has been enhanced by reading this book, and reading it confirms for me that Woolf’s understanding of the role of the essay was especially complex and that her work should continue to be central in my course.

MOLLY YOUNGKIN
Loyola Marymount University

Joyce’s Poetry

READING THIS BOOK is like being at a B-list cocktail party. People keep surreptitiously looking over the shoulder of the person they’re addressing—you, for example—for someone more interesting to talk to or something more interesting to talk about.

If you’re going to take Vienna, said Napoleon, take Vienna. I wish the contributors to this volume had “reconsidered the poetry of James Joyce.” Sometimes they do, sort of, but in almost every case the result turns out to be what the late Bernard Benstock derogated as a “Joyce and blank” production, with “blank” carrying the day.

To itemize. After an overlong but otherwise blameless summary by Marc C. Conner, the editor, Michael Patrick Gillespie’s “Reading Joyce’s Poetry against the Rest of the Canon” advances the argument that “rather than standing as embarrassing accoutrements to the real achievements of the fiction, the poetry complements the prose.” “Complements” turns out to be too elastic a word. Just where does this complementing occur? Joyce’s poetry is largely sentimental and his early prose, if anything, antisentimental to a fault, but on what hermeneutical field of combat or accommodation do the two meet? Gillespie thinks that Lenehan in “Two Gallants” and Mrs. Mooney in “The Boarding House” may have romantic soft spots similar to those on show in Chamber Music. I go along with him on the former, not the latter, but in neither case need Chamber Music enter the picture. Both readings would have been just as available had it never existed.

The next item, Matthew Campbell’s “The Unconsortable Joyce,” is an informed if overly discursive consideration of Joyce in relation to other poets, especially Yeats. By themselves, the sentences are often good, packed with information, but—back to that cocktail party—they