

Larsson, Lisbeth. *Walking Virginia Woolf's London: An Investigation in Literary Geography*. Translated by David Jones. San Marcos: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017 (247 pp). ISBN 9783319556727.

Lisbeth Larsson's recent eight-chapter study of Virginia Woolf's novels in light of the literary geography of London combines an extensive and detailed discussion of Woolf's novels with an original and fascinating use of Google Maps. Translating fictitious space into the actual space of real London, Larsson depicts the characters' movements on the map by means of exhaustive and clearly annotated dots and lines. Larsson examines how Woolf locates her characters in a web of London streets that, dependent on historical period, biological sex, gender and social class, afford them either opportunities and liberty or obstacles and impasse (4). In the process Larsson successfully manages to demonstrate how deeply and subtly political Woolf's fiction is. As Larsson explains, reading the novels alongside the map of London reveals the severity of Woolf's criticism of British systems of class, patriarchy, and colonialism (4).

Larsson organizes her discussion of the novels chronologically, according to their dates of publication. In her analysis of Woolf's debut novel, *The Voyage Out*, for example, Larsson distinguishes between "London" and London: the former encompasses greed, unhappy marriages, hypocrisy, prostitution, class oppositions and gender hierarchies; the latter, in turn, is a utopian place free from all these things (24-25). Larsson delineates similar kinds of contrasts at work in *Night and Day*. In that text London's parks, serve as places that liberate the characters from the norms and conventions of the city and enable them to explore alternative, free versions of themselves. In Woolf's early novels, such spaces as parks and the Embankment play a crucially formative role, allowing characters to open up to their emotions and change both inside and outside (57).

Throughout *Night and Day*, Woolf's attentiveness to the gender implications of her characters' location and movement attests to her social and anti-patriarchal commentary. Tracing the routes of the main characters on the map of London, Larsson, on the one hand, makes evident female characters' actual and metaphorical stagnation, and on the other hand, confirms the main male character's ability to free himself from social inferiority and function as the active force in the novel.

In the next chapter Larsson insightfully extends her discussion of the subtle ways of Woolf's criticism from gender to a whole range of crucial social issues. In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf uses the London map, as well as authorial voice and the bird's eye view, to show not only how small and insignificant but also how important an ordinary man can be (94). In this chapter, Larsson extensively discusses devices such as the lack of a clear-cut main character (84); fragmentation and non-traditional plot (83); mapping; and the combination of the narrative and authorial voices (84). These devices, Larsson argues, facilitate Woolf's social critique of a range

of issues: from nationalism, colonialism, and the idealization of war, to sexual hypocrisy and women's compliance with the patriarchal voices that stifle them (101).

Similarly, Larsson's subsequent discussion of *Mrs Dalloway* combines analyses of Woolf's uses of mapping and narrative voice. Larsson considers both how the lines of characters' movements either diverge, converge or intersect each other, and how interior monologue (116) and explicit narrative voice reveal characters' inner thoughts: their views regarding their lives, their relationships with each other, and their attitudes toward the restrictions imposed on and the possibilities open to them (127-130).

It is perhaps fitting that in her next chapter Larsson simultaneously widens her view and condenses her readings in order to consider four novels: *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando*, *The Waves* and *Flush*. This chapter is also the only one not to include Google Maps. These shifts in approach coincide with Larsson's examination of Woolf's critique of the categories of time, space, biological sex and gender as extremely restrictive for character formation. Here, Larsson considers Woolf's exploration of these categories: her highlighting of their fluidity and ambiguity; her awareness of and concern with their liberating and restrictive capacities.

In the final two chapters, Larsson elaborates on the twist that she perceives in Woolf's conceptualization of the city and its impact on her characters. In her reading of *The Years*, Larsson delineates a London transmuted. In Woolf's earlier novels, London, especially with its centre, streets and parks, offered characters a degree of physical and psychological freedom, as well as possibilities for personal development. In *The Years*, London proffers only a bleak reality. The noise and the bustle of its streets have gradually become louder, with disastrous repercussions for human communication and relationships (171). Despite the fact that in this novel the characters move across a larger area of London (an area that covers the city centre and increasingly spreads out towards London's periphery) than do their counterparts in the rest of Woolf's fiction, their movements are interrupted and confused (175). For Larsson, Woolf's depiction of London here facilitates a highly political, anti-patriarchal and anti-imperialist discourse (172). Woolf sustains this view of a dismal city in her last novel, *Between the Acts*. In what Larsson describes as "the exhaustion of London mapping" (230), all the values that Woolf links to London in her previous writing, (that is, modernity, the potential for social change, humanity, and the liberation of women), collapse and give way to male aggression, money, avarice and power (230).

In conclusion, Larsson's innovative reading of Woolf's novels alongside the Google Maps of London and her insightful discussion of time, space, place, biological sex, gender, class, colonialism and the ways that all these are intertwined make *Walking Virginia Woolf's London* an engaging and worthwhile study. Its language is rich yet accessible, thanks to David Jones' excellent translation from the original Swedish, and the eight chapters are nicely and coherently linked. Larsson's attention to literary-historical context also makes this book a suitable introduction to Woolf studies. In short, *Walking Virginia Woolf's London* offers a detailed and well-informed argument that incorporates a broad bibliography; delves into key literary and social issues; makes an original and very interesting use of Google Maps; and offers insightful interpretations of Woolf's novels. The book will undoubtedly prove useful to Woolf specialists, as

well as numerous scholars in such fields as modernism, geocriticism, and spatial literary studies, among others.

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