Are Too Many Books Written and Published?

LEONARD WOOLF AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

INTRODUCTION BY MELBA CUDDY-KEANE

Introduction

IN JULY 1927, VIRGINIA WOOLF PARTICIPATED IN THE FIRST OF THREE BROADCASTS SHE PRESENTED ON THE BBC.[1] "ARE TOO MANY BOOKS Written and Published?" was a collaborative project, scripted jointly with her husband, Leonard Woolf, in the typical BBC format of the conversational debate. Virginia was not entirely comfortable in front of a radio microphone, feeling as she did the constrictions of prescribed time limits, the BBC's conventional respectability, and even the sound of her own voice. Yet she engaged in this program with a liveliness, a good humor, and an inventiveness that display her public persona at its best.

Although avoiding politically contentious issues, BBC talk programs of the time welcomed controversy over cultural matters, and this debate—in which Leonard undertook the role of answering the titular question with a "yes" and Virginia, with a "no"—was designed to arouse the public's interest in radical transformations affecting the production of books. The rise of mass publishing brought troubling concerns about the relation between economics and quality: Did large-scale mechanization of production imply the demise of book making as a craft, the loss of serious writing as a viable profession, and the disappearance of the small highbrow press? Would mass marketing exacerbate the perceived decline in reading standards; would radio and cinema ultimately replace books? These are fundamental questions in print history, and in 1927, they were very much in (and on) the air.

In February and May, a series of articles in the *Nation and Athenaeum*, subsequently published by the Hogarth Press as *Books and the Public* (1927 [Henderson et al.]), focused on the comparatively low level of book buying in England and the ominous implications for the survival of the small press.[2] In October, the regular issue of the *Times Literary Supplement* was accompanied by a special number on printing, which analyzed the prospects for achieving quality and beauty in low-cost books (*Printing Number*). On the Saturday following the Woolfs' broadcast, the *New Statesman* ran an article on the recent

Leonard Woolf and Virginia Woolf's broadcast and an excerpt from Leonard Woolf's letter to Lance Sieveking are printed by permission of the Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of Leonard Woolf and the Estate of Virginia Woolf.

MELBA CUDDY-KEANE is professor of English and a member of the Collaborative Program in Book History and Print Culture at the University of Toronto. She has published widely on modernism, narrative, and cultural history and is the author of *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge UP, 2003). Her current book project is on modernism and the educated global imagination.

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Board of Education report on public libraries (also known as the Kenyon Report) and its numerous recommendations for improving and extending the public library system (Cole);[3] the following week the *Spectator* covered the annual conference of the Associated Booksellers of Great Britain and Ireland, held the weekend before. Situated in the midst of such high-profile attention to books and reading, the broadcast was well timed, and the Woolfs, as publishers and prolific reviewers of books, were ideally suited to address the issues involved.

The Woolfs were invited to broadcast by Lance Sieveking,[4] probably in early May 1927,[5] and Leonard responded in a letter dated 25 May, proposing three possible topics: "(1) Are too many books written and published? (2) Old books or new? (3) Is English literature in a bad way?" (Letter to Lance Sieveking). Sieveking chose the first title, writing back on 30 May, asking Leonard to "draft a manuscript in the form of a conversation between Mrs. Woolf and yourself."[6] Despite the conversational format, radio talk shows at the time were not informal, spontaneous productions. The normal procedure was for invited participants to begin with an unscripted dry run in the studio, from which a stenographer would generate a typescript, and for the participants then to read from an edited script for the live broadcast (Whitehead 125; Scannell and Cardiff 162–63, 167). That the Woolfs were invited both to propose topics and to prepare their own script indicates a large measure of trust and respect.

The pages now preserved in the BBC Written Archives Centre offer a striking example of what can be gleaned from material evidence.[7] The original script appears to have been produced by a single typist on one typewriter, one identical to the typewriter used by Leonard in his reply to Sieveking and distinctly different from the typewriters at the BBC. Yet the parts seem to have been typed at different times: only Virginia's pages are numbered, although their spaced numbers (2, 4, 6, 8, 10–11) leave gaps for the insertion of Leonard's pages. Leonard's text is furthermore on light paper and is a ribbon copy; Virginia's is on heavier, chained paper and, with the exception of one page, is evidently a carbon. The few handwritten changes on Leonard's part, in black ink, appear to be in Lance Sieveking's handwriting;[8] furthermore, the inkblots on the verso of Virginia's page 8 correspond exactly to the handwritten additions on the unnumbered page 9 of Leonard's part, suggesting that these revisions were made by Sieveking as he read consecutively through the script as a whole.[9] The more extensive written revisions on Virginia's part are in her hand and in her characteristic purple,[10] except for the word "read" on page 8, which appears to have been written—although also in purple ink—by Sieveking. Most of Virginia's hand corrections have also been typed in, usually over her handwritten words, and several of these entries, most notably the final eight words on page 2 and the entirety of page 11, testify to a different typewriter and a different typist. These sections are ribbon—not carbon—copy, and the bottom portion of the type shows the red imprint of the bottom half of the typewriter's dual color ribbon. Page 11 also displays a characteristic feature of Virginia's typing—the slight elevation of the initial capital on many of the words.[11] Finally, a consistent pattern of puncture holes in the top right-hand and left-hand corners implies that the script was collated and taken apart more than once, but on one of these occasions without page 11.[12]

A reasonable supposition as to the process of composition is as follows. Working together, Leonard and Virginia composed the basic script, each devising his or her own part. Leonard typed his part first (according to Virginia, he could compose at the typewriter, while she could not),[13] then typed up Virginia's and, collating his original and her carbon, gave the full script to Sieveking to review. After Sieveking read it and made a few editorial changes, the script was divided back into two parts and Virginia again worked on hers, typing the revisions over the hand corrections and typing a new page 11. At some later point, the parts were reassembled and stapled together once more. The evidence suggests an intricately collaborative work; editorial intervention, however, was minimal, whereas Virginia expended considerable effort revising her part.

Given the staged nature of the broadcast, we should be wary of assuming that its arguments

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transparently represent each speaker's views. The parts do reflect the Woolfs' characteristic styles and interests, but the dialogue is clearly orchestrated to foreground differences and disagreement as a way of stimulating debate.[14] Leonard, solidly in the role as manager of the Hogarth Press, focuses on practical matters of production: labor issues, market competition, and the bottom line. Virginia, as the author of *The Common Reader* (1925), puts her emphasis on the expanding opportunities for writers and readers. The fundamental contest, however, is between pessimistic and optimistic views: Leonard decries the devolution of book making into a factory system, whereas Virginia envisions publishing as a thriving cultural industry with a potentially inclusive and democratic reach. Humorously shifting metaphors from factory to fishing, gambling, eating, and finally to organic waste, she welcomes proliferation and even embraces expendability and obsolescence with an extraordinary scheme for disposable books. In a hyperbolic spoof that nevertheless anticipates the advantages of electronic books,[15] Virginia's proposal firmly locates the value of a book in its use, not its iconic status.[16]

The Woolfs' conversation is not dialectic, since the conflict does not lead to a synthesis; a response typically begins with some limited concession to the other's argument, followed by further development or enhancement of the speaker's own view. The speakers ultimately agree that nothing can stop the proliferation of written materials, and both strongly endorse the importance of reading. Yet they maintain the polarized balance of gloom versus hope. In a script of roughly 2,800 words, the parts are remarkably equivalent, at just over 1,400 words each.[17] While Leonard, it is true, has the last word, Virginia's words—with their humor, wit, and far-reaching vision—have possibly the more lasting ring.

Overall, the broadcast offers further insight into the principles informing the Hogarth Press, helping to dispel the old, lingering assumption that modernist intellectuals were culturally aloof: the Woolfs are neither elitist in approach nor detached from the practical, material problems of everyday life. Virginia's contribution shows that modernists did not necessarily assume a uniform mass *culture* to be the inevitable effect of mass *media*, emphasizing instead the advantages of making books more accessible, the productive continuities between popular and "serious" reading, and the possibilities for an expanded, fully democratic participation in the writing and reading of books. Leonard's words remind us of the precariousness of the life of the small publisher and—the ultimate success of the Hogarth Press not being foreknown—the uncertainties and anxieties that were experienced along the way.[18] But what finally may be most impressive about the broadcast is the way the Woolfs succeed in being both topical and accessible, putting intellectual matters before a broad public audience in an entertaining and thought-provoking way.

Notes

I am deeply indebted to the Society of Authors for permission to edit and publish Leonard and Virginia Woolf's BBC broadcast "Are Too Many Books Written and Published?" and permission to quote from Leonard's letter to Lance Sieveking. I would also like to thank the BBC Written Archives Centre for permission to quote from Lance Sieveking's letter to Leonard Woolf; Deputy Written Archivist James Codd for facilitating my work there; and Dorothy Sheridan, head of Special Collections, and the staff at the University of Sussex Library for their generous assistance. Finally, I would like to express my continuing gratitude to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a grant that enabled this research.

1. The other two broadcasts were "Beau Brummell," 20 Nov. 1929, and "Craftsmanship," 29 Apr. 1937.

2. For further discussion of the economic circumstances of publishers at the time, see "Reading, Economics, and the Highbrow Press" in Cuddy-Keane 62–64.

3. The report argued in particular for a central public lending library, to address the limited resources of local libraries' collections. In the broadcast, Virginia Woolf adopts a similar strategy but at a local, personal level, proposing a neighborhood sharing of books. I thank Rosie Creer, editorial assistant for the *New Statesman*, for identifying G. D. H. Cole as the author of "The Public Library."

4. Lancelot de Giberne Sieveking was a significant pioneer in radio drama and radiophonic effects, but in 1926 he had special responsibilities for topical talks. In January 1927, Hilda Matheson was given overall charge of the Talks department under Programmes, but Sieveking's letter, with his signature over the simple designator

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"Programmes," implies he is writing on his own authority. See Briggs, *Birth* 254 and *Golden Age* 124 and the organizational charts in the appendixes to both volumes.

5. Virginia Woolf refers twice to this broadcast in her letters to Vita Sackville-West, on 9 May and on 15 July 1927 (*Letters* 3: 373, 397). Her joking comments—particularly about the temptation to utter, on air, a remark about Vita's sex life—convey both her attitude to BBC respectability and her flirtatious sparring with Vita. Given the date of first mention, Sieveking's invitation to broadcast might well have been prompted by the publication of *To the Lighthouse* on May 5. (For Virginia's threatened remark, see the unexpurgated version of the letter reproduced on microfilm [Letter to Vita Sackville-West].)

6. Letter to Leonard Woolf. Correspondence relating to this broadcast is in the Leonard Woolf Papers, at the University of Sussex.

7. The typescript is housed in the BBC Written Archives Centre, although in printing it here, I have restored the order of the pages to their original sequence. The broadcast has not been unknown: a reference to it appears in B. J. Kirkpatrick and Stuart Clarke's *Bibliography*, under the entry for the publication of "Beau Brummell" in the *Listener* (288–89), and it is briefly summarized in Kate Whitehead's "Broadcasting Bloomsbury." It languished in relative obscurity, however, until my inquiries unearthed it from the archives. A copy of the typescript has now been placed in the Leonard Woolf Papers, at the University of Sussex. A detailed forensic analysis of this script is planned as the subject of a future article.

8. I am grateful to Paul Sieveking for corroborating my analysis of his father's hand.

9. Jeff Walden at the BBC Written Archives Centre drew my attention to these spots.

10. Some words appear to have been written first in purple pencil and then overwritten in purple ink.

11. The typescript of Virginia's short story "Slater's Pins Have No Points"—the rewriting of which she mentions in a letter to Vita just before her letter about broadcasting—similarly shows the imprint of the red ribbon and the characteristic elevated initial letter. See *Letters* 3: 397 and "Slater's Pins."

12. The bottom left-hand corners of pages 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 show a brown liquid stain; it does not appear to be present on page 11.

13. See V. Woolf, *Letters* 2: 83, 339, 536.

14. The Woolfs similarly used staged opposition in their 1939 pamphlet *Reviewing*, in which Virginia's essay begins, "The purpose of this paper is to rouse discussion" (V. Woolf, "Reviewing" 204) and Leonard's note opens, "This Pamphlet raises questions" (L. Woolf, "Note").

15. According to the *Spectator*, the next day Joseph John Thompson, master of Trinity College and Nobel Prize winner in physics, entertained the Association of Booksellers by predicting that "in the future television would enable a myriad readers to sit, each by his own fireside, and read some new book as it was flashed page by page before his eyes." The booksellers, the *Spectator* went on to report, were not amused (E. G. H.).

16. For Leonard's testimony that use value was the guiding principle in the Hogarth Press, see *Downhill* 79–80.

17. Sieveking had requested a script of no more than two thousand words.

18. The sudden leap in Hogarth fortunes to a more secure financial footing did not come until the publication of *Orlando* in 1928 (L. Woolf, *Downhill* 143).

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Note on the Text

I have preserved all emendations inserted on the initial typed copy in order to convey not only the content of the final broadcast but also the work encoded in the script's production. Typographical errors are reproduced, but spacing, layout, and typography are represented in accordance with current printing practice. Angle brackets mark insertions over the original typescript. Handwritten insertions are indicated in italics. Visible but canceled words and letters are marked through with a fine line. Cancellations marked with a run of *x*'s or obscured in ink are rendered here by struck-through *x*'s. My editorial insertions, which note undecipherable text, supply missing page numbers, and add letters lost when the type ran over the edge of the carbon copy, are in square brackets. All endnotes are mine.

<15.7.27>

<BBC
WRITTEN ARCHIVES CENTRE
CAVERSHAM>[1]

ARE TOO MANY BOOKS WRITTEN & PUBLISHED?

Dialogue: Leonard Woolf
Virginia Woolf

L.W. The making of books is now a trade, or rather an industry, and in my opinion it is in an unhealthy condition—almost as bad as the mining industry. Far too many books are written and published. /[2] The making of books was a handicraft a hundred years ago when the writer wrote with pen and ink and the printer set up type by hand; now it is a large scale industry, with books dictated to shorthand writers, typed on typewriters, and set up on monotype machines. / It is one result of living in the machine age. Books used to be written by a few people who wrote because they had a gift for writing; they are now written by thousands of people who have no gift for writing but merely a mechanical knack of stringing words together on a typewriter. What happened to boots has now happened to books. Book*<t>*s used to be made in small quantities by hand; they are now made in enormous quantit~~i~~es by machinery. Just as hand-made boots fitted better and lasted longer than machine made boots, so hand-made books read better and wore better than do our machine made books.[3]

BROADCAST FROM
2LO-5XX-S.B.
Time *10.20* Date ~~*17.6*~~ *15.7.27* Initials [undeciphered][4]

2

V.W. You forget that the population has increased. Thousands of people now draw up to the table after the day's work is done and read a book or write a letter, who used, a hundred years ago, to sit in the corner spinning or lie in the armchair snoring. For my own part, I think the increase of books is all to the good. For in the 18th century only middle-class people of some education wrote books. The aristocrat thought writing beneath him and the working man thought writing above him. The consequence was that literature became the preserve

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of one special class; it reflected their tastes and it flattered their opinions. Nowadays, when so many more books are written, there ought to be a corresponding increase in the number of good books. We are casting a much wider net and we ~~are fishing a much deeper sea~~. <*should bring much bigger fish to shore.*> and should bring much bigger fish to shore.

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[3]

L.W. I dont think you can prove your point that the quality of writing has improved as well as the quantity. But, putting that aside for a moment, you cant deny that the overproduction of books has disastrous consequences from an economic point of view. Only a very few writers of books earn a living wage. A man spends six months <, say ,> on writing a novel or two years on writing a History of Timbuctoo; he will be lucky if he earns by the first as much as a miner earns in three weeks and it would be a miracle if he earned anything at all by the second. If it weren't for the vanity of writers and the optimism of publishers, there would have been a General Strike of novelists years ago. If the truth were known, a large number of writers are simply blacklegs, that is to say they are ready to take a wage which is not a living wage; indeed dozens of them are so anxious to be published that they will pay for the privilege of seeing a book with their name on the title page. This causes over production and a supply much bigger than the demand. Hence both publisher and writer make less in these days of large production than they did in the days of small production.

4

V.W. I would rather put it like this. There is a greater risk of loss, but there is also a greater chance of gain. The most famous writers of the 19th century—Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Bronte—were content with profits which would be laughed to scorn by many of our popular novelists today. Literature is far more of a lottery now than it was then. We have all known cases of people who were living in a garret one week and the next were ordering their motor-cars and building their country houses. What has happened to them in the interval? They have sold the film rights of some novel in the United States, and their fortune is made for life. On the other hand, we all know the other kind of writer—who spends his entire life writing books which nobody wants to read, is always in difficulties, never has enough to eat~~, though sometimes perhaps a little too much to drink~~, and dies at last worn out, wretched, embittered, surrounded by manuscripts which ~~are~~ <*do*> <do> not ~~worth~~ <*fetch*> <fetch> enough to pay the expenses of his funeral. The publisher, too, shares the same uncertainty. He too may go bankrupt, but he too may become a millionaire. Taking human nature as it is, I expect most people would vote for the present system, with its chance of a motor-car and its chance of a garret, rather than for the old system where writers and publishers generally made enough to live respectably <*but not splendidly*> <but not splendidly> somewhere in the suburbs.

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[5]

L.W. That may be true; but I very much doubt whether the present state of things—this enormous output of books—really makes for the good of literature. Your best-seller, indeed, has a good deal to answer for; indirectly he ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ produces a flooding of the market with a much-advertized but shoddy brand of article, to speak commercially. The writer does not write because he must, or because he wants to, like Tennyson and his linnets, but in the hope of producing a best-seller. Everyone is trying to write a book which will be enormously and immediately popular, and

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I'm quite sure that that isn't the way in which good literature is produced. The best-seller also has a bad effect upon publishers. The publisher, perhaps, rakes in a huge profit from a novel that has sold by the hundred thousand. Out of the proceeds he is tempted to finance several~~x~~other books <of inferior merit> on the chance that they too may prove to be best-sellers. But nothing is more difficult than to spot a best-seller before publication; it is much easier to spot the winner of the Derby. Our publisher probably finds that his speculation has turned out badly; his new books are not best-sellers and the only result of his gamble is that he has lost a good deal of money and lowered the standard ~~of~~*s* all round. Even that isn't the end of the story. The mere existence of so many inferior books makes it more and more difficult for the ~~few~~ <*few*> first-rate books<*s*> to get a hearing. They are lost in the crowd; they are swamped by the deluge of would-be best-sellers. The reading public suffers too. Where there are so many books on every subject, busy people haven't the time to find out which is the best. They take the first that comes to hand or which is the best advertized, and meanwhile the good book is probably dying unread in a corner.

6

V.W. I agree with you that there is much to be said against the present state of things. But I am inclined to make a distinction. You say that too many people write. I say, on the contrary, not enough people write, but the people who do write write too many books. Most people have it in them to write one good book; many people can write ~~five~~ <*fifteen* > or six<*teen*> good books; but no one—not even Shakespeare himself—can write fifty or sixty good books. Yet some of our novelists have already written over 100 volumes. Once a writer starts writing, nothing can stop him. On he goes year after year, season after season. He ceases to be a human being; he becomes a machine into which you put a ream of paper in August and out drops a novel in October. It would greatly improve most people'[s] writing if they were forced to stop now and then and take up some other occupation. Ideas and images and ~~language itself~~ <*words themselves*> becomes stal[e] when they are always made by the same sort of people living the same sort of lives. But also I am convinced that many more people can write books than ever do write them. As a reader, I deplore the fact that I am catered for almost wholly by professional writers. Only scholars write about Latin and Greek; only famous people write their lives or have their lives written by others. Even today, when reading and writing are so much more practised than they have ever been before, the writing of books is far too much in the hands of a small <*class of*> professional ~~class~~ <*writers*>. For my own part, I should ~~fine any writer who had written more than~~ <*tax every book after a writer has*> <p> <put ~~a tax~~ *a tax* on every book after a writer> <*has written*> 30 books. On the other hand, I should of<*fer*> a prize to induce people who had never written a book to write one—preferably an autobiography. Above all things the reader wants variety; he wants books written by all sorts of people; by tramps and du[ch]esses; by plumbers and Prime Ministers. The reader's appetite is insatiable.

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[7]

L.W. I wish I could believe that the appetite of readers is insatiable. That is the crux of the whole position—at any rate so far as what are called serious books are concerned. If more people would read and if those who do read would read more and buy more books, there might well be no reason to say that too many books are written and published. But I am certain that, as it is, the supply of books is out of all proportion to the demand. It would be very interesting, and I think very depressing, if we could find out accurately what part of the

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national income is spent on books. For some reason, most people think nothing of spending ten and sixpence on a seat at the play or three and ninepence on one at the Pictures, but they think so long before they spend seven and sixpence or even half a crown on a book that in the end they hardly ever do it.[5] Yet the play is over in three hours and the book lasts a lifetime.

8

V.W. Yes, that is one of the great drawbacks of books. They last a lifetime. They take up space on our walls for ever. They need dusting for ever. How many times, after all, is one going to read the same book through? Of all the books in your library how many have you ~~opened~~ <*read*> twice? Yet there they stand, unopened and, I am afraid, often undusted, month after month and year after year. What is wanted is some system by which private libraries could be thrown open to other people, so that readers living in the same neighbourhood could use each other's books. The present system, by which each of us has a certain number of books locked up doing nothing on his shelves is the most wasteful that could be invented.

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[9]

L.W. What is wanted is that people should see that reading is one of the pleasantest of occupations, and that so they should acquire the reading habit. I allow that the public has a healthy appetite for popular fiction; but for history, biography, and poetry its appetite is deplorably feeble. Of course, one reason is that nowadays the reading habit has to compete with so many other habits. The competition among different pleasures for our patronage is far more severe today than it was a hundred years ago. There are so many attractive methods by which we can spend or waste our time. In the 18th century, you probably had to choose between sitting round in a circle and talking and drinking a dish of tea, and sitting in an arm-chair and reading Mr Gibbon's "Decline and Fall" or Mr Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield". This evening you may listen in, or go~~x~~ the pictures or watch greyhounds chase a mechanical hare or take a spin in the country in your car or on your motor-bicycle—let alone the usual plays, concerts, dances, and dinners. All these things are perpetually attracting us from the armchair and the book. And if we do consent to stop at home and read, we want ~~out~~ <*our*> thinking done for us on the easiest and pleasantest terms. Hence the enormous production of popular manuals about everything <*under the sun*> from Russian Literature to the Structure of the Atom and How to Keep Bees, ~~which~~ <*they*> are in themselves admirable, but tend to glut the readers' appetite and make him ~~xxxxxxxx~~ disinclined to exert himself mentally. What chance is there, then, for the serious writer to get a hearing or earn ~~a~~ <*his*> living? Yet such is the itch for writing, and such the vanity and optimism of the human mind, that men and women still go on producing these unsalable books, and publishers gamble on their paying their way.

10

V.W. You have drawn a gloomy picture, I admit, but I doubt that it is altogether a true one. You are describing a temporary state of things and you are assuming that, as things are now, so they shall be for ever. But there, I think, you are mistaken. You must remember that the majority of readers today are reading for the first time. Their grandfathers and grandmothers could, with difficulty, spell out a page of the Bible. Millions of human beings, of both sexes, of all ages, have now been admitted to the whole of literature. Naturally they makes a rush for the sweets and cakes first—for the easy books and the flashy books and the books that ask no trouble in reading.

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But the English are, by temperament, a literary people; their love of books comes long before their love of pictures or of music; it comes not so very far behind their love of horses and of games. You yourslef have already admitted that their passion for writing is such that they will write and they will publish though they starve for it. It seems to me likely that, as they grow to maturity as readers, they will tire of the sweets and pastries, and will demand good beef and mutton—that is to say, interesting books, difficult books, histories, biographies, poetry. No~~x~~<*t*> that I think that all fiction is necessarily bad. But my point is that as people read more books they will read better books; they will also realize the pleasure ~~that is added to reading, if you own the book that you are reading~~ <*of owning the books they read*> <of owing books> instead of borrow~~ing it~~ <*them*> <them> from a library. But here, I think, the publishers must come to our help. Books will have to be cheaper. Books ought to be so cheap that we can throw them away if we do not like them, or give them away if we do. Moreover, it is absurd to print every book as if it were fated to last a hundred years. The life of ~~most~~ <*the average*> books is <*perhaps*> <perhaps> ~~not more than~~ three months. Why not <*face this fact. Why not*> <face this fact? Why not> print the first edition on some

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11

per~~xx~~<*is*>hable material which would crumble to a little heap of perfectly clean dust in about six months time? If a second edition were needed, this could be printed on good paper and well bound. Thus by far the greater number of books would die a natural death in three months or so. No space would be wasted and no dirt would be collected—an ideal state of things in my opinion and one that they have already almost reached in ~~f~~<*F*>rance. In France it is as simple to buy a book and read it as it is to buy a packet of cigarettes and smoke them. Therefore the habit of reading has caught on in France and people read for the fun of it, and not because it is the proper thing to do. But here in ~~e~~<*E*>ngland the price of books is so high that few people can afford to buy them and no one can afford to throw them away. This makes for reading seldom~~x~~ and for reading solemnly—both bad things as I think you will agree.

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[12]

L.W. You are, I see, like the rest of the world, an optimist. I hope you may be right. But as regards the price of books, you must remember that on the average at prsent prices books are really cheaper than they were ~~xxxx~~ before the war. There is also a vicious circle in the arguments about cheap books. You say that more people would read if publishers made their books cheaper; I say that publishers can only make their books cheaper if more people will read and buy books. However, there is one thing about which we can both agree, I'm sure, and that is that nothing will prevent people from writing books. The itch for writing, the vanity of authors, and the hopefulness of publishers will always see to that. In the reign of King Solomon, 2500 years ago, the wise man remarked that "of making many books there is no end" and that" much study is a weariness of the flesh";[6] he could make the same remark today in the reign of King George V, and I expect he will be able to make it again 2500 years hence.

Notes

1. This stamp appears on every page.

2. The inserted slashes in pencil here and at the end of the next sentence appear to indicate a place to take a breath.

3. Mr. Ramsay expresses similar sentiments about handmade boots in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, published two months before this broadcast. A polarized

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debate between husband and wife is, of course, the way this novel begins.

4. According to the *Radio Times*, "Are Too Many Books Written and Published?" was broadcast from 10:20 to 10:35 on 15 July 1927, between performances of the operetta *Les cloches de Corneville*, by Robert Planquette, and Whittaker Wilson's "Four Songs of Morocco" ("Programmes").

5. In striking contrast to the sum Leonard sets, the leading article in the 13 October *Times Literary Supplement*, in lauding "the improvement in the production of fairly cheap books," suggests that the careful buyer could now "enjoy the possession of a great many delightful books, even if he decides as a rule to spend no more than ten or fifteen shillings on each book." But the author, an art critic and later Slade Professor of Fine Art at Cambridge University, again diverges substantially from Leonard by focusing on the "pleasure which may be got from looking at books as well as the pleasure of reading" (Clutton-Brock).

6. Eccles. 12.12

Works Cited

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