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# Heritage questing with Virginia Woolf: UCL Institute of Archaeology's 'spirit of place' and new pedagogies of the pandemic

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# Heritage questing with Virginia Woolf: UCL Institute of Archaeology's 'spirit of place' and new pedagogies of the pandemic

*Beverley Butler, David Francis and Ellen Pavey*

## Abstract

This article charts a particular journey of discovery – that of 'heritage questing with Virginia Woolf'. We explore how, against the backdrop of COVID-19, the Master's in Cultural Heritage Studies (MACHS) adopted and adapted Virginia Woolf as an efficacious 'ancestor figure' around which staff and students were able to grasp, engage with, articulate and try to understand the extraordinary experiences and challenges faced throughout the academic year. Woolf emerged as the shared conduit and portal by which MACHS in 'diaspora' could imaginatively connect with, collectively tap into and add new layers to the Institute of Archaeology (IoA)'s 'spirit of place' in Bloomsbury. In what follows, our article draws on a co-ethnography of these experiences which, in turn, we juxtapose alongside Virginia Woolf's own literary insights. Writ large, our journey sees us critically reflect upon attempts to navigate the unknown currents and trajectories of living, teaching and learning in times of coronavirus within which Woolf emerged as a lighthouse of sorts. Writ larger still, we see our quest as a means to grasp the 'new pedagogies of the pandemic' that materialised as an outcome of the impacts and experiences of coronavirus. Ultimately these were also seized upon as a means of taking

forward the shared promise of fulfilment, in terms of shaping such quests into liveable presents and better futures as well as adding new layers to the IoA's stratigraphy.

**Keywords**: cultural heritage, Virginia Woolf, COVID-19 pandemic, pedagogy, Bloomsbury

## Introduction: the voyage out

> 'The journey is everything. Most necessary of all, but rarest good fortune … [is that] we share it.'
>
> Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 2003

The MA in Cultural Heritage Studies (MACHS) at the Institute of Archaeology (IoA) UCL is structured around the concept of a shared 'heritage quest' – we take students on an intellectual journey that promises to transform them into heritage critics. Our quest is to problematise and gain new insights into the core questions that guide our journeys, not only to revisit key questions of what heritage *is* but also to ascertain what heritage *does* in terms of its diverse efficacies (Butler 2016). We explore the complex pathways, points of contestation and impasse, and the diverse directionalities that mark such quests, while grounding these in global case studies, vocational and research skills, moral-ethical debates as well as in visits to various museums, heritage institutions and guided walks across London. This motif of the 'heritage quest' thus operates as conduit and portal to a diversity of modes of heritage work, opening up into alternative, often unexpected, tropes and directionalities that gained an added potency during the academic year of 2020–21, against the backdrop of COVID-19. This article reflects on these responses and responsibilities in the form of the articulation of 'new pedagogies of the pandemic' – to paraphrase Paulo Freire (1996) – that emerged as a necessary outcome of the impacts and experiences of coronavirus.

Perhaps many, if not every, teacher and student, whether working in schools or higher education – or, in fact, anyone who has

been involved in any kind of formal–informal learning over the past 18 months – will identify with such changing and challenging experiences and circumstances. Indeed, the increasingly shared and extended nature of such pedagogies came further into view, as the phenomenon of 'home schooling' required parents, carers and students to adopt and adapt to new situations and to transformed roles. It was in this context too that the figure of Virginia Woolf emerged as central to our reworked MACHS 'heritage quest' and to the shaping of our extended 'new pedagogies'. Woolf as a writer and historical and legendary figure within the IoA's Bloomsbury environs thus became an efficacious 'ancestor figure' around which to frame our own critical reflections and those of MACHS students during last academic year. In what follows, our article thus draws on these shared reflections and upon the writings of Virginia Woolf. We explore our reworked 'heritage quest' in Woolf's words, as a 'voyage out', in the form of attempts to navigate the unknown currents and trajectories of living and teaching in times of coronavirus. This was a context that we actively adopted and we adapted Woolf as our muse and alternative spirit guide as we embarked on a journey that brought together real and imaginative worlds.

## Act One: pandemic as overturning

> Considering how common illness is, how tremendous the spiritual change that it brings, how astonishing, when the lights of health go down, the undiscovered countries that are then disclosed, what wastes and deserts of the soul a slight attack of influenza brings to light, what precipices and lawns sprinkled with bright flowers a little rise of temperature reveals, what ancient and obdurate oaks are uprooted in us in the act of sickness. (Woolf 2012, 32)

In the context of the ongoing impacts of the new coronavirus pandemic, and the rapid approach of the academic year 2020–21, it became increasingly clear that our vision and delivery of MACHS as an intellectual-operational heritage 'quest' needed to reworked. Indeed, it was obvious from the build-up to the beginning of term that not even the basic act of welcoming students to UCL IoA/Bloomsbury in the usual

way was going to be possible. The 'new normal', by way of contrast, necessitated that we imaginatively bring UCL IoA/Bloomsbury to the students in diaspora. This was first a response to those students located overseas, who faced travel restrictions in the run up to the new term. Ultimately, however, this concern extended to the student group as a whole (including those within the UK in general and London in particular), as the phased lockdown restrictions that unfolded as the academic year unfolded saw us increasingly confined to our homes.

It was thus in this context of profound uncertainly that the figure of Virginia Woolf, the modernist writer, dubbed 'the high-priestess of Bloomsbury', came to provide a privileged loci and conduit by which to engage with, articulate and understand the extraordinary experiences and challenges faced by students throughout the academic year. Moreover, this particular journey of discovery and experience of 'heritage questing with Virginia Woolf' began before the academic year proper – at the point when, in anticipation of the new MACHS student cohort in September 2020, we began making our introductions with an initial sharing of a 'mystery object' with students – a small bust of Virginia Woolf (Figure 1).[1] However, the object, when circulated in digital image form to all students, proved enigmatic. It was a source of curiosity, at times misidentified, which prompted some humorous responses. One student identified it as a representation of Edward Munch's *Scream*, for example, with most of us acknowledging the resemblance; another student, unsure of the materials used, asked if it was painted on a 'piece of bread'. As an icebreaker it evoked humour and initiated a form of 'play' that also emerged as a much-needed release mechanism and shared coping strategy throughout the year.

From these small beginnings, Woolf emerged as a 'shared object' and 'locus point' by which individuals could connect with, collectively tap into and add new layers to the IoA's 'spirit of place' in Bloomsbury. In this sense, Woolf, positioned as an iconic 'ancestor figure', takes on an attractor quality that acts as an efficacious 'cosmology of the centre', capable of bringing persons and other significant 'objects' together. Woolf's positionality and attendant efficacies gave rise to mutually transformative interactions and object-work that increasingly brought an internationalism 'home' to Bloomsbury – as its 'spirit of place' was reworked and 'housed' within networks of extended

**Figure 1** A small bust of Virginia Woolf, the 'mystery object' through which we introduced students to our heritage quest (Source: photograph by Beverley Butler)

hospitality and heritage that collapsed the real with the virtual to reach across and encompass the MACHS student body as a dispersed cohort.

Indeed, Woolf's literary insights into inner worlds and 'streams-of-consciousness' offer not only insights into the interaction between literary and lived experience, but also new ways of thinking about heritage work, transmission and, in particular, 'hidden' and 'outsider' ancestries and heritage (Butler 2021). More specifically, her text 'On being ill' (1926), gained a renewed resonance during the pandemic. Woolf's recurring theme in terms of her reflections on illness brings into sharp relief the greater suffering caused by the 'poverty of language' available to describe such experiences. For Woolf, it is both the physical effects of illbeing and the accompanying profound 'spiritual change' that not only 'uproot' us but manifest as experiences and states of being that resist language. As such, they create impasse in attempts to articulate such intensities of being in shared, empathetic ways with others. Whether in her accounts of suffering bouts of influenza or in her haunting experiences of breakdown, Woolf attempts to use creative means to navigate enforced journeys to 'undiscovered countries' to which illness displace us and which leave us feeling stranded 'outside' of 'real' life.

Ground-breaking work on illness by Sontag (2009a) and Scarry (1987) has taken forward such agendas, complemented more recently by Outka's *Viral Modernism* (2019). Her book traces the influenza epidemic both in terms of Woolf's recurring bouts of influenza and as a presence within *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). Such texts offer parallels with COVID-19 in terms of articulating the unseen (and seen) scars of the pandemic that leave their mark on persons and places, notably including Bloomsbury. Indeed, the effects of the pandemic as a globalised – and globalising – experience simultaneously grounded in the local interpolated us all into these new, unfamiliar domains, synonymous with fear, anxiety and, tragically for significant numbers of people in the world, with serious illness and death. The deeply felt need to create coping strategies and to ritualise new gestures of solidarity – be it 'clap for carers' or participation in the online workouts of popular health guru Joe Wicks – offered a new means to articulate collectively and engage with wellbeing/illbeing in new times.

In a more everyday experience of 'dis-ease', the effect of the pandemic has been noted for its distortion of time. People have been subjected to new rhythms around work, childcare, home schooling, family visits, leisure – even eating, sleeping and taking showers have all been repatterned and given new rhythms (Erll 2020, 862). The overturning of the rhythmic patterns of daily life has also led to the uncanny feeling that 'the time is out of joint' (to use Derrida's (2006, 20) quote from *Hamlet*). Again, Woolf's work reflects upon, if not reconceives and reconfigures, the literary form of the novel around the rhythm of time, more specifically the recurring eruptions and disruptions of the past in the present. For example, *Mrs Dalloway*, a novel set over just one day, begins with our eponymous central character buying some flowers, while subsequently and simultaneously exemplifying how diverse temporalities – including returns to childhood, lost love and other fragments of memory – are (re-)experienced in the space of 24 hours. Here the experience of time, and more specifically its passing, is acutely felt – whether this is within the pages of the 'elegiac' *Jacob's Room* (2008), *The Collected Short Stories* (2011) or her use of (auto-)biographical reflection in 'A sketch of the past' (1939) and/or her wider preoccupation revealed in *Moments of Being* (1972).

Our own contemporary experiences of coronavirus witnessed alternative salient moments of overturning related to the past in the present. These, for example, powerfully manifested in turn as the resurfacing of long-standing quests for social justice, previously repressed, were led by activist movements that both defined and defied lockdown. Here the great statue toppling of 2020, and campaigns to de-name institutions associated with slavery and other colonial violences, intensified the various calls for removal, repatriation and/or de-pedestalling of icons and associated objects. As we address later, these deeply impacted upon the environs of Bloomsbury and UCL, and continue to do so.

Restrictions increasingly placed on both internal and international travel also necessitated a refocus on the local. With this came the possibility of exploring the grassroots production of heritage, as a counter to the top-down approach imposed by the state (see Evans and Rowlands 2021). It also saw many of us revisiting aspects of the local we had previously taken for granted. In the context of the MACHS degree, those moments in which university facilities were able to remain open provided much needed access for reading, writing and reflection. However, full lockdown – resulting in the unexpected rupture and detachment from the familiar environs of Gordon Square and wider Bloomsbury – meant that in order to initiate the MACHS 'heritage quest' we felt the need to be active in attaching/reattaching students with this 'locality' while they found themselves in different forms of 'diaspora'.

## Act Two: communing with the ancestors

In many senses this 'heritage quest', and similarly this article, can be seen as a means of 'talking to the ancestors' in the Bakhtinian (1981, 280) sense that all dialogue is written to an intended *other* and thus as an act of *othering*. Woolf too, as a pioneer of literary modernism, in her writing frequently divides times as before and after a cataclysmic event – notably the First World War. The recasting of such Woolfian concepts as *A Room of One's Own* (1929), *Moments of Being* and 'Street haunting' (1927) thus helped us to make sense of the experiences of

lockdown, its distortion of time and denial of space. At the same time Woolf is not a novelist who fits within conventional plot structures like the 'hero's quest', and the destination of her novels are more elusive. Just as in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), where the rhythm of the flashing of the lighthouse's light provides 'A central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together', so Woolf (1977, 3, 385 n.2) was used by MACHS 'heritage questers' as a central motif to unite the disparate and unexpected events of lockdown. Indeed, in a statement that lends itself to questing for, and a questioning of, what heritage *is* and *does*, Woolf describes her own refusal to define her terms as that which 'kills them'. She gives an example of the lighthouse: 'I meant nothing by The Lighthouse… I saw that all sorts of feelings would accrue to this, but I refused to think them out, and trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotions' (Woolf 1977, 3, 385 n.2). Similarly, Woolf for us represents not one thing, but a surface upon which various aspirations and creativities can be projected. This in turn mirrors the 'fluctuating self' of characters in novels such as *Mrs Dalloway* or *To the Lighthouse*.

Our article thus similarly recasts our shared 'heritage quest' not only as a strategically fluid metanarrative around which to structure the degree, but also as a means of understanding the lived experiences of the staff and students who took part in MACHS 2020/21 and the fluctuating emotions which accrued around the pandemic. In lamenting how 'ethnographic' has been overused as an adjective in the field of anthropology, to such an extent that the term has lost much of its meaning, the anthropologist Tim Ingold (2014) notes that the only time ethnographers do not use the term is within the walls of the university itself. He thus argues that the knowledge co-produced with informants is classed as ethnographic, while the knowledge co-produced with students curiously is not (Ingold 2014). In response to Ingold's observation, this article seeks to take some of the features inherent in an ethnographic perspective, including drawing on fieldnotes, the co-construction of knowledge and the use of thick description (Geertz 2008), as an 'art of observation and description', to understand the experience of teaching during the COVID pandemic. In its focus on asking students to reflect on their lived-experiences of lockdown, the article can also be seen to answer Sontag's (2009b, 103) call for a shift away from reductive

interpretation to 'acts of criticism which would supply a really accurate, sharp, loving description'. In so doing we seek to draw out the close relationship between teaching and research, often separated in contemporary academia.

'Street haunting', Woolf's motif and mode of experiencing the world that we discuss in more depth later in this article, and also the title of Wolf's essay, features her reflections on how objects have the capacity to articulate and express how we feel about ourselves. It begins with the contemplation of a blue-and-white China bowl:

> 'within the solitude of one's own room', we sit: surrounded by objects which perpetually express the oddity of our own temperaments and enforce the memories of our own experience … All this – Italy, the windy morning, the vines laced about the pillars, the Englishman and the secrets of his soul – rise up in a cloud from the china bowl on the mantelpiece. (Woolf 1943a, 155–6)

In response to the bust of Woolf selected by Beverley Butler as Degree Co-ordinator, students were asked to introduce themselves with an object that contained significance for them and which would act as a talisman to be carried with them on their quest. David Francis, as Back-Up Degree Co-ordinator, selected a model of Zhu Bajie (Figure 2), sometimes translated as Pigsy, bought in Chengdu as a key character from the Chinese epic *A Journey to the West* to allow us to think about heritage quests from a non-European perspective. Zhu Bajie, the pig-headed follower of the Chinese scholar Xuanzang, accompanies Sun Wukong (Monkey) and Sandy on their journey to bring Buddhist scrolls back to China. As such, it represented David Francis's (forthcoming) research interest in alternative models of heritage narrativisation beyond those commonly used to underpin heritage that adopt a 'Western' epic perspective and tradition such as the *Odyssey*.

Ellen Pavey, as Post Graduate Teaching Assistant (PGTA), selected a mug (Figure 3) featuring the Guerrilla Girls. They are an anonymous group of feminist activist artists, originating out of New York in the 1980s, who campaign against sexism, racism and corruption in the art world. Pavey's choice encapsulated her research interests in art

**Figure 2** A model of Zhu Bajie, sometimes known as ‘Pigsy’, bought in Chengdu by David Francis. (Source: photograph by David Francis)

**Figure 3** A mug featuring the Guerilla Girls, feminist activists in the New York art world, was Ellen Pavey’s choice. (Source: photograph by Ellen Pavey)

museums, invisibility and institutional critique and became a prompt to think about the exclusions of the academy, gender biases and the tactics of acting back and claiming space in order to '[reveal] the understory, the subtext, the overlooked, and the downright unfair' (Guerrilla Girls 2021).

The objects selected by students to introduce themselves also powerfully resonated further with our core questions of what heritage *is* and what heritage *does*. There were many objects associated with travel, either with one-off trips to elsewhere or synonymous with longer periods of time spent studying, and in one case excavating, a particular heritage site. Some of these objects fitted into the category of souvenir – a tote bag with a print of Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, Mickey Mouse ears from Shanghai Disneyland – which in turn acted as aide memoires to access formative and/or transitional life moments, like a year spent abroad or graduation. Other objects connected the person to specific relationships – a gift given by someone after they had returned from travel; this notably included sand brought back by a father and given to his daughter after a military tour of Iraq. Contrasting with these were objects associated with local identity or a home town, such as a clay Zhang figurine from Tianjin or a familial domestic object like a 'tomato grinder used to make tomato sauce' that connected the North American student owner with their Italian grandmother and Italian heritage.

Alongside the linking of place and lineage as heritage and identity were objects that reflected a hobby or interest that played a crucial role in the understanding and articulation of selfhood. For example, a collection of concert trophies, such as drumsticks and plectrums, collected by one student with his brother when attending rock concerts, as well as an album of 'Folk songs of Courting and Complaint' by Peggy Seeger and a Lego model of a Parisian restaurant. Of the particular efficacies of the aforementioned Mickey Mouse ears, this student reflected on how it had stood in for the mortarboard denied to her because she could not attend her graduation:

> My object is a Mickey Mouse headband. It is a souvenir I bought in Disneyland during the graduation trip with my bestie. I had planned to go to Beijing for my graduation ceremony, but it was cancelled due to the pandemic. Therefore I went to Disneyland in

> Shanghai and bought the Mickey trencher cap as my graduation gift … When I had an on-line meeting with the MACHS Class of 2020/21 I was on the lawn of my undergraduate school. I felt that I made my own special memory which is probably the combination of fantasy and reality. Although I cannot explain why I became obsessed with this fantasy/memory, I gained a sense of fulfilment and happiness. (Student reflection)

For other students the object would lead to them following a line of inquiry that they would continue all the way to their final dissertation.

> At the beginning of term one, I choose a toy duck as my object to introduce. In fact, one of the reasons I choose it is because I saw David's example of a Zhu Bajie and this introduced me to the initial concept, that a heritage object could be anything that was meaningful to oneself. When looking at it anew now, it reflects the important and popular kind of creative products of cultural heritage in China and can be linked to my dissertation topic, too. A nice start that leads through to the end! (Student reflection)

From this point of departure, again in Woolf's words as a 'voyage out', we collectively created extended cosmologies and constellations of persons–objects constituted by the objects the students used to introduce themselves, thereby bringing these/themselves imaginatively to UCL IoA/Bloomsbury.

## Act Three: *A Room of One's Own*

In October 2020, after seven months away from the IoA, we (David and Ellen) would return to teach classes in person at the start of the academic 2020–21 year in Bloomsbury. Woolf, too, had her different arrivals, exiles and returns to Bloomsbury. In March 1924 she returned to live in Bloomsbury at 52 Tavistock Square, after a decade living in exile in Richmond due to the stress brought on by the First World War. What followed was a period of intense, creative activity during which she wrote some of her greatest works, including the novels *Mrs Dalloway*, *To*

*the Lighthouse*, *Orlando* (2018) and the seminal essays 'Street haunting' and 'A Room of One's Own'. The vibrant energy of being back among the cars and crowds of the city is captured in the famous opening in *Mrs Dalloway*, in which the novel's eponymous protagonist steps out into the city, walking across Victoria Street in June, and delights in its energy:

> In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp and trudge: in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high signing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June. (Woolf 2015b, 5)

Woolf (2002, 98) would describe these occurrences of intense presentness as 'moments of being' in her essay 'A sketch of the past', in which the present is experienced as running so smoothly that it is like the 'sliding surface of a deep river'. This in turn allows the past to return, which Woolf perceives as 'seeing through the surface to the depths'; she refers to it paradoxically as being when 'I am living most fully in the present' (Woolf 2002, 98). This conflation and collapse of past and present, and the problematisation of diverse notions of 'present pasts' (Butler 2006), is one of the central focuses of the MACHS, revealing the potency of Woolf as an intellectual ancestor to a cultural heritage degree based in Bloomsbury.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf's own exuberance induced by the urban environment is also projected onto Westminster and its surrounds. (She similarly transfers her own memories of the family holidays of her youth in St Ives in Cornwall to the Isle of Skye in *To the Lighthouse*.) Indeed, she recalls and reiterates the role that walking through the city, and more specifically around Bloomsbury, played in her creative practice. In a diary entry of 2 May 1939, Woolf (2002, 92) recounts in 'A sketch of the past' how: 'one day walking around Tavistock Square I made up, as I sometimes make up my books, *To the Lighthouse*: in a great, apparently involuntary, rush. One thing burst into another.' Moreover, Woolf's own creative epiphany mirrors that of Lily Briscoe at the end of that novel. As it concludes, the young artist conceives of the triangular strokes of the paintbrush which will balance and complete her painting, while

simultaneously Mr Ramsey and his son James make their much-delayed landing at the lighthouse. Afterwards Lily, 'laying down her brush in extreme fatigue' declares 'I have had my vision' (Woolf 1943b, 224). This idea of searching for, and reaching, a creative destination is a thread that runs through much of Woolf's work from this period; it parallels the concept of the heritage quest.

When the first term begins in October 2020, half of the seminars are run digitally and the other half in-person in room 612 of the IoA. All seminars thus take place together on a Friday, beginning at 10.30 am and ending at 4.30 pm. One of the most noticeable elements of the return to campus is the set of new rules and rituals that accompany in-person teaching. Only one person is allowed in the lift at one time and only one person on an individual flight of stairs, when we ascend to the sixth floor where our seminars take place. Upon entering the room, the sterilisation of hands with the sanitiser pumped from the plastic bottle and the strict filing in of the students beginning from the front, seats are positioned one metre apart in regimented square formations. Windows are always lifted to their highest extent to maintain ventilation, which becomes increasingly bracing as autumn transitions into winter. The students able to make 'in-person' seminars don coats and David and Ellen wear matching moss-green jumpers, commented on as reminiscent of a Scandi Noir detective drama. Once the seminar is concluded, students leave the room; times are staggered so no one has to pass another class in a hallway. Then the tables have to be systematically wiped down, with David cleaning the right side of the room and Ellen the left. These rituals will be repeated with mnemonic regularity. By Reading Week something that was disquietingly strange is imbued with the comfort of habit.

Before the start of term, we also begin to wonder whether it will be possible to teach in-person due to the high level of restrictions and whether the students will enjoy it. All of these constraints felt as if they would widen the gap between student and lecturer, and go directly against the dialogic pedagogical approach championed by the likes of Paulo Freire (1996) that underpins such teaching. However, it soon emerged that these classes were the highlight of both the staff and student week. The opportunity to discuss ideas with people in-person from outside home-based bubbles began to feel like a privilege for

many. The bravery and perseverance of the students, many of whom travelled from locations as far away as China and Chile, was inspiring and motivating. Given that each week of in-person teaching might be the last, each seminar possesses a fragile, precarious preciousness. Student reflections on this time convey these sentiments:

> During the first eight weeks of the academic year, most of my teaching took place online. Consequently, the time I spent studying often blended into time spent eating, relaxing and doing everyday tasks in the house. This made it difficult for me to organise my days, and the lack of structure quickly led to a generalised feeling of confusion and anxiety.
>
> For this reason, the weekly seminars and activities, especially those provided in person, were crucial for my wellbeing. They provided me with something to look forward to week after week, making me more aware of the passage of time. Also they gave me the opportunity to socialise with other students, making me feel less isolated. In my opinion, the excitement around these weekly activities created the perfect environment for discussion. We revelled in the opportunity to share ideas and compare thoughts, but we also took these debates as an opportunity to create relationships. I really missed being able to participate in in-person seminars and fieldtrips later on during the full lockdown. (Student reflection)

If *Mrs Dalloway* can be said to capture and echo the way in which London provided Woolf with the energy that enabled her to write, then Woolf's 1929 essay, 'A Room of One's Own', laid out the material realities required to create and be creative: 'a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction' (Woolf 2015a, 3). With university libraries closed, and students only able to access the IoA once a week for their seminars, this year made apparent what was previously taken for granted in terms of the minimum resources required for students to be able to study, write and create. Woolf evokes this herself in the early chapters of *A Room of One's Own* (1929) when, after being invited to Cambridge to give a lecture on women's education, she finds herself physically locked out of the

university, her entrance barred by the college porters. The amenities of the university denied to her as a woman are not limited to its educational resources, but also its social life and the network of connections that this provides.

> I thought of … the shut doors of the library; and I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in; and, thinking of the safety and prosperity of the one sex and the poverty and insecurity of the other and of the effect of tradition and the lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer. (Woolf 2015a, 19)

Returning to Bloomsbury and its efficacies and affordances, Woolf is able to access the Round Reading Room of the British Museum. Here she encounters texts written by men about women, typically portraying them in a derisory light.

> Suppose, for instance, that men were only represented in literature as the lovers of women, and were never the friends of men, soldiers, thinkers, dreamers; how few parts in the plays of Shakespeare could be allotted to them; how literature would suffer! We might perhaps have most of Othello; and a good deal of Antony; but no Caesar, no Brutus, no Hamlet, no Lear, no Jacques – literature would be incredibly impoverished, as indeed literature is impoverished beyond our counting by the doors that have been shut upon women. (Woolf 2015a, 63)

One of the unique features of undertaking the MACHS degree is the IoA's location in Bloomsbury, which provides a convenient point of departure for fieldtrips that resonate with contemporary issues in cultural heritage. As the term progressed, debates around heritage would not only enter the mainstream media via the framing of the so-called 'culture wars', but also become a central strand of government policy (Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government 2021). Prior to the start of term, a national (and international) reckoning with Britain's colonial past had begun to take place. A series of events, set in motion by the global amplification of the Black Lives

Matter movement following the brutal murder of George Floyd, saw the toppling of the statue of Bristolian slave trader Edward Colston. This led in turn to renewed protests calling for the removal of a statue of the colonial mining magnate Cecil Rhodes from Oriel College, University of Oxford (Russell 2020). The case of Rhodes in particular was a reminder of the interconnectedness and global scope of these collective actions and the historic entwinement of universities with structures of colonial thought and capital. Public action in turn pressured cultural institutions in London to confront their own deep and often unacknowledged ties to Empire. The Museum of London Docklands, for example, removed a statue of plantation owner and slave trader Robert Milligan (Russell 2020).

Within Bloomsbury too such transformations took place and hit home. The British Museum 'de-pedestalled' the bust of the museum's founder Hans Sloane from its prestigious position within the Enlightenment Gallery, demoting it to a glass case to give recognition to, and to reflect on, both Sloane's and institutional links to slavery. In the same spirit, MACHS fieldtrips included the *Bricks and Mortals* walking tour[2] that exposes the legacy of eugenics at UCL. Lecture theatres at UCL named after the Eugenicists Francis Galton and Karl Pearson were denamed in June 2020, while the nearby Marie Stopes clinic changed its name to MSI Reproductive Choices in November 2020 (Stopes, herself a UCL alumni, was also in favour of eugenics). Vociferous online debate took place around denaming and possible renaming of the UCL Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology; the discussion is still ongoing, based on Flinders Petrie's work as 'Father of Archaeology' being informed by eugenics. It seemed that every week news of another instance of statue removal, recontextualisation or replacement reached us.[3] Indeed, in terms of Virginia Woolf's own elitisms,[4] exclusions and accusations of racism, Alice Walker challenges Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* thesis by asking: 'What then are we to make of Phillis Wheatley,[5] a slave, who owned not even herself?' (Walker 2005, 235).

As the students embarked on their heritage 'quests', we began with a close reading of Stuart Hall's text *Whose Heritage? Un-settling 'The Heritage', Re-imagining the Post-nation* (1999). Although more than 20 years have elapsed, Hall's call to challenge the notion of an official, homogenous cultural narrative – 'The Heritage' – remains potent in the

face of an increasingly hostile political backlash against attempts to embed critical reflection and decolonial practice into cultural heritage scholarship and heritage institutions. It is as if Hall is writing for the present from the past, especially as he argues: 'This is therefore an appropriate moment to ask, then, who is the Heritage for?'

The articulation of our own transformed 'pandemic pedagogies', as an ongoing quest led by the core-course module Critical Perspectives on Cultural Heritage, saw us thus continue to challenge the exclusivities that define 'Heritage Crusades' (Lowenthal 1998) – notably as viewed from a routinised fixed elite 'Euro-centric-western' (neo-)colonial trajectory. In lectures purposefully recast in 'prerecorded' digital forms due to the coronavirus pandemic,[6] we explored, for example, the reconstruction of the ancient Mouseion/Library of Alexandria, historically looked to by the 'west' as a paradigmatic heritage quest of return, redemption and revivalisms of lost origins (Butler 2006, 2007). Our emphasis, however, was placed upon drawing out the ways in which contemporary local actors subvert, reclaim and repossess such concepts and revivalism projects for their own popular, grassroots heritage quests. In so doing, we explored how basic categories of heritage are variously added to, rejected, transformed and constantly remade. The desire to make Alexandria a 'decent place for children to grow up in' (Butler 2006, 275) is thus articulated in ethnographies alongside what is oft-regarded by many critics and those on the ground as more 'toothless' UNESCO jargon and divisive interventions within the local. Our concern to expose power relationships and ongoing resistance to top-down 'Authorised Heritage Discourses' (Smith 2006) was engaged with from the outset, and new and alternative roots/routes of cultural transmission identified.

Our heritage quests also explored relationships between time and place by recasting heritage as forms and forces of ritual movement led by acts of possession. Such diverse attempts to manifest the past and/or call up lost origins, commune with the sacred, with ancestors and ancestry – and in some cases to break with these by forging new and alternative lines of transmission – often collects around a specific locale and locality. 'Jerusalem Syndrome', for example, a term coined to describe those newcomers to the city of Jerusalem who experience extreme, and oft-unexpected, transformation in which they believe

themselves be a figure from the Old or New Testament, offers insights to other genres of 'heritage syndromes' (Butler 2016). As such, we might all learn from our ritual behaviours, possessional acts and attempts to commune with that which is efficacious. Indeed, they hold insights too into refugee and other experiences of enforced displacement and containment that often manifest as painful inversions of questing – or as anti-quests – in which persons suffer detachment from efficacious centre-points of home, land or locale to name a few.

This motif of the 'quest narrative' not only continued to provide an overarching meta-narrative structure for the course, but was also at times explored as resembling and reworking the motif of the 'sacred pilgrimage'; at other points, it might (also) take the form of a 'hero's journey' (Campbell 2008). Through the course's essential readings, alongside Virginia Woolf, Stuart Hall and David Lowenthal, we also encountered a variety of iconic-intellectual 'heritage questers'. These included Sigmund Freud who, on his visit to the Acropolis, suffers a 'disturbance of memory' that he subsequently analyses as a manifestation of his inner feelings of Oedipal guilt in surpassing his own father. As an intense experience of 'derealisation' and 'splitting', Freud (1984) interprets this as the effects of the return of his own repressed childhood experiences and feelings, triggered by an encounter with the 'afterlife' of the ancient past as analogous, he argues, to the wider childhood of civilisation. In *Illuminations* Walter Benjamin's quest to reconstruct the lost Europe of his youth is grasped at through his accumulation of fragments; the quest itself is engaged with as a powerful acting back against the contemporary threat of fascism (Benjamin 1968). Crucially too, our quest centred upon how constituents and constituencies previously made marginal and/or excluded from heritage pathways routinised by power similarly engage in struggles to 'act back' in new heritage quests, in which diversity and social justice reveal and create 'new-old' facts on the ground. As such, we adopted, adapted and subverted uncritical, routinised notions of the journey-quest. Here new and alternative motifs of heritage communion – whether possession, dreamtime, intangible evocations and/or activist paradigms – are taken up and taken on.

## Between the acts: *Time Passes*

Virginia Woolf describes the structure of *To the Lighthouse* as 'two blocks joined by a corridor'. This corridor, titled in the novel *Time Passes*, separates two holidays to the Isle of Skye taken a decade apart, from 1910 to 1920. This short section of the novel, just 20 pages in length, considers the meaning of time by contrasting the quiet stillness of the house with the momentous events unfolding around the novel's characters, especially the sudden and unexpected death of Mrs Ramsey, the central protagonist in the book's first 'block'. These developments are delivered with taut, emotionless brevity, enclosed in parenthesis to keep them separate from the actions of the house.

> [Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.] (Woolf 1943b, 140)

Alongside these personal moments are events of collective importance, including the outbreak of the First World War. With the people gone, the house is flooded in darkness, punctuated by the rhythmic, wandering beam of the lighthouse. The house and its contents are threatened with gradual deterioration and erosion through the weather. As it moves across these things, the wind asks, 'Will you fade? Will you perish?' The objects defiantly reply 'We remain', and the house becomes becalmed. This stillness is interrupted only by the movement of Mrs McNab, the elderly housekeeper, who counters her worries about the building's decay with memories of when it was occupied by the Ramsey family. Again and again the question resurfaces in her mind: will they ever return? They do – a decade later.

The way in which Woolf compresses the passing of a decade to 20 pages can be seen as an articulation of lockdown in which the routinisation of days, its *unchangingness*, made time itself feel becalmed (Erll 2020) – but also made days, as several students recalled, indistinguishable. Returning to the strange distortive effect on time of the pandemic on Monday 3 December 2020, eight weeks into term, all teaching was moved online – the COVID-19 rates had risen too high.

Like the Ramsey's house, the IoA was closed off and locked down; so was much of the surrounding university, apart from Gordon and Tavistock squares. A weekly virtual heritage bar (hosted by David Francis throughout the degree) and virtual heritage tea (hosted by Rachel King in term two) were organised to help students and staff remain connected during this time. Several students who had begun the term remotely and arrived in December expecting to experience a British Christmas for the first time were suddenly faced with remote teaching in lockdown London:

> It was freezing winter weather when I arrived in London, a place described in the news in China as 'an abyss of COVID-suffering'. However, I thought how years in the future I didn't want to talk about my school without knowing first-hand the UCL campus. I thought 'I must go and see it!' Hence I headed to London alone, with a big jar of my mother's hand-made chili sauce and a suitcase of perfume, to explore in the direction of UCL's entrance gate.
>
> If the summer in London was the longest of my life, the winter in London was the loneliest. Maybe the change started at the Heritage Bar every Friday, which became my expectation and solace during that time. When I asked curiously whether the statue in Victoria Park topped with ice thorns was an artistic innovation of cultural heritage, David told me that the device was used to prevent pigeons. Then he saw the picture I took of them standing on the statue: it obviously did not work.
>
> Like the warm sunshine in winter in London, the Heritage Bar accompanied me through the lonely lockdown days. I explored the city more actively and collected more interesting stories to share with my friends in the virtual bar. Many years later, I should not only be able to tell others about the direction of the UCL entrance gate, but I also have many stories to share about my journey to it. (Student reflection)

Other students made the difficult decision to return home while they were able to – facing expensive flights and lengthy quarantines in the process:

> Everything changed after receiving an email informing us that the whole university will not have face-to-face teaching during the second and probably the third term, due to the pandemic situation. Accordingly, we packed our things and joined the massive exodus before the borders closed. From then on I passed through different emotions and feelings, such as denial, frustration and anguish. All of these are in parallel (and disconnection) with a study process that never stops and demands an important amount of time. Moreover, I had to postpone or disrupt the process many times since I had to face unexpected circumstances.
>
> In line with the above, I might say that COVID-19, the lockdowns and digital teaching have changed the way we sense the passing of time. Time gained another value and meaning to me since the physical tick-tock of the outside world became mute. Days passed unnoticed at the laptop as I logged in and logged out. Every day seemed to be a deadline or a day closer to something scheduled which, due to the pandemic, might never happen. Consequently, and during these challenging times, I can say that I became (dis)connected to online processes, while our face-to-face time was something much more concrete (every Friday 2:00pm) than anything else. The relativeness of time depends on how it passes in our minds, more than in a physical or digital environment. (Student reflection)

During the first term, and into the second, Bev was writing an article based on a visit to Beijing in 2011 where she experienced an unexpected encounter she had with 'Bloomsbury in China'. This took the form of coming across an exhibition by the Chinese artist Chen Ke entitled *A Room of One's Own*, which was held in the Dashalar district of the city (Butler 2021). The article also explores Virginia Woolf's correspondence with the Chinese modernist writer and poet Ling Shuhua, a connection and relationship linking Bloomsbury and China that is discussed with MACHS staff and students. David then took up the task of photographing the bust of Virginia Woolf in Tavistock Square to include in the published article.

This bust of Virginia Woolf is located in the southwest corner of Gordon Square. It is a cast of an original made by Stephen Tomlin in 1931, now in the National Portrait Gallery. At a time when statues are such a media talking point, it feels significant to use a statue as a focal point. This is especially relevant given the debates around female statues sparked by the controversy surrounding Maggi Hambling's statue of the eighteenth-century 'mother of feminism' and author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* located in Newington Green, London, which depicts Mary Wollstonecraft naked (Brown 2020). The importance of having both historical and contemporary voices, advocacy and activitisms vis-à-vis women's rights traumatically and tragically came to the fore with the brutal murder of Sarah Everard later during lockdown in March 2021 (BBC News 2021). This in turn brought questions of gendered violence, women's safety and police failures and complicity into view.

Returning to Woolf, not only did she seek to highlight the impacts and implications of certain societal patriarchal portrayals of women and gender that frustrated quests for equality, but she was also reportedly not a fan of her own sculpture. It shows an excessively strife-ridden Virginia, which she regarded as more of a self-portrait of Tomlin than a rendition of herself (King 1994, 549). Significantly, the literary critic and Woolf's biographer Hermione Lee (1997, 622) argues that the author's discomfort with the statue is due to it making Woolf 'think of herself as an image, a thing … and that she could not bear to be pinned down and fixed'. Tomlin can perhaps be excused for seeking to reflect in the sculpture the expressive depth of the 'stream-of-consciousness' writing style that she pioneered. Indeed, Woolf's deep-set eyes are lightened somewhat by the quote beneath, in which she reflects on the inspiring effects of Tavistock Square in her writings, and by the offerings of flowers periodically placed at the statue's base by various literary pilgrims to Bloomsbury.

It is here that MACHS increasingly adopted Woolf as the conduit by which different messages of support and celebration are shared with students as teaching progresses in lockdown. These include celebrations of Christmas and signs that read 新年快乐 *Xīn nián kuài lè* (25 January) 'Happy New Year' for the Chinese Spring Festival, International Women's Day on 8 March and Happy Easter/Spring Break to name but a few (Figures 4a and 4b).[7] The statue becomes then

**Figure 4** (A–D) A woman for all seasons: Virginia Woolf's statue in Tavistock Square attracts messages of support and celebration throughout the year (C) Square haunting in the rain. Students and teachers meet face-to-face post-lockdown in typical British summer weather. (D) Full-circle Woolf: the group's 'heritage quest objects' are placed next to her statue in Tavistock Square. During our heritage quest David's son Kal hid the model of Pigsy and its whereabouts remain a mystery. Another iconic figure, Daddy Pig (Peppa Pig's father), was thus substituted for this photo. (Sources: photographs by (A)–(B) David Francis and (C)–(D) Ellen Pavey)

a beacon, like the Lighthouse, out of reach for many unable to travel into London. It also becomes a means of marking time as the months of lockdown pass. Woolf is thus actively deified as a MACHS totem, the rituals creating an ever more efficacious 'cosmology of the centre'. Like the Chinese Terracotta Warrior in the IoA foyer and Jeremy Bentham, installed in his new panoptic vantage point in the new UCL Student building, Woolf is one of several ancestor figures whose visages also acquired a carefully placed COVID mask.

## Act Four: 'Square haunting'

Returning to her essay on 'Street haunting' to further explore the relationship between object and self, Woolf contrasts the affirmation of self through objects experienced within *A Room of One's Own* with her ability to 'shed the self' when walking through the streets of London. She called such a process 'street haunting'. By means of 'street haunting', which resembles the flaneurial practices of the Situationists and London-based psychogeographers such as Ian Sinclair, the self could be lost through contact with the lives of others – including the 'non-human' – and with the city itself. These critical perspectives have the efficacy to recast the plurality of heritages of place as vibrant and dynamic psychogeographies. As Woolf reflects:

> Into each of these lives one could penetrate a little way, far enough to give oneself the illusion that one is not tethered to a single mind, but can put on briefly for a few minutes the bodies and minds of others. One could become a washerwoman, a publican, a street singer. And what greater delight and wonder can there be than to leave the straight lines of personality and deviate into those footpaths that lead beneath brambles and thick tree trunks into the heart of the forest where live those wild beasts, our fellow men? (Woolf 1943a, 490)

In using the term 'haunting', Woolf is exploring how this wandering is not simply an attempt to escape the self and possess or be possessed by others/othering, but also a search for a memory of a past self; this in turn assumes the metaphor of a moving river. Yet in retrying to regain this past self, Woolf argues, it is always tantalisingly out of reach:

> For if we could stand there where we stood six months ago, should we not be again as we were then – calm, aloof, content? Let us try then. But the river is rougher and greyer than we remembered. (Woolf 1943a, 490)

It is mid-summer, and this is the first time the three of us met together in person while teaching on the MACHS degree. We do so to meet

up with students and engage in our own 'street haunting'. We gather at the bust of Virginia Woolf in Tavistock Square while a circle of MACHS students who Ellen and David have not seen in person for six months and who meet Bev, Degree Co-ordinator, in person for the first time. The British weather, true to form, pours down rain on us on this London summer day, leaving the students to shelter under shared umbrellas (Figure 4c). The air is full of the distant chanting of England and Scotland football fans making their way down Euston Road, on their way to watch the group games of the Euros at Wembley stadium. We walk around Tavistock and Gordon Squares, both providing open-air spaces in which we can meet and talk, while encountering its monuments and memorials. Afterwards we go to the Institute of Education bar, replacing the virtual heritage one, to sit in tables of six according to restrictions and order our drinks from the app. It feels triumphant to be able to talk to the students in person again. In an impromptu ceremony, full of humour and celebration, plastic medals were given to students and to Woolf to underline the sense of achievement, camaraderie and play: students not able to be with us, located in China and elsewhere, joined us via social media.

Our in-person gathering was described by a student in these terms:

> In the Third Term we returned to Bloomsbury. After an uncertain year – consisting of a joyous first term on campus, then being plunged into gloomy isolation in the depths of winter – returning to Bloomsbury was a treasured familiarity. In the Second Term, I would still go to campus to use the library computers. But there was no life there, just the odd lonely student. The IoA was locked up. The environment was uninspiring, silent and sterilised (literally) after any signs of life.
>
> In summer our cohort was invited for a celebratory walk around Bloomsbury, on possibly the worst wet-weather day of the season. This gathering was a return to our origins, having toured Tavistock Square and Gordon Square together in the First Term. Umbrella in hand, I joined a practically squealing group of peers at the bust of Virginia Woolf. We were excited to connect after

> a period of distance and anonymity. The hilarity of excitement from our professors manifested in an amusingly chaotic tour of the Squares and surrounding UCL campus in the pouring rain. Being back in Bloomsbury, I felt reconnected to the roots of our intellectual journey over the past eight months. The place had special meaning for myself and my peers, and returning to it conjured a much-needed sense of belonging and orientation. (Student reflection)

In our wanderings around Gordon and Tavistock Squares, Woolf's concept of 'street haunting' allows us to reflect further on memorialisation and memory, drawing on a Bloomsburian perspective on time. These two squares can be seen as both highly concentrated centres of cultural memory, but ones from which networks stretch infinitely outwards. First, the heritage of the Bloomsbury group is commemorated and signified by the blue plaques that line the squares. Walking past the names of Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Clive and Vanessa Bell, Maynard Keynes and Lytton Strachey, who at various points lived next door to one another, it is striking how localised some of the key actors in the British Modernist movement were. Simultaneously, on entering the squares one encounters a variety of memorial statues and trees that commemorate key figures in the international pacifist movement. The local here is, as Evans and Rowlands (2021, 2) argue, not a fixed spatial definition of place, but rather a shifting arena of everyday life and belonging shaped profoundly – if not always evidently – by translocal and transcultural forces.

Woolf herself was a pacifist and her husband Leonard spent much of his life working for World Peace and was formative in the establishment of the League of Nations. It therefore feels appropriate that in Tavistock Square there is a statue dedicated to Mohandas 'Mahatma' Gandhi, a student at the University of London from 1888 to 1891. We visited the statue on our Bloomsbury gathering. Around the figure of Gandhi, cross-legged and head bowed in mediation, are other sites of memorial, dedicated to peace. These include a cherry tree planted on 6 August 1967 in memory of the victims of Hiroshima, a bench donated by Mothers for Peace and a slate stone commemorating International Conscientious Objectors' Day, unveiled on 15 May 1994

(on International Conscientious Objectors' Day itself). The themes of war and peace and the efficacies of 'street haunting' have recently been added to and extended further in a book by Francesca Wade (2020). It features a series of five female writers, scholars and intellectuals living in Bloomsbury in the interwar years whose presence and legacies, Wade argues, still haunt the squares. Featured here are Hilda Dolittle (H.D.), Dorothy L. Sayers, Jane Harrison and Eileen Power. The fifth and final female profiled in the book is Virginia Woolf; Wade explores her time living in Mecklenberg Square in the 1930s and during the Blitz: a period in which Woolf vividly conveys the almost unbearable realities of her personal experiences of war and its devastating effects on Bloomsbury.

Thinking back to the final fieldtrip of term one, students walked from Marble Arch to the corner of Green Park. On the way they encountered a parade of monuments and memorials dedicated to protagonists involved in conflict, beginning at the Animals in War Memorial[8] and ending with the Monument to Bomber Command. These memorials took on an added *presentness* during the pandemic. As Erll (2020, 866) has noted, memories of war, in particular the Second World War, have been used by the likes of Donald Trump, Boris Johnson and the Queen as a means of framing the crisis of the pandemic, while stirring up nationalist patriotism. In the UK this was helped along by the tabloid press that simultaneously evoked a 'COVID spirit' often conflated with Brexit Britain rhetoric. In contrast, Tavistock Square can be seen as populated with counter memorials to the dominant discourse of monuments in London's civic space, which commemorate the combatants and also sometimes the victims of war and conflict.

Part of the contrast arises from the fact that many memorials take the form of trees. They include a cherry tree planted in memory of the victims of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima, trees to commemorate the international Year of Peace in 1986 planted by the League of Jewish Women, a tree in memory of Nirmal Rey (a lifelong campaigner against apartheid and racism) and another to mark a hundred years of caring in the public service, planted by the National Union of Public Employees. These tree memorials and the squares' green spaces carry a number of associations that stone monuments lack; being alive, they fluctuate and change with the seasons. They also have a particular connection to time, both in the capacity potentially to outlive the human life span

while also having a finite existence. These living memorials also evoke salient agendas of climate change, climate action and climate justice; and remind us of the importance of centring such heritage within our quest. Our 'square haunting' encountered trees that have been replaced, for example the copper beach tree planted in 1953 by the Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, in connection with Camden Council's donation of a site for the erection of a statue to Gandhi. Conversely, we encountered trees that were powerful and poignant symbols of survival, for instance the Gingko trees, which survived the bombing of Hiroshima.

Despite this overriding focus on peace and pacifism, violence and conflict is woven into the fabric and memoryscape of Tavistock Square; it provides the subject of a tour devised by our IoA colleague Gabe Moshenska called *Bombs in Bloomsbury.* This tour, for example, takes in the six-tonne, pig iron memorial plaque to the 13 victims of the bus bombing at Tavistock Square on 7 July 2005. Placed in the flowerbed, it forms a disruption to the lush undergrowth of the Square's border and frames the view to the exact location of the incident in the road. Many of the victims were treated by the British Medical Association, whose headquarters are located across the road from the square; some of those caught up in the chaos and horror of that day found sanctuary and respite in the IoA. Violence is also visible in its absences, such as the removal of the graceful, wrought-iron railings that once formed the perimeter fence of Tavistock Square, melted down for weapons in the Second World War and later replaced by more rudimentary versions. Woolf lived in 52 Tavistock Square until 1939, when she moved east to Mecklenburgh Square where Wade (2020) takes up the story. Both houses were badly damaged during the Blitz and her former home is now the site of the Tavistock Hotel.

## Act Five: internationalism: Bloomsbury beyond Bloomsbury

As well as the pacifist movement, the other transnational elements of the square embedded in its memoryscape are the monuments

to international modernists from elsewhere. Just off the centre of Gordon Square is a bust of the poet Rabindranath Tagore, the first Nobel Laureate from Asia who was a student at the University of London. This particular memorial was unveiled in 2011 in to mark the 150th anniversary of the poet's birth. Tagore was an exponent of international modernism. His poem *'Crescent Moon'* was taken as a name for a group of modernist writers in China; among them was Ling Shuhua who, as previously mentioned, became a long-term correspondent with Virginia Woolf. Indeed she encouraged Ling to write her autobiographical modernist text *Ancient Melodies* (1953). Another tree in Tavistock Square is dedicated to Leonard Woolf by what is signed *the Ceylon Bloomsbury Group*. Leonard Woolf worked as a civil servant in Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka) and set his novel *The Village in the Jungle* (1913), described as 'a marker for the beginning of the Contemporary Period of our Modern Cultural History', there. In effect, the tree dedicated to Woolf is not only an offering, but also a chance to write back.

Although the pandemic restricted access to the facilities of the IoA, the necessary push to embrace digital communication that it brought about has enabled new dialogues and possibilities to emerge, as this student reflects:

> Joining UCL four years ago as an undergraduate foreign student was an overwhelming experience, and the Institute of Archaeology quickly imposed itself as both an anchor and a guide. It was therefore a cruel disillusionment to have my Master's interrupted by the pandemic.
>
> A century after Virginia Woolf's essay 'A Room of One's Own', I was ironically locked up in mine, but I had an infinity of opportunities from my computer. In my quest for heritage, I reflected on what impact studying outside of a traditional place of exchange had on my inner questionings. New learning practices and rituals replaced the old ones, but rather than seeing this as a deprivation I came to understand it was an opportunity.
>
> Being part of a group of humans from all over the world exchanging past, present and future practices thanks to years of humanity's progress was an incredibly humbling experience. It

taught me, in Beverley Butler's words, 'how the world acts on me and how I act back on it'. This digital year will forever shape the way I approach knowledge as a privilege, a place of exchange and an act of empowerment. (Student reflection)

These dialogues did not happen only digitally, however. The MACHS cohort in London met up again in ritual fashion by Woolf's statue in more clement weather to celebrate the completion of their heritage quest/MACHS degree (Figure 4d). In addition, for two students who lived in different regions in China, the MACHS course and Woolf in particular provided an opportunity for a post-lockdown meeting in the streets of Dashalar in Beijing. Inspired by hearing about the connection between Ling Shuhua and Woolf these two students – who had never previously met – together decided to bring Bloomsbury to Beijing; they visited the street that Butler (2021) had written about in her article, 'Encountering Virginia Woolf in Dashalar'.

For that day, [student A] … brought the book *Ancient Melodies* with her, and she told me about the story of these two female authors who had a great physical distance between them writing letters to each other to encourage their writing. We went on a book hunt, hoping to find the book by Woolf in a local bookstore to make these two authors 'encounter' each other again. Unfortunately, we couldn't find a copy, yet I felt like the two of us meeting up was similar: we had been helping each other out through our remote study, and now we were finally able to meet up in person! I am not sure if Ling Shuhua wrote about the food she had, but the sweet cake with sesame paste (麻酱糖饼) that we had that day was awesome, and I hope you can come and enjoy it one day too! (Reflection by student B)

I was impressed by the bustling scenes of Beijing that Ling narrated in *Ancient Melodies*. When I walk along Hutongs in Dashalar, I feel closer to the past glories of Beijing and understand more about Ling's sensations. We wanted to find a bookstore and buy *A Room of One's Own* and take pictures for our companions in Bloomsbury. However, no one was selling this book, which reminded me of

> Ling's difficulty in obtaining Western books. I think our quest for Woolf's book is our way of bringing Bloomsbury to Beijing: perhaps the bookstore owners we spoke to may plan to purchase more books written by Woolf or other writers from Bloomsbury. (Reflection by student A)

## Concluding reflections and future quests

During the 'quest' that has been this article, the above reflections iterate the vitalities and efficacies of heritage as sites of crossings-over, renewal and creativity – and also as struggles to sustain and maintain wellbeing, if not to nurture strategies that allow wellbeing to flourish. Woolf as a shared object, whether communed with as muse, spirit guide or as a 'lighthouse' to reach, united our unique 'COVID heritage quest'. As the student reflections show, this quest was capable of encompassing not only Bloomsbury but heritage encounters in Beijing and beyond that have significant, ongoing, extended 'afterlives'. Such complex journeying permeated the whole experience of the degree. Despite and/or because the COVID-19 pandemic created so much difficulty, fear and extremis, it required new solidarities – 'new pedagogies of the pandemic', to evoke Freire again – in terms of crafting mutualities of shared experiences and wisdoms learned. Even as Bloomsbury and UCL/IoA have their own diverse ancestors/ancestry, they are ultimately remade and kept alive by the students, adding new layers of their own to its stratigraphy. Woolf offered a certain way of working through points of difficulty and impasse that brought many challenges with it. In this sense the return to/of the ancestor of the shared past can be seen as heritage efficacy, in terms of providing the localising of diverse constellations of care and protection that mapped global tropes. Ultimately, these were also seized upon as a means of taking forward the shared promise of fulfilment, thus moving such quests on into a better future.

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photographs that appear in the above were gained with the full permission and consent of MACHS students who agreed to them featuring in this article.

We would like to thank Virginia Woolf for inspiring our recast 'heritage quest' and for sharing her ongoing efficacies. Most of all, we would like to extend our most sincere thanks to MACHS students – aka self-identifying as the 'COVID Class of 2020–21' – for being co-participants in the production of this article and, writ larger still, for getting themselves and us through our shared 'heritage quest' with such resilience, camaraderie and lots and lots of hard work.

Finally, we reiterate and dedicate Woolf's words that featured at the start of this article to them: 'The journey is everything. Most necessary of all, but rarest good fortune … [is that] we share it.'

## Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work.

## Notes

1 The bust was bought prior to the start of term for the specific purpose of making introductions, sharing the heritage of Bloomsbury with students and to begin the initial nomination and sharing of 'heritage quest objects'. Interestingly Bill Payne, the artist who made the bust and who lives and works outside London, was pleased to know that in posting his artwork to the IoA 'Virginia Woolf was coming home to Bloomsbury'.

2 https://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture/projects/bricks-mortals Of note too is the Bloomsbury Black history walking tour https://drawingoverthecolourline.wordpress.com/2012/11/05/postcards-and-bloomsbury-black-history-walking-tour-leaflets/. The surrounding Bloomsbury area has also nurtured countercultures, creative intellectual groups and protest movements, including the suffragettes and the Bloomsbury Group. It has been home to, among others, Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Vladimir Lenin and Bob Marley.

3 See also Butler (forthcoming) for a discussion of the 'Palestinian Collection' synonymous with Flinders Petrie at the IoA and its essentialised role in the founding of the IoA and the potential future 'rehousing' of the collection.

4 On the question of Woolf as an elitist figure, Alison Light's *Mrs Woolf and the Servants* (2008) offers an approach to Bloomsbury (the people / movement and area) and snobbery.

5 Phillis Wheatley is credited as being the first African American and second woman (after Anne Bradstreet) to publish a book of poems (Michals 2015).
6 The preparation and recording of which often extended into the early hours. Colleagues no doubt will recognise the enormity of this new challenge which was a significant outcome of pandemic working lives.
7 It is worth adding that Bev shared some of these images of Woolf's statue with the Virginia Woolf Society, who expressed pleasure that 'someone who lives locally is still visiting VW in her corner of Tavistock Square garden! Most of us haven't seen her for ages' (personal communication, 12 February 2021).
8 It is of note too that animals (in the form of staff and student pets) featured in our quest during the pandemic as honoured companion familiars, images of which were circulated on Teams.

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