

Institution: University of St Andrews 
Unit of Assessment: 29 - English Language and Literature
Title of case study: <i>Vanessa and Virginia: recreating Virginia Woolf for a popular audience</i>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Editorial and biographical research on the work of Virginia Woolf, carried out primarily by Susan Sellers, fed directly into the composition of <i>Vanessa and Virginia</i>, a novel by Sellers about Woolf's relationship with her sister. In 2008 <i>Vanessa and Virginia</i> was published by a small independent publisher set up in 2006 in the north-west Highlands of Scotland. It became the press's most commercially successful publication and ensured its early economic viability. The novel was subsequently published in North America and translated into more than a dozen languages. It was also turned into a successful, internationally-staged play. This case study therefore claims several types of impact: (1) exporting the cultural heritage of the UK and stimulating international public interest in Woolf; (2) generating economic prosperity for a small entrepreneurial business in a remote part of Scotland, and for the creative industries (theatre and international publishing) more widely; (3) inspiring and facilitating the work of other cultural practitioners; (4) enriching cultural life in the UK and abroad. The users of this research are: the directors of an independent publishing company; translators and international publishing houses; the director, producer and actors of a touring theatre company; the reading and theatre-going public.</p> 
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Since her appointment in 1995, Susan Sellers, a researcher in post at St Andrews throughout the assessment period, and a member of both the School's Modern and Contemporary Research Group (RG), and its Creative Writing RG, has carried out extensive research, including archival work and scholarly editing, on the fictional and non-fictional prose of Virginia Woolf.</p> <p>The first published output to result from this research was <i>The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf</i>, (2000), with Sellers as co-editor and contributing a chapter on 'Virginia Woolf's diaries and letters'. [R1] This led directly to Cambridge University Press offering Sellers a contract to serve as one of two General Editors for a new scholarly edition of Woolf's writings. Thirteen volumes have been contracted and Sellers is the co-editor of the second of these, <i>The Waves</i>, together with Michael Herbert, a researcher in the School throughout the assessment period until his retirement in June 2013, and a colleague of Sellers in the School's Modern and Contemporary RG. [R2]</p> <p>The purpose of this new edition was twofold: to provide a full list of variants between the versions of Woolf's texts, and to provide full annotation for the rich weave of allusions in Woolf's writing. Despite Woolf's importance no adequate edition of her work previously existed; her writing was presented in a plethora of differently edited versions, a number of which contained errors. None of the previous editions had the scope to annotate the many literary, cultural, historical, political, scientific and other references in her work, and during the course of her research at St Andrews Sellers discovered many hitherto unnoticed allusions, for instance those based on Woolf's knowledge of Latin and Greek. The CUP multi-volume edition of Woolf, then, represents a major scholarly undertaking that will require many years of rigorous, detail-focused research.</p> <p>Work on the CUP Woolf edition has continued in the School's Modern and Contemporary RG from 2003 to the present day. AHRB/C grant income supported two full-time postdoctoral researchers to work on the edition from 2005 to 2007, with one of them based at St Andrews (see R2 below for grant details). Furthermore, since the appointment in 2003 of Emma Sutton as a researcher in the School and a colleague in the School's Modern and Contemporary RG, Sellers and her editorial team have been able to draw on Sutton's own research expertise for advice on Woolf's extensive</p>

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references to, and uses of, music in her writing. Sutton's complementary research in this area is published in an Edinburgh University Press monograph, and both demonstrates and reinforces the strength of the School's reputation for excellence in Woolf studies. Sellers' long-term research project has already started to deliver results in the form of scholarly, peer-reviewed outputs, with the first two volumes of the CUP edition (including Sellers' own co-edited volume, *The Waves*) being published in 2011, and accompanied by an edition [launch at Senate House](#), London in February 2011. The third volume of the series, *The Years*, came out in 2013.

All of this research on the texts of Woolf's novels, diaries and letters fed directly into the composition of Sellers' novel *Vanessa and Virginia* (2008). [R3] Dealing with the relationship between Virginia Woolf and her sister Vanessa Bell, Sellers' novel reveals a dramatic interpretation of one of the most iconic events in twentieth-century literary history: Woolf's suicide. In part *Vanessa and Virginia* represents a popularization of Sellers' scholarship. In addition, the narrative technique and lyrical interior monologue of Sellers' novel is both influenced by, and also a deeply engaged study of, Woolf's own prose style. [3] *Vanessa and Virginia* then, occupies a double position in this case study, being both a practice-led research output (a well-researched historical novel, such as might be submitted in REF2 from any Creative Writing colleague in UoA 29), as well as vehicle for impact, stimulating interest in Woolf's life and work among non-scholarly audiences.

3. References to the research

R1) *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers (Cambridge University Press, 2000). Co-edited scholarly collection. Sellers also authored the chapter 'Virginia Woolf's diaries and letters', pp. 109-127. RAE 2001 output. Second, revised edition 2010 with Sellers as sole editor.

R2) Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, ed. Susan Sellers with Michael Herbert (Cambridge University Press, 2011). Scholarly edition. Volume 2 of a 13 volume series for which Sellers is also series co-editor. Funded by an AHRC (then AHRB) Resource Enhancement Scheme grant of c. £173,000 for [The St Andrews/Dundee Research Edition of the Writings of Virginia Woolf](#) (RE/AN5991/APN19544), awarded to Sellers and her co-general editor. The grant-funded project ran for two years from March 2005. Output listed in REF2.

R3) Susan Sellers, *Vanessa and Virginia* (Two Ravens Press; Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008; 2009). Literary novel. Winner of an East of England Escalator Award, 2007 and a New Writing Partnership Arts Council Award, 2008. Output listed in REF2.

4. Details of the impact

i1) Literary heritage of a major British author is adapted and interpreted for the reading public, simultaneously contributing to the economic prosperity of the creative industries in a remote region of the UK.

Sellers' *Vanessa and Virginia* was published in June 2008 by Two Ravens Press, a small Scottish independent literary publishing company. Founded in 2006 near Ullapool in the Highlands, Two Ravens has since relocated to Uig on the Isle of Lewis. *Vanessa and Virginia* retails for £8.99 and at the end of assessment period had sold around 2,100 copies and around 50 e-books in the UK, most orders being taken directly through Two Ravens' website. [S1] According to the Director of Two Ravens: 'This makes it our bestselling work of fiction, and Two Ravens Press' bestselling book ever. It is unusual for a small literary press to sell more than 1000 copies of a work of literary fiction, especially by a first-time novelist, and so the fact that *Vanessa and Virginia* has done so well (and, on the strength of our UK publication, been sold on to the USA and several other countries) has meant that we have been able to use this success story as inspiration to other authors we publish. It also gave us credibility when applying for a block funding grant from the Scottish Arts Council, which we obtained in 2009.' [S1] Clearly, then, Sellers' work was significant in helping to establish the viability of this independent, entrepreneurial business in its early years.

i2) UK Cultural heritage is exported, creating wealth in the international publishing industry.

Vanessa and Virginia was picked up and marketed intensively by international publishers, first in North America by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, who published it in hardback in 2009 (\$23). A US

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paperback followed in 2010 (Mariner, \$13.95). [An audio book](#) accompanies these editions. Moreover, that *Vanessa and Virginia* was selected for the [Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writing](#) awards 2009 [S7] and was picked by [The New York Times](#) in May 2010 as editor's choice, [S8] are indications of the significance of its impact in the US publishing industry. Translation enabled penetration of global markets, with the novel published in France, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Brazil and China. [S6] The Chinese version was made by Professor Yang Lixin (Nanjing University), a visiting Research Fellow at St Andrews from 2010-2011, during which time she collaborated with Sellers on the project. Translations into Finnish, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Lithuanian, Polish and Russian are in press. That the novel has been translated into over a dozen languages so far is a measure of its unusually wide international reach.

i3) Other arts practitioners adapt Sellers' novel, interpreting her work to enrich the imagination of new audiences, and providing employment in the creative industries and generating revenue for a theatre company and several theatres.

During 2009 *Vanessa and Virginia* was adapted for the stage by a practising playwright. This attracted interest from a freelance director who set up a company, Moving Stories, specifically to tour the play, opening in September 2010 and running until April 2013. Plans made during the period of assessment will result in its revival for the New York stage in 2014. Moving Stories secured AHRC funding to launch the play (Knowledge Catalyst Transfer scheme AH/I500618/1, £26,220). Tour dates have included around a dozen venues in the UK and the play has also been staged at Aix-en-Provence, Krakow and Regensburg. Total audience for the play at its various performances to the end of July 2013 was over 3,600 people, with almost 1200 of those seeing the play at the Riverside Studios in London, where it ran from 26 March to 14 April 2013. [S3] A British Sign Language-signed performance of the play was given on 13 April, and while at the Riverside it received five nominations for the [2013 Off West-End Theatre Awards](#). [S9] Sellers gave a talk at the Riverside to coincide with the production. Over the the play's performance-span the staging of *Vanessa and Virginia* provided work for a total of fourteen people, including producers, a designer, lighting engineers, and three actors (launching the professional careers of two), an image company (Artwork media), and a musical director for approximately 32 months. [S3] The Artistic Director of Moving Stories reports '*owing to the success of V&V [their first ever production] we have been invited by the Riverside Studios to become an affiliate company, and they have commissioned both our next play [...] and invited us to take the 'Stop-Look-Listen' project to the Edinburgh Festival next summer under their banner [...] The success of Vanessa and Virginia at the Riverside has significantly enhanced our company profile and reputation and given us a foundation on which to build.*' [S3] The actors called Sellers '*our greatest research resource*' and reported that '*regular feedback from audience members [...] was that the play had made them want to go and find out more about the sisters themselves, to read more Woolf, [...] the play brought Professor Sellers' novel, research on Woolf and Bloomsbury to a new audience*'. [S4] Sellers is currently collaborating with New York based theatre company Shakespeare's Sister, preparing for their upcoming production of the play with 'pump-prime' funding of c. £1000 from the Carnegie Trust.

i4) Public cultural life at home and abroad is enriched as a result of Sellers' research and programming content is created for the arts and broadcasting media industries.

Sellers worked to ensure that *Vanessa and Virginia* has been at the centre of a wide range of public events both in the UK and abroad. A sample of these includes readings and/or public talks and lectures at: Essex Book Festival; Heffers bookshop to launch Cambridge Wordfest, plus three other events at this festival; Welborne Arts Festival; Tramway Theatre Glasgow; Sunday Times Oxford Literary Festival. Sellers also spoke at Aix-en-Provence and Regensburg (both to coincide with the local premiere of the play); the University of Oslo; the International Culture Centre, Krakow, Poland and the Lincoln Centre, New York. The Director of her British publishing press has remarked that this intense promotional activity makes Sellers '*by far Two Ravens Press' most active author*', also noting that she has '*raised the profile of Two Ravens Press considerably*'. [S1] This strongly indicates that the economic benefit to the independent press mentioned at (i1) is in part a direct result of the public engagement detailed here in (i4).

As a result of the success of *Vanessa and Virginia*, and a mark of its ongoing impact, Sellers was invited to serve as literary advisor to the steering committee for 'To the Lighthouse Festival: For

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Readers and Writers' (24/09/11 - 7/10/11, Cambridgeshire). The festival aimed to help reading groups engage with and discuss Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*, offering web materials, talks, workshops and tours. Ten libraries across Cambridgeshire took part, hosting displays, and approximately 700 members of the public took part in the reading groups and library workshops set up to promote knowledge and understanding of Woolf's novel. A competition for schools was included, and a performance of the play was preceded by a talk for local schools and members of 'The Phoenix', a NHS tier 4 specialist inpatient unit for young women with eating disorders. The former County Literature Officer for Cambridgeshire has remarked that the Festival '*had a huge impact on The Phoenix*' and the families of the women there. [S5]

Radio broadcasts provide further evidence of the increasing reach and significance of Sellers' work: *Vanessa and Virginia* was chosen for BBC Radio Cambridgeshire's 'Book a Day in May', and an interview with Sellers was subsequently broadcast (25/05/09, weekly listening figure 136,000); Sellers was also interviewed about her novel for WNYC Public Radio's [Leonard Lopate Show](#) (05/06/09, monthly listening figures of 11.5M in 2012, data unavailable for 2009) [S10, S11]; Sellers was a major contributor to a special 45-minute edition of [Woman's Hour, BBC Radio 4](#) on Virginia Woolf (22/10/09, reach of 9,841,000 listeners), [S12] and was also interviewed for [Radio Cambridge 105](#) (08/10/11, reach of 108,000 listeners) [S13]. Podcasts of these radio broadcasts continue to provide legacy resources. Sellers' work was also taken up, cited and discussed on the website of [Freshies](#), a non-profit rights organisation not normally concerned with literature.

[Legacy Resources](#) for this case study will be curated at the School's webpage to provide continuing benefit to our users beyond the end of this REF cycle.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1) Director of Two Ravens Press. Corroborates the importance of Sellers' work to Two Ravens Press. [i1 & i4]
- S2) Sellers' Literary Agent. Corroborates the impact that the work has had on Moving Stories Theatre Company. [i2]
- S3) Artistic Director of Moving Stories. Corroborates the influence of the work on the stage performance of *Vanessa & Virginia*. [i3]
- S4) Actress playing Vanessa Ball for Moving Stories. Corroborates the impact of the work at the To the Lighthouse Festival on the women of the Phoenix eating disorders unit. [i3]
- S5) Former County Literature Officer for Cambridgeshire: to corroborate details of the 'To the Lighthouse Festival' [i4]
- S6) [Vanessa and Virginia](#) website: to corroborate number of foreign translations [i2]
- S7) [Barnes and Noble](#) website. Corroborates that *Vanessa & Virginia* won a Discover Great New Writing Award. [i2]
- S8) [New York Times](#) website. Corroborates claim *Vanessa & Virginia* was an editor's choice. [i2]
- S9) [Off West-End Theatre Awards](#) website. Corroborating the play's nominations. [i3]
- S10) Podcast of Sellers on the [Leonard Lopate Show](#). Evidence of her appearance there. [i4]
- S11) Website hosted pdf of [NYPR 2012 Annual Report](#), pp. 3-4. Corroborates WNYC Public Radio listening figures. [i4]
- S12) Podcast of [Woman's Hour Virginia Woolf Special](#). Evidence of Sellers' appearance. [i4]
- S13) Podcast of [Radio Cambridge 105 Book Night](#) special. Evidence of Sellers' appearance. [i4]