

Virginia Woolf, Hope and Wonder

International Virginia Woolf Society Panel for MLA 2022

“The future is dark, which is the best thing the future can be, I think.” Rebecca Solnit’s essay, “Woolf’s Darkness,” opens with this quotation from Woolf, and follows with a discussion that celebrates Woolf’s investment in uncertainty and even darkness as a space of possibility. As Solnit writes, darkness is the time in which “things merge, change, become enchanted, aroused, impregnated, possessed, released, renewed.”

In a similar vein, Paul Saint-Amour notes that Woolf’s “diary entry for June 27, 1940, reads, ‘I can’t believe there will be a 27th June 1941.’ All the same, she went on to make one of the most radical feminist statements of her time, on behalf of a future she didn’t believe she would live to see.” Woolf has, Saint-Amour marvels, “the courage to make both connections and distinctions — between men and women, soldiers and civilians, one’s own death and another’s death — in the face of a threat that would efface them all.”

As Woolf teaches critics how to write clearly and sympathetically in the midst of uncertainty or darkness, her works offer a primer on hope, wonder, and play. Such achievements are hard-earned; Woolf rejects sentimentalism even as she reimagines distraction, uncertainty, and dread to awaken such wonder. This panel seeks papers that show us how and where hope surfaces in Woolf’s writing. Potential topics include:

- The transformation of the sublime in Woolf’s modernism
- Woolf’s reactions to nature
- Woolf’s alternatives to national memorials following the First World War
- Ethical and aesthetic responses to the war
- Portrayals of childhood
- The place of art, frivolity and joy during times of darkness
- How does Woolf’s oeuvre combat popular portrayals of Woolfian melancholy?

Please send CVs and abstracts of 300 words to Angela Harris (angela.cat.harris@gmail.com) by March 15.