S. P. ROSENBAUM

The Bloomsbury Group Memoir Club

Edited with an Introduction and an Afterword by

JAMES M. HAULE

THE BLOOMSBURY GROUP MEMOIR CLUB

Also by S. P. Rosenbaum

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The Bloomsbury Group Memoir Club

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University of Toronto

Edited with an Introduction and Afterword by
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This history is dedicated to
Naomi Black

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Introduction

James M. Haule

When S. P. 'Pat' Rosenbaum died in the spring of 2012 after a short illness, he left uncompleted his book on the Memoir Club. Some months earlier, I spoke to him about his plans and what he hoped to achieve, offering the same easy encouragement I had numerous times before. I was sure he would succeed, I said, even though what he proposed seemed nearly impossible. I had reason for optimism. He had done this before when composing each of his books on Bloomsbury. Pat was not just an accomplished literary historian, but a fine philosopher and literary critic. The intellectual quality I admired most in him, aside from his searing honesty, was his ability to remember. He could speak with authority on even the most disparate details of twentieth-century literature and history, marshalling the elements of many disciplines to illuminate not just a manuscript but an age. His loss was deeply felt, most especially by his family. Once the shock of Pat's death began to ebb into grief, another loss seemed likely. The Memoir Club book, unfinished and in pieces, was surely gone as well. In this, happily, I was wrong.

Naomi Black, Pat's wife, sent me what he had completed and asked that I read it with an eye to its disposition. I was surprised by what I found. It was not merely a series of notes and outlines, but over five chapters, provisionally edited and proofread. It was Pat's voice not just telling the story of one of the most fascinating associations in the history of English letters but also explaining it, linking the papers they presented with the work of their lifetimes, work we rightly see as critical to our understanding of literature and politics and history in the early twentieth century. Although *The Bloomsbury Group Memoir Club* is unfinished, his account of the Club's early years is nearly complete. In it he provides a

firm basis for our understanding of how the group was formed and how it operated, and marks a path through the remaining evidence to allow us, in time, to complete the work he began. It was clearly among his most valuable contributions, and I knew it must be shared. The current volume is the result.

S. P. Rosenbaum's plans for his book were described in his keynote address at the exhibit entitled 'A Room of Their Own: The Bloomsbury Artists in American Collections' held at Cornell University in October 2009.[1] He knew that he had a problem at the outset: what was the Bloomsbury Group and who were its members? This would be

> difficult to say for several reasons. First of all, essentialist definitions won't work because the members of the Group display [no] common and peculiar characteristics but rather an overlapping interconnected similarity of ideas and attitudes such as their values and beliefs concerning individual consciousness, external nature, isolation, time and space, love and death. Unlike most other kinds of intellectual or artistic groups, the Bloomsbury Group was not formed out of common beliefs or shared aspirations. Bloomsbury originated rather in families and old friendships which predated any of the Group's achievements or fame. From these relationships they developed into a collectivity whose work deeply influenced modern English literature, visual art, aesthetics, criticism, and international economics as well as modern attitudes towards feminism, pacifism, and sexuality. The development of Bloomsbury over two generations is another reason why notions of the Group can be elusive. Some members of the Group itself were convinced it ended with the First World War while others distinguished between Old Bloomsbury before the war and Later Bloomsbury that flourished in the 1920s and 30s.

Few outside Bloomsbury knew of the existence of the Club until publications by members eventually acknowledged its existence. In the spring of 1949 a posthumous book by John Maynard Keynes appeared entitled *Two Memoirs*. In his introduction, David Garnett noted that the memoirs were first 'read to a small audience of old and intimate friends . . . to whom the writer

could speak entirely without reserve . . . '[2] Virginia Woolf had alluded to the Club years earlier in her 1940 biography of Roger Fry when she said Fry's childhood memoirs were 'written for friends who took a humorous rather than a reverential view of eminent Victorians' and 'no doubt owed a little to the temper of the audience'.[3] This context is important since, 'David Garnett's and Virginia Woolf's emphases on the context of Keynes' and Fry's memoirs are fundamental to understanding these memoirs and the Club for which they and others were written.' This is a topic to which Rosenbaum returns often in his book.

Membership in the Club changed with the years as members resigned or died and others were added. Their memories are our first source of information. Second are the memoirs they read to the Club in whatever condition they now exist, supplemented by published and unpublished diaries and member correspondence. In 1975 Rosenbaum edited a number of these memoirs in a collection that was revised twenty years later.[4] Aware of the memoirs, correspondence and diaries that had come to light in recent years, Rosenbaum knew it was possible to sketch a history of the Memoir Club and of the Bloomsbury Group that formed it. He begins at the beginning:

> Let's start, as all accounts of Bloomsbury seem to, with a cast of characters. The original members of the Memoir Club included the novelists and essayists Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, and Mary or Molly MacCarthy, the biographer and essayist Lytton Strachey, the economist John Maynard Keynes, the painters Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell, and Roger Fry, and the critics Clive Bell, Leonard Woolf, Desmond MacCarthy, in addition to Fry, Strachey and Keynes.

Rosenbaum is careful to draw attention to a central fact: all of these people were either related to one another or were undergraduate friends at two Cambridge colleges. Many brothers, sisters, friends, partners, husbands and wives never belonged to it, not Lytton Strachey's companion Carrington, not assorted Strachey and Stephen siblings. Like the Cambridge Apostles

before it, the Memoir Club was a very private group with highly selective admission. It all began with a letter of invitation:

> In the Spring of 1920 . . . Molly MacCarthy . . . sent out a letter to a group of people inviting them to the first meeting of what was to be a secret Memoir Club. They were all friends of the MacCarthys and included those who have come to be known as Old Bloomsbury as well as others such as Bertrand Russell . . . and the future diplomat Sydney Waterlow. . . . The original members of The Memoir Club consisted of the MacCarthys, Woolfs, Bells, Duncan Grant, Roger Fry, and Maynard Keynes. Shortly afterwards E. M. Forster expressed a desire to belong and joined the Club only to have characteristic misgivings over the years as to whether he really wanted to belong or not. And in addition to Waterlow, Mary Hutchinson – a cousin and confidante of Lytton Strachey's as well as Clive Bell's current lover – also belonged at the beginning of the Memoir Club . . .

Molly had an ulterior motive. She hoped it might encourage her dilatory husband Desmond to write his memoirs. She had tried something similar six years earlier when she started a Novel Club. Neither effort worked; Desmond wrote nothing. There was a second impulse behind the founding of the Memoir Club that was more successful; it brought together friends and relatives of Old Bloomsbury dispersed by World War I. As Rosenbaum notes in his address, 'the First World War remained the most disillusioning historical event in Bloomsbury's own history, and many of the Club's memoirs are about antebellum life'. This gathering of old friends and the companionship and entertainment it promised is a central point in Rosenbaum's book.

So is irony. Just before the founding of the Club three of its members published books that were deeply ironic: Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* in 1918, Maynard Keynes' *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* in 1919, and Leonard Woolf's *Empire and Commerce in Africa* early in 1920. Rosenbaum notes that it

> did not . . . escape the members of the Memoir Club that there was something rather ridiculous in a group of middle-aged friends . . . meeting regularly to read one another their memoirs. Irony is a pervasive characteristic

> of Bloomsbury memoirs. They were meant to amuse their friends, but they were also serious.

There were other influences on the founding of the Memoir Club. Roger Fry had been reading Marcel Proust since 1914 and urging him on his friends. In 1929 Clive Bell wrote the first book in English on Proust.

> Forster felt Proust helped him finish *A Passage to India*, and Virginia Woolf's development in the Twenties might be described as from the Joycean *Mrs Dalloway* to the Proustian *To the Lighthouse*. . . . The Shakespearean title of the translation of Proust's novel that Scott-Moncrieff began in 1922 better describes the remembrances of things past in Bloomsbury's memoirs than the French *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Bloomsbury memoirs are not searching for the past. Proust's title better describes my quest for the Memoir Club's history.

Rosenbaum identifies another formative inspiration for the Memoir Club: the secret undergraduate discussion group known formally as the Cambridge Conversazione Society. All the Bloomsbury men of the Memoir Club except Clive Bell and Duncan Grant were Cambridge Apostles, as the group was known. The Apostles read papers to close male friends with the utmost sincerity and humour. This was the model of the meetings of the Memoir Club. Rosenbaum notes that

> the Apostles' papers were objective, dispassionate sometimes irreverent discussions of almost any subject. The Memoir Club, confined to autobiography, made their memoirs reminiscences rather than apologetics or confessions. . . . The members were neither exercising self-justification or exorcising accumulated guilt. Their memoirs were remembrances.

The most significant Apostolic characteristic of the Memoir Club is audience.

> The Memoir Club . . . was composed of old friends and family who were thoroughly familiar with the lives, characters and personalities of each

> memoirist. Thus much could be taken [for] granted and not spelled out in the memoirs. What could be assumed on such occasions is sometimes overlooked by interpreters of the memoirs. The presence and pressure of intimate but critical listeners should never be forgotten in considering the Club's memoirs. . . . Indeed one of the Memoir Club's few rules was that no one should be affronted by anything read or said in the Club. That was the theory.

It was no place to go for comfort or support, certainly not applause.

The difference between a private and a public Bloomsbury memoir is, Rosenbaum tells us, a 'matter of tone'. Rosenbaum reminds us that a memoir for the Club was to be not only candid and serious but also entertaining. This tone, developed by a lifetime of association and deep affection, must be kept in mind as we read and interpret what the members presented in private meetings and then edited, often substantially, before publishing to the world.

The private nature of the Memoir Club is illustrated by a 1943 painting by Vanessa Bell.[5] Seated in a circle are Desmond MacCarthy, Molly MacCarthy, Quentin Bell, Forster, David Garnett, Vanessa Bell in a hat, Duncan Grant, Leonard Woolf, Maynard Keynes, and Lydia Keynes. And on the wall are Bloomsbury portraits of the three deceased members, Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey, and Roger Fry. Desmond MacCarthy, appropriately, is reading a paper. The number of Club members, about twelve, seems to have remained steady over the forty years of its existence. During that time, there were a total of 25 members. After the first meeting on 4 March 1920, Molly's original memoir plan proved too ambitious. The Club settled into having two or three memoirs read of an evening, some of them continuations of earlier ones.

One of the main sources of Memoir Club history are Virginia Woolf's diaries. Rosenbaum tells us why. 'No records were kept of the Club – no register of meetings, no minutes of them, no archive of memoirs.' One of the difficulties was that the writers often took their memoirs home after they were read. There seems

to have been some initial interest in keeping track of them, since 'Virginia Woolf once donated a handsome ledger to the Club in which to record the meetings. The members all inscribed their names, but when Quentin Bell, the last secretary of the Club, came to examine it, he found it was blank.' This makes the scattered accounts of meetings that survive in letters and diaries of special importance, as are the memoirs themselves, especially those that refer to previous ones.

Facing these limitations, Rosenbaum used three basic sources to construct his history: the members, their meetings, and finally the memoirs themselves. We know a good deal about many of the original members of the Club. All of them except Clive Bell have biographers. Some later members, most notably Frances Partridge and Julia Strachey, have as well. Membership in the Club was an issue that the members discussed in their letters and diaries over the years. With the deaths of Lytton Strachey in 1932, Roger Fry in 1934, Virginia Woolf in 1941 and Maynard Keynes in 1946, new members were invited to join. First sons, daughters or nieces of members were added; later a few friends, the men often Apostles, were elected. The Memoir Club met six times the first year, two or three times in the next two years. In 1922 Molly MacCarthy proposed quarterly meetings before meetings abruptly stopped. For five years there were none.

This did not mean that memoir was abandoned entirely. Rosenbaum tells us that the

> hiatus of Memoir Cub meetings corresponded, oddly, with an activity at Charleston . . . that resulted in a mocking juvenile commentary on some Bloomsbury lives. From 1923 to 1927 Vanessa and Clive's children Julian and Quentin produced a newspaper called *The Charleston* or *New Bulletin* for which Virginia Woolf wrote some of the commentary. Special numbers included a life of Vanessa, dictated by Virginia. Another number had the Strachean title *Eminent Charlestonians*. Anecdotes about Duncan Grant were nicely called *The Dunciad*, and a life of Clive Bell was entitled *The Messiah*, while the life and adventures of Maynard and Lydia Keynes took the name *The Tiltoniad* from Tilton, their Sussex home next to Charleston.

In 1928 Molly MacCarthy announced a last meeting of the Club to hear Virginia Woolf read something on Bloomsbury's beginnings. What was supposed to signal the end of the Club, however, seems to have resuscitated it. It met at least three times in the late Twenties and then at least a dozen times in the Thirties. There were a few meetings during World War II and another twelve in the Forties. In the Fifties and early Sixties the Club met once or twice a year. The end came with the death of four original members: the MacCarthys in 1952 and 1953, Vanessa Bell in 1961 and Clive Bell in 1964. Only three original members survived it: Leonard Woolf, E. M. Forster, and Duncan Grant.

Rosenbaum tells us that 'approximately 60 meetings took place during the 45 years of the Club's existence and some 125 memoirs were read. A number of these are lost . . . and others cannot now be identified with any certainty. But it appears that around 80 memoirs have survived. The existence of these memoirs is the principal justification for an interest in the Memoir Club and its history.' About a quarter of these remain unpublished.

> Those that have been published are scattered in books of memoirs (there are two now by Virginia Woolf), in collected essays (such as Clive Bell's and Desmond MacCarthy's, all of which are out of print), in the appendices to collected works (such as E. M. Forster's), and in multiple-volume autobiographies (such as Leonard Woolf's and David Garnett's). That the dispersed memoirs need to be brought together, if only in a history, is indicated, I believe, by their interrelations. . . . When presented in their historical context, the memoirs can illuminate one another by their shared or even by their contrasting subjects.

Rosenbaum's discussion of this aspect of the Memoir Club is one of his most important contributions. He begins with an illuminating discussion of John Maynard Keynes' extended, two-part memoir 'Dr Melchior: Defeated Enemy' and moves to a memoir read at the same meeting, Clive Bell's unpublished account of his experience as a teenager with a powerfully sexual woman in her late thirties. E. M. Forster's 1922 memoir read on his return from India shows that the Memoir Club continued to provide an outlet

for frank sexual discussion and may have encouraged Virginia Woolf to produce what has become the most significant example. In November of the Club's first year, Rosenbaum tells us,

> Virginia Woolf read a memoir that has survived. Her account of home life at Hyde Park Gate centred on her obtuse, erotic half-brother George Duckworth and his attentions to Vanessa and herself after their mother's death. The description of George – 'though he had the curls of a God and the ears of a faun he had unmistakably the eyes of a pig' – Keynes in turn thought the best thing Virginia had written, which of course depressed her.[6] Like Keynes' and Clive's memoirs, Virginia's breaks off on a note of suspense, in this case a hyperbolic one that calls the cuddling George his sisters' 'lover'. In so writing Virginia Woolf could count on the amused response of her audience that has escaped some later readers of her memoir.

This did not end the discussion of sexual matters. Years later Vanessa Bell returned to the scene in a memoir that

> presents George as a chaperone-cum-nursemaid rather than as an incestuous half-brother. An earlier sequel to Virginia's memoir of her Kensington home and its extended Victorian family was given in 1922 by Lytton Strachey on his Kensington home. In his only memoir written for the Club, Strachey's 'Lancaster Gate' also ends with sexual encounter in a relative's bedroom – in this case his cousin Duncan Grant's. Strachey's memoir focuses on that quintessential Bloomsbury symbol . . . [of] the room. In the drawing rooms and bedrooms of their houses the energetic chaos of Victorian family life is played out in the Memoir Club's memoirs.

While memoirs continued to be written about the proclivities of the living, the dead were topics too. Lytton Strachey, Roger Fry, Virginia Woolf, and Maynard Keynes all became subjects of memoirs after their deaths. Rosenbaum also notes the

> substantial memoirs . . . written about members' lives – Leonard Woolf's on his colleagues in the Ceylon Civil Service, E. M. Forster's on his difficulties with his Surrey landlords who drove him out of the house whose architect was his father, and Duncan Grant's on his comic involvement, through Strachey and Keynes, with the Apostles. . . .

This is how S. P. Rosenbaum saw the scope and purpose of the book he had in 2009 already begun to write. The five chapters of his *The Bloomsbury Group Memoir Club* presented here follow this plan. They explain the origins of the Club, document its initial members and their contributions, and explore the impact of these meetings on the work each of them pursued individually. It concludes with a chapter on the hiatus in Club meetings from 1922 to 1928, a prolific period of production that included fiction, criticism, and a large variety of published and unpublished autobiographical work. For example, the resumption of meetings in 1928 marked the completion of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and the beginning of her work on *A Room of One's Own*. That first meeting after the hiatus began with Woolf reading a memoir entitled 'Old Bloomsbury', a text that has become an essential source in the biography of Virginia Stephen.

Rosenbaum was able to complete only a few paragraphs of Chapter 6, stopping just before Virginia Woolf read 'Old Bloomsbury', the same year that saw the publication of Clive Bell's *Proust*, Strachey's *Elizabeth and Essex,* and Forster's *Eternal Moment and Other Stories*. Some of the most significant work of the Memoir Club members was yet to come: Fry's *Matisse* (1930), Woolf's *The Waves* (1931), Leonard Woolf's *After the Deluge* (1931 & 1939) and Keynes *Essays in Biography* (1931). We do not know what Rosenbaum might have told us about the Memoir Club's influence on these texts or what we might have learned about later members: Francis Partridge, whose diaries he admired, and Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, Julia and Oliver Strachey among others.

S. P. Rosenbaum was a careful and determined scholar, and while his work on the Memoir Club was cut short, the evidence he found and how he was able to organize and understand it is important to those of us who wish to continue this essential work. Among the last things he said was that he had to 'get out of [the hospital]' because he 'had a book to finish'. That task now falls on us. We miss Pat terribly but are deeply grateful for who he was and what he gave us. And we are fortunate to be able to

depend on his remarkable work as we complete the story of this special group of friends who transformed the twentieth century.

Acknowledgements

I regret that I cannot name and thank the many colleagues, scholars, librarians, and archivists on whom S. P. Rosenbaum depended as he gathered his information and organized it. Since I do not know the many, I dare not name the few. One person, however, was essential to my work here and to Pat's work for a lifetime: Naomi Black. A distinguished teacher and scholar in her own right, Naomi's encouragement and material help Pat long acknowledged as essential. It was for me as well. Without her insight and energy, the typescript would have been lost. Without her wisdom and encouragement, this volume never would have been possible. I add my voice to Pat's as I repeat one last time the dedication that opened so many of S. P. Rosenbaum's Bloomsbury books: 'This history is dedicated to Naomi Black.'

James M. Haule
June 2013

Outlines

1

In the spring of 1949 a small posthumous book by an economist appeared in London under the title *Two Memoirs*. Economists' memoirs are not often of general interest but these turned out to be among the twentieth-century's most interesting works of what is now called life-writing. Part of that interest comes from the remarkable origin of the memoirs.

The economist was John Maynard Keynes. His memoirs were introduced by David Garnett who noted that they were not written for publication but rather 'read to a small audience of old and intimate friends' who had been meeting over the years to listen to one or two of their memoirs. The memoirs were written without reserve or veils, Garnett continued, noting that their personal allusions and jokes would have been understood by the listeners, who would not have been shocked by their truth and wit.

Garnett's brief introduction is virtually the first published description of the Memoir Club that had been meeting since the 1920s, though he does not give its name. Virginia Woolf had alluded to the Club earlier in her 1940 biography of Roger Fry when introducing a memoir of his that was written, she said, 'for friends who took a humorous rather than a reverential view of eminent Victorians' and thus owed something 'to the temper of the audience'.[1]

The Memoir Club was named for the first time in print by Leonard Woolf when he reviewed for the *Listener* Keynes' *Two Memoirs* in 1949. Leonard doubted if the memoirs could really be understood by outsiders, for they

> are private papers read to a small circle of people who had been intimate friends for thirty years and more, and who met from time to time in what

> they called their 'Memoir Club'. At each meeting of the 'Club', members, in rotation, after a dinner, read a 'memoir' which was intended to be quite frank and truthful and was, therefore, almost always indiscreet.

Leonard goes on to discuss the subjects of Keynes' two memoirs, defending the first, which is entitled 'Dr Melchior: A Defeated Enemy' and mostly agreeing with the brilliant second memoir, 'My Early Beliefs', but about which he has one serious reservation (he will have others later). He thought Keynes confused the efficacy of reason with the rationality of human beings. Woolf, Keynes, and their college friends believed in the former, but not the latter. And in making this distinction, Leonard invokes the book Virginia had alluded to by another Cambridge friend and Memoir Club member: Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*, which appeared two years before the Club was founded.[2]

Since the publication of Keynes' *Two Memoirs*, the Memoir Club has become widely known as biographers have used its papers in their lives of Keynes, Strachey, the Woolfs, Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Desmond and Molly MacCarthy, E. M. Forster, and Roger Fry – to stop with these founding members. But sometimes the Memoir Club context of these memoirs has been inaccurately represented. Even David Garnett, himself – a later member of the Club, as he says – rather exaggerates in claiming that Keynes' memoirs wore no veils. 'My Early Beliefs' is concerned, among other things, with D. H. Lawrence's hostility to Keynes and his friends, but the memoir omits any mention of their crucial 'early belief' having to do with homosexuality that so upset Lawrence. Keynes' audience (which included at least one of his former lovers) would not need to have his sexual history spelled out.

The circumstances of the Memoir Club are essential to understanding its memoirs, and not only because of the shared experiences of its members. A number of the memoirs are interactive, as it were, stimulated by other Club memoirs and contingent on the occasions of their readings. Then there is the pervasive use of humour in the recollections of old friends. Leonard Woolf refers to the sharp edge of Strachey's irony, which is present in many of

the memoirs.[3] More than one of Virginia Woolf's interpreters, for instance, have cut themselves handling the irony in her memoirs.

* * *

Ours has been called the age of the memoir. (This is not new. E. M. Forster in the 1930s thought his an age of recollectionism.) Memoirs are now seen to rival novels in popularity. It is rather surprising, then, that so little attention has been given to one of the most notable manifestations of memoirs in modern times. Despite the frequent citations of its memoirs in various accounts of and commentaries on the members and their works, there has still been no detailed account of the Memoir Club.

The main reason for this is simply the absence of accurate information about the Club. Scattered comments in biographies are based on allusions in letters, diaries (Virginia Woolf's are an important source), autobiographies, and most especially in the memoirs themselves. The Club appears to have kept no records, no minutes of meetings, no inclusive record of memoirs read. When Vanessa and then Quentin Bell became secretaries of the Club in the 1940s, Molly MacCarthy – the founding 'secretary and drudge', as she called herself – passed on a handsome log-book that Virginia Woolf had originally presented to her. Quentin found it blank. Molly also thought there was a suitcase of Club memoirs somewhere but it has never been found.

Over the forty-some years of its existence, the Memoir Club underwent frequent changes in membership, the frequency of its gatherings, and the focus of its memoirs. Members, meetings, memoirs – these are the components of the Club's history. They can be reconstructed in varying degrees as the following pages will show. The founding members of the Memoir Club were the following: Mary (Molly) MacCarthy, Desmond MacCarthy, Roger Fry, John Maynard Keynes, Vanessa Bell, Clive Bell, Duncan Grant, Virginia Woolf, Leonard Woolf, Lytton Strachey, and E. M. Forster as well as Mary Hutchinson and Sidney Waterlow, who did not continue as members.[4]