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**Article**

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Kathryn Simpson, *Gifts, Market and Economies of Desire in Virginia Woolf* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 200pp., £52. ISBN 978-1-4039-9706-7

The modernist marketplace has, in recent times, become a popular focus for scholarship. Of particular relevance to this journal is Jenny McDonnell's *Katherine Mansfield and the Modernist Marketplace: At the Mercy of the Public* (2010) (reviewed in this volume), which claims a new reading of Mansfield's short stories via a detailed analysis of the author's publication history, thereby establishing a social reality for her writing within a network of literary modernists in general. Most recently, in 2011, a collection edited by Jeanne Dubino entitled *Virginia Woolf and the Literary Marketplace*, examines Mansfield's great rival in the context of the modernist market place and gift economies, with a wide variety of essays including 'How to Strike a Contemporary: Mansfield and Woolf on the Market' by Katie Macnamara. Encompassing a much wider remit is Alissa G. Karl's *Modernism and the Marketplace: Literary Culture and Consumer Capitalism in Rhys, Woolf, Stein, and Nella Larsen* (2009), which focuses attention on the dichotomy of globalised modernism's overt distaste for – but covert fascination with – marketing and consumerism.

Inspired by Lewis Hyde's groundbreaking study, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (1999), Kathryn Simpson in *Gifts, Market and Economies of Desire in Virginia Woolf*, takes the notion of the market place and extends it to include gifts and gift economies, at the same time highlighting the homo-erotic importance accorded the gift in Woolf's oeuvre: 'As Hyde explains, gifts can act as agents of transformation, as "a sort of guardian or marker or catalyst. . . . a gift may be the actual agent of change, the bearer of new life"' (63). In Woolf's story 'A Woman's College from Outside', for example, the protagonist's homoerotic desires, experienced through the bestowing of a gift, vindicate for Simpson 'this story's challenge to the social and sexual norms for middle class women and the limitations these norms impose' (143).

The book touches on the subject of Mansfield as Woolf's arch literary rival whilst the younger woman was alive, this rivalry co-existing alongside an uneasy friendship, which left both women troubled, with Woolf 'anxiously comparing herself to Katherine Mansfield whose commercial success she both envied and despised' (138), though in the end it was Mansfield who avoided the contact more keenly sought by Woolf. Nevertheless, Simpson astutely reminds the reader in a remarkably apt quotation from Woolf's own diaries how great was 'the significance she attributed to Mansfield at this time: she valued the "priceless talk" she and Mansfield shared, seeing Mansfield as "the only woman. . . with gift enough to make talk of writing interesting"' (128). For Simpson, this suggestion of a gift-related bond linking women can be seen as a key to unlocking an understanding of Woolf's shorter fiction. Woolf's 'gift' to Mansfield was the publication of 'Prelude' in 1918, hand printed by her and Leonard at the recently created Hogarth Press – the second of their publications. Simpson also highlights a well known homo-erotic moment of gift-giving in Mansfield's story 'Carnation', where one schoolgirl slips a carnation inside the blouse of another girl, noting that Janet Winston sees an intertext here between this story and Woolf's 'Slater's Pins' (184).

Simpson's book offers a dense seam of research, coherently expressed, investigating Woolf's gift-giving and her interaction with the marketplace. 'That gifts are complex, ambiguous and indeterminate, and that the risk in giving them is great, are factors central to Woolf's own sense of her creative gift, to her negotiation of the literary market, and to her own acts of generosity' (163). After reading this volume, it is tantalising to think of how the notion of gift-giving in Mansfield's life and work might offer similarly exciting research possibilities.

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