

RESONATING ACROSS GENERATIONS: VIRGINIA WOOLF AND LITERARY CROSSOVER LOGIC

Guilherme Magri*
Diana Navas**

- **ABSTRACT:** This article explores how Virginia Woolf's literary works and her persona have been reimagined in children's literature and culture. It analyzes five key categories of texts: intergenerational collaborations, fiction adapted into picturebooks, biographies (which are divided into metaphorical picturebooks and graphic biographies), essay adapted into picturebook, and illustrated repackaging of canonical works. The study argues that, although these texts primarily target a younger audience, they employ a crossover logic that blurs the lines between age, genre, and target audience. These reconfigurations, marked by metaphor, visual hybridity, and multimodal storytelling, suggest that children's literature serves as a generative field where Woolf's modernist principles are translated, reframed, and continually reinvigorated for new generations.
- **KEYWORDS:** Biography. Children's literature. Crossover. Modernism. Virginia Woolf.

Introduction

The centenary of *Mrs. Dalloway* invites reflection on Virginia Woolf's modernist legacy and its resonances within our contemporary, post-pandemic world. As new forms of art and cultural production continue to reimagine the past, Woolf's work gains fresh relevance through its intersections with other media, genres, and audiences.

Virginia Woolf is a pivotal figure in modernist scholarship, feminist literary criticism, and biographical studies. However, her emergence in the realm of children's literature provides new perspectives for understanding her legacy and the larger frameworks that influence literary reception. As crossover fiction gains acknowledgment as an important category in literary studies, this is an ideal time to reevaluate Woolf's work through a lens that includes a wider range of generations.

* UFMS - Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul. Três Lagoas - MS - Brasil. 79613000 - g.magri@ufms.br

** PUC - Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo. São Paulo - SP - Brasil. 05015901 - dnavas@pucsp.br

Defined by scholars like Sandra Beckett (2009, 2012, 2021) and Rachel Falconer (2009), crossover literature encompasses works that are not only read but often crafted with multi-age audiences in mind. While much existing research focuses on fantasy epics or commercially successful young adult series, this article turns instead to literary modernism, asking what it means when Woolf's work and life are reimagined for an intergenerational audience. The texts examined here require analysis as evidence of a broader change in how canonical authors are being reinterpreted for new and diverse audiences.

This study analyzes five key categories of texts: intergenerational collaborations, fiction adapted into picturebooks, biographies (which are categorized into metaphorical picturebooks and graphic biographies), essay adapted into picturebook and illustrated repackaging of her canonical works. The focus is not on providing a comprehensive overview of all these books but rather on showcasing specific examples that illustrate the main classifications of these works. This approach aims to explore the crossover logic behind this body of production.

Drawing from interdisciplinary approaches across modernist studies, children's literature, and crossover, the article addresses three central questions: I) How have Virginia Woolf's life and work been reimagined in contemporary children's literature? II) In what ways do these reconfigurations exemplify crossover literature? III) What editorial, visual, and narrative strategies allow Woolf's work to function within a contemporary crossover logic? The article unfolds in two sections: the first explores the five book categories mentioned above, and the second analyzes this production through the lens of crossover literature, showing how they blur age boundaries and exemplify contemporary transgenerational reading practices.

1. Virginia Woolf in children's bookshelves

1.1 INTERGENERATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

Victoria Ford Smith (2017) defines intergenerational collaboration as the partnerships between adults and children that shape the creation of cultural artifacts. Rather than viewing children as passive recipients of culture, she argues that these collaborations reveal their active participation in cultural production. Such collaborations challenge hierarchical notions of authorship, emphasizing how creative relationships between adults and children redefine the boundaries of literary agency and reception.

The idea of children as Woolf's collaborators in creating a cultural artifact takes form in the supplements of *The Charleston Bulletin*, a family newspaper launched in the summer of 1923 by Julian Bell, then fifteen, and his thirteen-year-old brother Quentin. Both are sons of Clive and Vanessa Bell, Virginia Woolf's sister. Originally intended for the adults living at or visiting the Charleston farmhouse, the East Sussex home closely associated with the Bloomsbury Group, the *Bulletin* chronicled daily

life. It included information about the weather, notes on nature, and accounts of both ordinary and unusual events that occurred around the house.

Typed before breakfast and full of typos, the *Bulletin* came to life with Quentin's drawings, a visual counterpart to the daily reports. Since Charleston was mainly a holiday residence, the paper was produced on and off until 1927, eventually becoming Quentin Bell's sole venture. In 2003, the British Library acquired all 188 issues from Anne Olivier Bell (Olk, 2007), including eight *Supplements* (identified as K–R) created by Quentin Bell with Virginia Woolf. These later formed the basis of the book *The Charleston Bulletin Supplements*, edited by Claudia Olk and published in 2013, sparking new scholarly interest in a lesser-known facet of Woolf's work.

Bell, in a text available in *The Widow and the Parrot* (1988), offers a glimpse into Woolf's involvement:

My brother and I produced a family newspaper; it was daily. I made all the illustrations and most of the other matter. From time to time, my brother got bored. I carried on reporting and inventing the news as best I could until he took over again. Thus, it happened that I asked for a contribution from my aunt Virginia. Although I didn't think much of her work, it seemed stupid to have a real author so close at hand and not have her contribute (backcover).

Olk's 2013 edition preserves the idiosyncrasies of the original manuscripts, such as Quentin's spelling. The collection is split into six sections: *Special Supplement Xmas Number* (1923), *Eminent Charlestonians* (c.1923), *The Life and Death History of a Studio* (c.1924), *The Dunciad* (1924), *The Messiah* (1925), and a *Monthly Calendar* filled with various undated entries from 1923 to 1927. All the texts were written in Woolf's hand, accompanied by illustrations, captions, and headings by Quentin, except for "A Life of Vanessa Bell," which was dictated by Woolf for the Christmas edition, with Quentin responsible for both the artwork and the orthography, and the calendar, which is attributed solely to Virginia Woolf.

The manuscripts relate to Smith's (2017) concept of composition narratives, which are documents that outline the shared creative process. The interaction between Woolf's writing and Quentin Bell's illustrations does not follow a specific sequence; it remains unclear whether the words or the images were created first. Instead of one medium serving the other, their collaboration unfolds as a dialogue. According to Smith (2017), this exemplifies real collaboration: a form of collaborative authorship where an adult and a child work together to create a cultural artifact. This creative partnership continued beyond the *Supplements*; in the preface to *Orlando*, Woolf refers to Bell as "an old and valued collaborator in fiction" (2000, n.p.).

Woolf was no stranger to family newspapers. *The Charleston Bulletin* took its cue from *The Hyde Park Gate News*, produced by the Stephen siblings, Virginia, Vanessa, and Thoby, in the 1890s. Although both periodicals share a satirical spirit and a taste for biographical sketches, Quentin and, at first, Julian's *Charleston Bulletin* adopts a

freer and more irreverent tone, unrestrained by the moral supervision that shaped the earlier publication. As Yeung (2016) observes, this later venture embraces a looser aesthetic, marked by irony, imagination, and an intergenerational collaboration that feels spontaneous and genuine rather than didactic.

As we argued elsewhere (Rocha; Navas, 2024), the Bell-Woolf partnership reshapes how we think about authorship, genre, and childhood through a distinctly modernist lens. Their creative fusion breaks down hierarchical roles, foregrounding the child's artistic voice. It includes Woolf's playfully fragmented narration, Quentin's imaginative illustrations, and a deliberate subversion of biographical norms, all of which cast childhood not as a passive subject but as an active, creative force. These elements together make *The Charleston Bulletin Supplements* a space for literary and artistic experiments, particularly for Woolf, given that, during the same period, she was immersed in writing "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1923), the first series of *The Common Reader* (1925), and the novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927).

The *Bulletin* and its *Supplements* can be viewed as examples of what Bourdieu (1984, cited in Yeung, 2016) referred to as "restricted production," meaning art created for its own sake without commercial motivations. As a private family publication associated with the Bloomsbury Group, it embodies the "pure gaze" of young Quentin Bell and the creative freedom afforded by its non-commercial nature. Additionally, Woolf's involvement opened new avenues for creative biographical writing, free from the constraints of traditional genre boundaries (Yeung, 2016).

The Charleston Bulletin Supplements is a cultural artifact for children that resulted from intergenerational collaboration. However, its published edition cannot be categorized as a crossover artifact. This volume is aimed at a scholarly audience and includes digitized manuscripts along with complete transcriptions. Edited by Claudia Olk, it features a preface by David Bradshaw, a critical introduction, biographical notes, a section on abbreviations, a selected bibliography, and acknowledgements. This work is highlighted not as a crossover publication but because it documents Woolf's involvement in creating with children.

1.2 FICTION ADAPTED INTO PICTUREBOOKS

A picturebook combines words and images to enhance storytelling. This section focuses on two short stories adapted into picturebooks: *Nurse Lugton's Curtain*, originally *Nurse Lugton's Golden Thimble*, and *The Widow and the Parrot*, which lost its subtitle, *A Real Story*. While *Nurse Lugton's Curtain's* manuscript shows no signs of intended illustrations, *The Widow and the Parrot* included doodles by Woolf, that were published in a 1982 edition of the text for her centenary. These illustrations indicate an early connection between text and image that anticipates the story's visual adaptation.

Both stories were created to entertain Virginia Woolf's nephews, which likely explains why they feature "real" characters, fostering a stronger connection between the children and the narratives. The Reverend James Hawkesford, who tries to comfort Mrs. Gage in *The Widow and the Parrot*, was the actual vicar of Rodmell from 1896 to 1928. By including such local figures, Woolf firmly rooted her "true" tale in the landscape of her daily life, as it is set in Monk's House. Virginia and Leonard Woolf settled in this Rodmell cottage in 1919 after leaving Asheham House (Dick, 2005). Additionally, the main character from *Nurse Lugton's Curtain* reappears in another of Woolf's works, "Scene No. 1 in the Life of Mrs. Bell," featured in the *Special Supplement Christmas Number of the Charleston Bulletin Supplements*. In this work, Nurse Lugton attempts to prevent young Vanessa Bell from eating red beads instead of porridge, highlighting her role in the daily life at the Charleston farmhouse.

1.2.1 NURSE LUGTON'S CURTAIN

Wallace Hildick discovered the first version of this story in *Mrs. Dalloway's* manuscript, housed at the British Museum. Virginia Woolf wrote it for her niece Ann Stephen in the autumn of 1924. Untitled, the tale was later named "Nurse Lugton's Golden Thimble" by Leonard Woolf. First published in the *Times Literary Supplement* on June 17, 1965, the Hogarth Press released the story in 1966, featuring black-and-white illustrations by Duncan Grant. In the preface, Leonard Woolf situates the narrative within the domestic atmosphere of the Stephen family. Years later, a second version, titled "Nurse Lugton's Curtain" in Woolf's hand, was found among the *Charleston Papers* collection at King's College Library in Cambridge. It was then edited and published in picturebook format in 1991 by Gulliver Books (Harcourt) with color illustrations by Julie Vivas.

In *Nurse Lugton's Curtain*, Woolf tells the story of an older woman who dozes off while sewing a blue curtain. As she sleeps, the embroidered animals on the fabric come to life. The once-static figures begin to move, their world transforming into a vibrant landscape with forests, bridges, and a town called Millamarchmantopolis. The scene fills with wild beasts, bustling townspeople, dignitaries, and even a Queen in her palanquin. Above them all looms a great ogress, none other than Nurse Lugton herself, silent and unmoving as long as she sleeps, but terrifying when awake. In this enchanted world, the animals thrive under her slumber, drinking from lakes, dancing, and delighting in their freedom. But the spell is suddenly broken when a buzzing fly wakes Nurse Lugton. With a jolt, she resumes her sewing, unaware of the dreamscape that had just flickered to life and vanished on the folds of her curtain.

According to Sayaka Okumura (2008), the image of women weaving in Woolf's work mirrors the woman-writer and her creative process. In *Nurse Lugton's Curtain*, Woolf metaphorically addresses this through a character who, though engaged in a traditionally feminine task, cannot consciously access her creativity, once her imaginative world flourishes only in sleep. The story reflects themes from Woolf's

feminist essays, notably the barriers imposed on female expression, echoing “A Room of One’s Own”. Nurse Lugton, like Shakespeare’s imagined sister, remains voiceless throughout the narrative, her artistry unacknowledged even by herself. Though she creates the intricate world of Millamarchmantopolis, her status as “nurse”, never simply Lugton, relegates her to a domestic role in the real world. At the same time, in the imaginary one, she is viewed as a monster, a destructive force. Her creativity, static in wakefulness, is only dynamic in unconsciousness, revealing the palimpsestic nature of female authorship stifled by tradition.

Critical and editorial interest in Nurse Lugton’s *Golden Thimble* / *Nurse Lugton’s Curtain* extends beyond its English-language editions, demonstrating the text’s international circulation and recognition as a work with crossover appeal. Multiple countries have produced editions featuring distinct visual and editorial approaches. Notable examples include *Il Ditale d’Oro*, published in 1976 by Emme Edizioni, translated by Enzo Siciliano and illustrated by Flaminia Siciliano; *Le Dé en Or*, issued in 1983 by Fernand Nathan, translated by Frédéric Armei with illustrations by Napo; and *La Cortina de la Mainadera*, published in 2006 by Editorial Eruïlla, translated by Núria Font and illustrated by Victòria Tubau. With the exception of the Eruïlla edition, these volumes are based on the earlier, unfinished version of the text. This context warrants close examination of how textual variation and visual interpretation reshape Woolf’s narrative.

The illustrations in these editions have been analyzed in previous scholarship (Rocha, 2022). Nevertheless, their presence indicates publishers’ confidence in the story’s suitability for children’s literature, leveraging Woolf’s cultural prestige while also engaging with elements beyond thematic content. The narrative’s dream logic, emphasis on visual transformation, and the complex role of Nurse Lugton as creator, guardian, and threat facilitate interpretations accessible to both child and adult audiences, thereby reinforcing the text’s status within crossover literature.

1.2.2 THE WIDOW AND THE PARROT

The short story “The Widow and the Parrot” was kept unpublished for over fifty years in the archives of *The Charleston Bulletin*. It was finally released in the July 1982 issue of *Redbook*, celebrating Virginia Woolf’s 100th birthday. The publication included the first page of Woolf’s manuscript, showing that she illustrated the story herself. Quentin Bell’s son Julian Bell created illustrations for the 1988 children’s edition published by Hogarth Press, continuing the story’s visual legacy.

The Widow and the Parrot follows Mrs. Gage, an elderly widow in Yorkshire, who is thrilled to learn that her estranged brother Joseph has died, leaving her a house and £3,000 in Rodmell. Borrowing money for the journey, she arrives to find the house in ruins, the inheritance missing, and only a parrot named James left behind. Confirming her disappointment with local solicitors, she begins a weary return home, only to be saved from a dangerous river crossing by the light of her house burning

down. James miraculously reappears, leading her back to the charred kitchen, where his strange behavior helps uncover the hidden treasure: 3,000 gold sovereigns buried beneath the floor. With her apron full of coins and the loyal bird on her head, Mrs. Gage quietly returns to Yorkshire, living comfortably with her dog and parrot until her death, when she confesses that James may have started the fire to save her. The parrot's final cry of "Not at home!" and instant death adds a spectral final note to this tale of unexpected fortune and animal loyalty, still whispered about in Rodmell to this day, according to the story's narrator.

As mentioned elsewhere (Rocha, 2022), in *The Widow and the Parrot*, Woolf subverts the conventional ghost story by centering an older woman as the protagonist and ending with her and the parrot as spectral figures haunting Rodmell, as observed by passersby. The parrot's final cry and death shortly after his owner's reinforces this transformation. Years before collaborating with her nephews, Woolf had already challenged ghost story norms in "A Haunted House" (1921), and argued that modern ghosts emerge from within, not as grotesque figures like bloodied sea captains or headless ladies in stormy paths, but as emotional echoes when the ordinary becomes uncanny. Her call for original, unsettling ghost narratives resurfaces in this children's tale, where the uncanny only materializes on the final page, through the synchronized, chilling deaths and the narrator's closing statement, suggesting a reinterpretation of the genre's boundaries. Woolf's rhetorical approach transforms the story from a simple fable into a haunting and enigmatic narrative, where children's literature is seen as a site of experimentation.

In addition to its Anglo-American editorial history, *The Widow and the Parrot* has established a significant pedagogical and editorial presence in Portugal, where it is designated as required reading for the fifth year of basic education. The text's inclusion in the *Metas Curriculares de Português para o Ensino Básico* and its recommendation by the *Plano Nacional de Leitura* have directly contributed to the proliferation of Portuguese editions featuring diverse visual interpretations. This institutional support has prompted publishers to continually reframe the story for young readers, resulting in illustrated editions by Anisabel Sá Fernandes (2023) and David Pintor (2021), as well as earlier editions by Cultura (2020) and Texto (2013). The narrative's international reach is further evidenced by its publication in Brazil, accompanied by original illustrations by Simone Matias (2022).

The diversity of editions highlights the text's adaptability and its perceived appropriateness for educational settings, while also reaffirming its crossover qualities. Woolf's narrative functions simultaneously as a pedagogical resource, a children's story, and a site of literary experimentation. Visual mediation plays a crucial role in maintaining the narrative's relevance across national, cultural, and generational contexts.

1.3 BIOGRAPHIES

This section is divided into two groups. The first consists of metaphorical picturebooks about Virginia Woolf designed for children, focusing on emotional and creative growth. The second includes biographical accounts of Woolf's life presented in graphic biography format, aimed at older readers but also accessible to a crossover audience.

1.3.1 METAPHORICAL PICTUREBOOKS

The following works are called metaphorical picturebooks because they reinterpret Woolf's life through symbolic imagery and emotional resonance rather than factual chronology. Text and illustration merge to convey her inner world, translating experiences of creativity, perception, and vulnerability into visual metaphors. In this way, they transform biography into a poetic mode of life-writing that mirrors Woolf's own pursuit of "inner truths."

1.3.1.1 VIRGINIA WOLF

Published in 2012 by Kids Can Press, author Kyo Mackear and illustrator Isabelle Arsenault present *Virginia Wolf* as a literary and artistic reinterpretation of Woolf's emotional world through a stylized children's narrative. At its core is the transformative power of creativity, explored through young Virginia's metaphorical "wolfish" behavior, a poetic evocation of mental illness, balanced by her sister Vanessa's imaginative efforts to restore joy by creating the Bloomsbury Garden. This fictionalized space, referencing the Bloomsbury Group, serves as an emotional refuge and a symbol of artistic healing.

Rather than offering a linear account of Woolf's life, *Virginia Wolf* engages with the genre of biography from an emotional and symbolic perspective. Maclear's minimalistic, lyrical prose and Arsenault's layered visual compositions construct a metaphorical biography that privileges internal experience over historical detail. The illustrations, composed of ink, pencil, watercolor, and gouache, shift in tone and color to mirror Virginia's emotional journey, aligning the visual narrative with the text's psychological depth. This destabilization of traditional biographical structure, through non-linear storytelling, symbolic metaphors, and material experimentation, echoes Woolf's reflections in her essay "The New Biography" (2012) on capturing a subject's "inner truths." Using broken panels, expressive whitespace, and dynamic page layouts invites readers to navigate time and memory in non-traditional ways, reinforcing the book's affinity with modern life-writing practices.

Virginia Wolf exemplifies a contemporary biographical mode that speaks across generations by uniting the poetic with the visual and prioritizing affect over fact. For children, the narrative offers an intuitive exploration of sadness and recovery; for adults, it provides layers of intertextual resonance and reflection on the artistic self,

attesting once again to the work's ability to cross between audiences, something we will discuss in the next section of this article. The protagonist's gradual emotional transformation, neither sudden nor romanticized, underscores the book's nuanced engagement with mental health, identity, and creativity. In this way, *Virginia Woolf* bridges biography, fiction, and visual art, expanding the boundaries of children's literature and modernist biography, and affirming the potential of hybrid storytelling to reflect the multifaceted nature of human experience.

1.3.1.2 VIRGINIA WOOLF, LA ESCRITORA DE LO INVISIBLE

Antolín-Villota and Santolaya's *Virginia Woolf, la escritora de lo invisible* (2008) is a poetic reimagining of Woolf's life that echoes the author's biographical philosophy in "The Art of Biography." (2012) Published in a bilingual edition in 2008, the work addresses young readers while resonating with adult audiences (Castilian Spanish - English) through metaphor and lyrical narration. Rather than a conventional chronology, the book traces Woolf's inner evolution, focusing on emotional milestones and imaginative insight. Virginia is introduced as a curious child with vivid green eyes, surrounded by her siblings in a lively household where stories begin to shape her worldview. Her initial silence gives way to a moment of poetic revelation: a cloud mistaken for a seagull, a sheep, and finally imagined as an elephant, marking the text's turn from fact to metaphor.

The authors build on this moment by exploring Virginia's awakening to language and her deepening passion for storytelling. The biography avoids rigid timelines, portraying writing as a fluid, almost magical process. Her father's library, initially a forbidden realm, symbolizes access and empowerment when he hands her the key, an emblem of her future intellectual freedom. A central metaphor emerges: Virginia as a quiet fisher of "silent words," casting a transparent net into clouds, waves, and rivers to retrieve meaning. These words, however, often elude her, slipping away when domestic life intrudes. This tension between creative focus and social expectation reflects Woolf's challenges as a woman navigating intellectual ambition in a patriarchal context.

As the narrative matures, so does its treatment of Woolf's inner world. Her famous concept of "a room of one's own" is visualized through a treehouse filled with symbolic objects, a snow globe, paper butterflies, and red shelves for books, illustrating the need for solitude and imaginative space. The biography does not explicitly mention Woolf's suicide but addresses her struggles with illness and perceptual intensity with poetic restraint. Illustrations of faded flowers and enclosed rooms convey psychological weight. The narrator emphasizes that Woolf sought to "open windows with words," a mission that demanded silence and concentration, but was often thwarted by the demands of domesticity, a tension well captured through metaphorical imagery.

The final sections celebrate Woolf's creative triumphs, positioning her as a great writer and a visionary who taught others to see beyond the visible. Her writing is described as a gift to readers: words caught in a net and offered like treasure. The watchful eye motif recurs, linking to Woolf's attentiveness to hidden truths. Echoing Woolf's belief in the value of emotional and perceptual experience over mere fact, the authors conclude that Woolf's power lay in naming the invisible. The result is a biographical work that, while crafted for children, elegantly embodies Woolf's challenge to reimagine the art of biography as a space for wonder, interiority, and creative freedom.

1.3.2 GRAPHIC BIOGRAPHIES

The following book is a graphic biography rather than a metaphorical one because it portrays Virginia Woolf's life through a historically grounded narrative and visual documentation. While it does use symbolism, its primary aim is to represent Woolf's experiences rather than to translate them into allegory. The focus on factual reconstruction and visual storytelling aligns this work with graphic life writing, distinguishing it from the poetic reinterpretation typically found in metaphorical biographies.

1.3.2.1 VIRGINIA WOOLF

Virginia Woolf graphic biographies can be exemplified by Michèle Gazier and Bernard Ciccolini's 2013 *Virginia Woolf*, originally French but published in Spain as part of Impedimenta's "El Chico Amarillo" collection. It provides a graphic interpretation of Woolf's life in an emotionally resonant and visually elegant format. Designed with literary and aesthetic precision, the graphic novel places Woolf within a tradition of experimental life writing. Gazier, a translator and literary scholar, offers nuanced textual insight, while Ciccolini's expressive watercolors and attention to period detail create a narrative grounded in historical context and psychological introspection. Their biography aligns with Woolf's vision in "The New Biography," valuing emotional truth and personality over linear historical record.

The novel's structure fluidly blends memory, metaphor, and sensory immersion. Panels of varying shapes and sizes mirror Woolf's psychological rhythms and interior landscapes. Dialogue, first-person narration, and symbolic illustration evoke the non-linear, fragmentary quality of stream-of-consciousness writing. This form resists conventional biography, instead capturing Woolf's shifting states of mind and emotional complexity. Temporal disjunctions and spatial transitions, from domestic scenes to bustling streets, create a layered portrait of a writer caught between isolation and social engagement.

Ciccolini's illustrations further extend the novel's symbolic reach. Soft lines and muted sepia tones evoke the distance of time while inviting intimacy. In one

scene, Woolf's half-brother warns her that "biting an apple is a sin," a line that subtly invokes the trauma of abuse and repression. Without explicit exposition, the novel embeds historical violence into visual allegory, trusting the reader to draw inferences. Other sequences, like the *Hyde Park Gate News* portrayal, show Woolf's early creativity shared with her siblings and encouraged by her parents. These scenes depict artistic growth as familial and collaborative.

The novel culminates in a quiet depiction of Woolf's suicide, counterbalanced by moments of humor and creativity, such as the Dreadnought Hoax. These tonal shifts reflect Woolf's own multifaceted life. Gazier and Ciccolini offer a rich and paradoxical tribute to Woolf's legacy by incorporating symbols and emotional textures rather than chronological events alone. While the graphic form imposes specific narrative closures that Woolf may have resisted, the work nonetheless honors her belief in the necessity of capturing the inner life. In doing so, it exemplifies the potential of visual biography to bridge fact and feeling, art and memory.

1.4 ESSAY ADAPTED INTO PICTUREBOOK

This section presents a reinterpretation of Virginia Woolf's feminist essay aimed at young readers. *Una Stanza Tutta Per Me*, published by Settembre in 2017, is a picture book that reimagines Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" for children aged three and older. It can be classified as a creative retelling, as it distinctively reshapes the original text while preserving its key elements. Creative retellings may include reinterpretations, parodies, and metaphorical updates, often characterized by unique narrative tones. In this case, Serena Ballista crafts a lyrical and symbolic reinterpretation of Woolf's feminist argument, employing accessible metaphors like the spider and its web to convey themes of autonomy, creation, and gender equality to young readers. The story's cyclical structure and symbolic resonance establish it as both a tribute to the source text and a means for contemporary reflection.

Ballista, a feminist writer and activist from Modena, has a strong background in gender education and cultural policy, and her work integrates activism with literature to dismantle stereotypes from early childhood. Illustrator Chiara Carrer, internationally recognized and awarded for her work, enriches the book's message through expressive visuals, using textured lines, warm tones, and symbolic imagery that emphasize the connection between space, imagination, and identity. The 2017 *White Ravens* list included the book for its universal themes and innovative design. The use of purple in the cover title design, long associated with feminism and women's rights, further reinforces the political undertone of claiming space for female creativity. At the same time, the interplay of text and image reflects a carefully balanced collaboration between author and illustrator.

Narratively, the book begins with Virginia, based on Woolf, reflecting on her childhood of storytelling and expressing a desire to become a writer. Drawing a parallel between the spider spinning its web and the author constructing a story, Ballista reaffirms Woolf's metaphor of writing as a grounded, material act rooted in

personal space and social context. Visual motifs of the spider and web accompany Virginia throughout her emotional journey, highlighting the complexities of creating under constraint. References to Woolf's original essay, such as depicting fiction as a spider's web tethered to life, are interwoven into the story's core.

The narrative concludes with an invitation for the reader to imagine their creative space, bridging the gap between fiction and lived experience. In doing so, *Una Stanza Tutta Per Me* not only makes feminist ideas accessible to children but also encourages critical reflection on creativity, identity, and justice, positioning itself as both literary homage and pedagogical tool.

1.5 ILLUSTRATED CANON REPACKAGING

Some of Woolf's novels are now entering young adult bookshelves, particularly *Flush: A Biography* (1933). Often considered marginal in her novels, the book followed the experimental and commercially underwhelming *The Waves* (1931) and returned to a more conventional narrative form. Though Woolf initially dismissed the book as a "joke," she acknowledged its mass appeal, a view validated by its bestseller status in both the United Kingdom and the United States. The success of *Flush* had tangible rewards: Woolf notably used the royalties to buy her sister a new car. Despite its popularity at the time, the book occupies a relatively obscure position in contemporary Woolf scholarship, especially in Britain, where critics have mainly neglected it.

The book offers a fictionalized biography of Flush, the cocker spaniel belonging to poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Charting the dog's life from his early countryside days with Mary Russell Mitford to his urban life with Barrett and eventual travels to Italy, Woolf uses the dog's perspective to explore themes of domesticity, class, and authorship in Victorian England. The narrative includes Flush's jealousy of Robert Browning, his kidnapping in Whitechapel, and eventual death in Florence, paralleling Barrett Browning's final years. Though the story centers on a dog, Woolf's irony and stylized prose embed subtle commentary on human hierarchies, gender dynamics, and literary culture.

Feminist scholars in the 1970s and 1980s found in *Flush* a layered criticism of gender roles. As shown by Camargo (1997), Susan Squier interpreted Flush's domestication as an allegory for the socialization of women, transformed from free subjects into obedient household figures. The contrast between the enclosed world of Wimpole Street and the chaotic, lower-class neighborhood of Whitechapel becomes a metaphor for gender and class oppression. Yet Camargo also highlights a critical shift initiated by Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), which rejects binary feminist readings in favor of post-structuralist interpretations. Drawing on figures like B. Tomachevski and Fredric Jameson, he suggests that *Flush* defies categorization, blending the literary and the commercial, the ironic and the sincere, in a form that challenges canonical expectations.

In some contexts, this ambiguity contributes to *Flush*'s reclassification as a crossover text with its canine protagonist, sentimental narrative arc, and accessible tone, has increasingly appeared on young adults' bookshelves, though its thematic complexity invites more mature interpretations. Another marker of *Flush*'s crossover status is the proliferation of illustrated editions.

The 2018 edition of Prosymne Press in London, illustrated by Katyuli Lloyd, was later published in Brazilian Portuguese by Autêntica and features multiple full-page color illustrations. These images employ a more textured, sketch-like aesthetic with rough, expressive lines and pastel or crayon-like strokes. The result is an emotionally resonant visual language that aligns with Woolf's modernist sensibility. The artwork foregrounds movement and feeling over technical clarity, creating a visual counterpart to the book's ironic tone and psychological undertones. The illustrations suggest an affinity with modernist expressionism, elevating the book's aesthetic complexity, bridging narrative and art in ways that mirror the layered style of the text itself.

Further illustrated editions reinforce the book's visual appeal. The Spanish publisher Lumen commissioned Barcelona-based illustrator Iratxe López de Munáin to create illustrations for the novel, published in 2019 and translated by Rafael Vázquez Zamora. Her illustrations, which later appeared in Portuguese and Italian editions, use textured brushstrokes and a muted palette of reds, blues, and greens to evoke a warm, nostalgic atmosphere. The artistic style avoids realism, opting for expressive distortion in figures and gestures that enhances emotional accessibility while preserving narrative depth. *Flush*'s depiction, anthropomorphized but still distinctly canine, captures the subjective richness of Woolf's narrative voice. In 2025, Editorial Alma published an edition illustrated by Granollers illustrator Gala Pont Paradís, who presents watercolor-like illustrations throughout the book. Sandra Beckett (2021) notes that publishing strategies have evolved significantly to accommodate crossover audiences.

Publishers often release multiple editions of the same book with different covers tailored to children or adults, as in the case of Isabel Allende's *City of the Beasts*. Sometimes, books are simultaneously included in children's and adult catalogues. Similar strategies have enhanced the reach of works like *Flush* and other Woolf titles, including, even more recently, the novels *Orlando*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *A Room of One's Own*, which have all received illustrated reissues. Together, these developments suggest reevaluating Woolf's legacy in contemporary publishing.

2 A universal bridge

The concept of crossover literature, as theorized by Sandra Beckett (2009, 2012, 2021) and Rachel Falconer (2009) refers to a transgenerational literary phenomenon in which texts cross the boundaries between children's, young adult, and adult readerships. It may be deliberately crafted to appeal to multiple age groups,

or unintended audiences may appropriate it over time. Either way, it resists rigid age-based classification. Although the term gained visibility in literary and publishing discourse after the global success of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, Beckett demonstrates that the practice itself has a much older lineage. From classical fables and fairy tales to canonical narratives such as *Don Quixote*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and *Robinson Crusoe*, many works have historically attracted readers across generations.

Beckett's contribution lies in framing crossover not as a recent trend but as a continuous and global phenomenon. Her diachronic, comparative approach reveals that in certain cultural contexts the distinction between children's and adult literature has always been more porous. For instance, a work such as Jostein Gaarder's *Sophie's World* (1991), which blends philosophical inquiry with narrative fiction, is variously categorized as children's, young adult, or adult literature depending on the cultural and editorial framework in which it is received. This malleability underscores the fact that crossover status is not inherent to a text alone but shaped by the shifting expectations of readers, publishers, and critical institutions.

The growing visibility of crossover literature prompted significant changes in how publishers conceptualize, design, and distribute literary works. Beckett draws attention to the increasingly nuanced strategies deployed by the publishing industry, such as releasing dual editions with different covers, paratexts, or even formats tailored to younger and older demographics. These editorial decisions do not merely reflect market segmentation, but also signal deeper transformations in how reading is practiced and understood. In an increasingly visual and multimodal cultural environment, readers defy the age-based categories once used to organize literary consumption. This is especially evident in the field of picturebooks, where artists such as Shaun Tan, Roger Mello, and Katsumi Komagata produce works that merge visual experimentation with literary sophistication, appealing to diverse age groups without compromising artistic depth (Beckett, 2025¹).

In this context, the recent reimagining of Virginia Woolf's writings and biography through children's publishing formats offers a case of crossover reception. Picturebook editions of *Nurse Lugton's Curtain* (1991) and *The Widow and the Parrot* (1988) present Woolf's short stories in ways that invite engagement from children and adults alike. In these volumes, the illustrations by Julie Vivas and Julian Bell serve not decorative purposes but function as interpretive tools that enrich the text's emotional and symbolic layers. While the stories retain a narrative structure that is accessible to young readers through anthropomorphic animals or uncanny settings, they also retain the marks of Woolf's modernist prose: attention to consciousness, feminist undertones, and poetic language. For adult readers, these editions offer opportunities for new interpretive reading, while for younger audiences, the visual storytelling and themes provide an entry point into Woolf's imaginative world.

¹ This is from an interview conducted by the authors of this article with Professor Sandra Beckett. It will be published in the dossier *Transgressão de Fronteiras entre Públicos e Gêneros*, organized by them for the journal *Caderno Seminal*.

A similar logic applies to *Virginia Woolf* (2012) by Kyo Maclear and Isabelle Arsenault and *Virginia Woolf, la escritora de lo invisible* (2008) by María García Esperón and Berenice Boeta. These works do not offer simplified or strictly factual biographies; instead, they adopt metaphorical and poetic strategies to evoke Woolf's emotional world, artistic vision, and mental landscape. In *Virginia Woolf*, the depiction of melancholy and creativity through a child's imagination allows for nuanced discussions of emotional states in a manner both accessible and suggestive. The illustrations use color shifts and surreal compositions to express transformation, inner conflict, and sisterly bonds. Similarly, the Spanish-language picturebook builds a lyrical portrait of Woolf's engagement with invisibility, silence, and intellectual freedom. Both texts offer younger readers opportunities to connect with emotions and ideas often considered abstract or difficult, while adult readers are drawn to the intertextual layers, stylistic allusions, and biographical references that reward literary and historical knowledge. So, besides introducing the author, these picturebooks cultivate affective and aesthetic participation across age groups.

This transgenerational dynamic is further evident in the illustrated reissues of *Flush: A Biography* (1933), which recast a text often viewed as marginal in Woolf's literature. In the editions illustrated by Katyuli Lloyd (2018) and Iratxe López de Munáin (2019), *Flush* is re-presented in visual languages that highlight dimensions of Woolf's prose. The use of soft textures, atmospheric palettes, and stylized anthropomorphism appeals to young readers through the figure of the dog and his emotional journey. Yet, the text remains rich in commentary on class hierarchies, gender roles, offering complex interpretive possibilities for adult readers. These illustrated versions open parallel channels of meaning and, in doing so, they expand the cultural reach of Woolf's work while preserving its literary integrity.

These examples demonstrate how Virginia Woolf's fiction and biography have been reimagined to engage with a broader crossover logic that characterizes much of contemporary publishing. This logic is not just a marketing trend, but a cultural response to evolving concepts of readership, authorship, and literacy. It involves a set of aesthetic, editorial, and market strategies designed to help literary authors and their works cross generational boundaries. Key components of this approach include dual addressing, hybrid genres, visual-textual interplay, and paratextual framing, all of which enhance diverse reading experiences.

This tendency is evident when we consider modernist works created for or reimagined for children. As discussed elsewhere (Magri; Navas, 2025), this reframing often enhances the reach of these authors, allowing their modernist sensibilities to engage with contemporary issues. Rather than diminishing their literary legacy, these crossover adaptations enrich it, creating a shared space for reflection, empathy, and critical imagination that readers of all ages can enjoy.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that the examined works function as crossover literature in their intended design and reception, operating through a crossover logic that bridges audiences and interpretive modes. These texts do not simplify Woolf's literary richness or exclude younger readers from nuanced engagement. Instead, they foster shared analytical spaces, where elements such as visual storytelling, metaphor, and intertextual layering enable experiences across age groups. Woolf's presence in children's literature is not incidental, but reflects a broader cultural and editorial shift that values hybridity, emotional resonance, and formal experimentation.

Nurse Lugton's Curtain and *The Widow and the Parrot* reinterpret themes of fantasy, detective quests, and the uncanny. Picturebooks like *Virginia Woolf* and *Una Stanza Tutta per me* rearticulate mental health issues and feminist ideas through metaphor. Meanwhile, graphic biographies such as *Virginia Woolf* by Gazier and Ciccolini present a chronological yet emotionally grounded depiction of Woolf's life, mirroring her emotionally grounded portrait, mirroring Woolf's experimental narrative techniques. Finally, *Flush* expands its audience through illustration. Collectively, these texts broaden our understanding of the spread of modernist authorship across forms and readerships.

In the end, this crossover logic emerges as a mode of cultural exchange that invites critical reflection on how writing, illustration, editing, and reading practices perpetuate Woolf's influence across generations.

REFERENCES

Primary

ANTOLÍN, Lucía. *Virginia Woolf: la escritora de lo invisible*. Ilustrações de Antonia Santolaya. Madrid: Hotel Papel Ediciones, 2008.

BALLISTA, Serena. *Una stanza tutta per me*. Ilustrações de Chiara Carrer. Cagli: Settenove, 2017.

GAZIER, Michèle. *Virginia Woolf*. Ilustrações de Bernard Ciccolini. Salamanca: El Chico Amarillo de Impedimenta, 2019.

MACLEAR, Kyo. *Virginia Woolf*. Ilustrações de Isabelle Arsenault. Toronto; Tonawanda: Kids Can Press Ltd., 2012.

WOOLF, Virginia. *A viúva e o papagaio*. Ilustrações de David Pintor. Lisboa: Texto Editores, 2013.

WOOLF, Virginia. *A viúva e o papagaio*. Lisboa: Cultura, 2020.

WOOLF, Virginia. *A viúva e o papagaio*. Ilustrações de David Pintor. Lisboa: Cultura, 2021.

WOOLF, Virginia. *A viúva e o papagaio*. Tradução de Sandra Trabucco Valenzuela. Ilustrações de Simone Matias. São Paulo: nVersinhos, 2022.

WOOLF, Virginia. *A viúva e o papagaio*. Ilustrações de Anisabel Sá Fernandes. Lisboa: [s.n.], 2023.

- WOOLF, Virginia; BELL, Quentin. *Charleston Bulletin Supplements*. London: The British Library, 2013.
- WOOLF, Virginia. *Flush*. Ilustrações de Katyuli Lloyd. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2016.
- WOOLF, Virginia. *Flush: biografia de um cão*. Ilustrações de Iratxe López de Munáin. Porto: Livros do Brasil, 2021.
- WOOLF, Virginia. *Flush: uma biografia*. Ilustrações de Gala Pont. Barcelona: Editorial Alma, 2025.
- WOOLF, Virginia. *Il ditale d'oro*. Tradução de Enzo Siciliano. Ilustrações de Flaminia Siciliano. Milão: Emme Edizioni, 1976.
- WOOLF, Virginia. *La cortina de la mainadera*. Tradução de Núria Font. Ilustrações de Victòria Tubau. Barcelona: Editorial Eruïlla, 2006.
- WOOLF, Virginia. *Le dé en or*. Tradução de Frédéric Armei. Ilustrações de Napo. Paris: Fernand Nathan, 1983.
- WOOLF, Virginia. *Nurse Lugton's Golden Thimble*. Ilustrações de Duncan Grant. London: Hogarth Press, 1966.
- WOOLF, Virginia. *Nurse Lugton's Curtain*. Ilustrações de Julie Vivas. San Diego; New York; London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991.
- WOOLF, Virginia. *Nurse Lugton's Curtain*. Ilustrações de Julie Vivas. Nova York: Gulliver Books; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991.
- WOOLF, Virginia. *Orlando*. London: Penguin, 2000.
- WOOLF, Virginia. *The Widow and the Parrot*. Ilustrações de Julian Bell. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988.

Secondary:

- BECKETT, Sandra. *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- BECKETT, Sandra. *Crossover Picturebooks: A Genre for All Ages*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- BECKETT, Sandra. Crossover. In: NEL, Philip; PAUL, Lissa; CHRISTENSEN, Nina (org.). *Keywords for Children's Literature*. New York: New York University Press, 2021.
- FALCONER, Rachel. *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- FORD SMITH, Victoria. *Between Generations: Collaborative Authorship in the Golden Age of Children's Literature*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017.
- Magri, G., & Navas, D. (2025). Stein, Woolf, and Joyce: Modernist Authors in Children's Bookshelves. *Revista De Letras Norte@mentos*, 18(53), 31-46. <https://doi.org/10.30681/rln.v18i53.13639>
- OKUMURA, Sayaka. *The poetics of Virginia Woolf's fiction: time, space and the material world*. 2007. Tese (Doutorado em Literatura Inglesa) – University of York, York, 2007.

OLK, Claudia. The art of ‘scene-making’ in the Charleston Bulletin Supplements. *Literature Compass*, Oxford, v. 4, n. 1, p. 252–262, 2007. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2006.00398.x>.

ROCHA, Guilherme Magri da. A Literatura Infantil de Virginia Woolf em Diferentes Ilustrações: uma Investigação sobre Nurse Lugton's Curtain. *Miscelânea*, Assis, v. 32, p. 245-265, jul.-dez. 2022.

ROCHA, Guilherme Magri da. *Literatura infantil e modernismo literário: palimpsestos e representações da consciência ficcional em textos de mulheres*. 2022. Tese (Doutorado em Letras) - Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP), Faculdade de Ciências e Letras, Assis, 2022.

ROCHA, G. M. da, & Navas, D. (2024). Entre palavras e imagens: Virginia Woolf e a magia modernista no *Charleston Bulletin*. *Revista De Estudos De Cultura*, 10(25), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.32748/revec.v10i25.21285>

WOOLF, Virginia. The New Biography. In: WOOLF, Virginia. *Granite and Rainbow*. New York: Girvin Press, 2012. p. 149–155.

WOOLF, Virginia. A Arte da Biografia // The Art of Biography. *Dispositiva*, Lisboa, n. 2 (1), p. 200–207, 2012.

YEUNG, Jessica Siu-Yin. Collaboration and cultural production in *Hyde Park Gate News* and *The Charleston Bulletin*. *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, n. 89, p. 14–16, 2016.

MAGRI, G.; NAVAS, D. Ressoando entre gerações: Virginia Woolf e a lógica do crossover literário. *Itinerários*, Araraquara, n. 61, p. 217-234, jul./dez. 2025.

■ **RESUMO:** Este artigo analisa de que modo a obra literária e a figura de Virginia Woolf vêm sendo reinterpretadas na literatura e na cultura voltadas para o público infantil. O estudo identifica cinco principais categorias de textos: colaborações intergeracionais, narrativas adaptadas para livros ilustrados, biografias (divididas entre livros ilustrados de caráter metafórico e biografias gráficas), ensaio adaptado para livro ilustrado e reedições ilustradas de obras canônicas. Argumenta-se que, embora voltadas prioritariamente para crianças e jovens, essas obras adotam uma lógica crossover, que rompe as fronteiras entre idades, gêneros e públicos. Tais reconfigurações, marcadas por uso de metáforas, hibridiz visual e narrativas multimodais, revelam como a literatura infantil se tornou um espaço criativo em que os princípios modernistas de Woolf são traduzidos, ressignificados e constantemente revitalizados para novas gerações.

■ **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Biografia. Literatura infantil. Crossover. Modernismo. Virginia Woolf.

