



# Virginia Woolf: The Patterns of Ordinary Experience

*Lorraine Sim*

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In her timely contribution to revisionist approaches in modernist studies, Lorraine Sim offers a reading of Virginia Woolf's conception of ordinary experience as revealed in her fiction and nonfiction. Contending that Woolf's representations of everyday life both acknowledge and provide a challenge to characterizations of daily life as mundane, Sim shows how Woolf explores the potential of everyday experience as a site of personal meaning, social understanding, and ethical value. Sim's argument develops through readings of Woolf's literary representations of a subject's engagement with ordinary things like a mark on the wall, a table, or colour; Woolf's accounts of experiences that are both common and extraordinary such as physical pain or epiphanic 'moments of being'; and Woolf's analysis of the effect of new technologies, for example, motor-cars and the cinema, on contemporary understandings of the external world. Throughout, Sim places Woolf's views in the context of the philosophical and lay accounts of ordinary experience that dominated the cultural thought of her time. These include British Empiricism, Romanticism, Platonic thought and Post-Impressionism. In addition to drawing on the major novels, particularly *The Voyage Out*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse*, Sim focuses close attention on short stories such as 'The Mark on the Wall', 'Solid Objects', and 'Blue & Green'; nonfiction works, including 'On Being Ill', 'Evening over Sussex: Reflections in a Motor-car', and 'A Sketch of the Past'; and Woolf's diaries. Sim concludes with an account of Woolf's ontology of the ordinary, which illuminates the role of the everyday in Woolf's ethics.

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