“I Always Destroy What I Love Most”:
Julian Bell’s Romantic Failure

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I. Introduction

Our intent to explore the Bloomsbury group is to show extended research on Virginia Woolf has recently been branching out. Not only biographies on Vanessa Bell, Woolf’s sister and Julian Bell, her son, but also novels featuring them have been published. These publications indicate that Woolf studies in extraneous nature is gradually expanding. Then, why do we mention the Bloomsbury again now? Perhaps, topics of the Bloomsburian era raised by the members of the Bloomsbury are based on some of the leading ideas that are still valid even nowadays like all the other stream of thoughts ahead of their time. In other words, several propositions that cannot be overlooked are reposed in their questions time after time. Nigel Nicolson’s remark on the Bloomsbury group reminds us of its present aspect as follows: “Bloomsbury, like the Old Testament, is exceptionally fertile ground for commentary and expertise, and the fun is that, unlike an archaeological site, each new generation can start all over again” (9-10). A group of intellectuals
known as the Bloomsbury is not easily expressed in one word, but their main question along with their liberalist spirit is: “What is civilization? Where does this civilization lead them?” Issues that they argued in the concept of the civilization include utopianism, socialism and religion. Hong Ying summarizes Julian’s biggest despair of their influence as “[t]hey left no space for posterity to say anything new, their influence was so all pervasive” (K: The Art of Love 153). Julian, then, is the very figure that acutely reacted to and devoted his life to this question. Although he was not a member of the Bloomsbury, he was trapped by his parents’ fame and reputation. He was a great Bloomsburian in the making who was forced to live under the pressure of such fame and reputation. Woolf published her first novel, The Voyage Out as Julian was born. According to Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, this was the beginning of the Bloomsbury’s “golden years,” which slowly disappeared with Julian’s death in 1937 (286). They record that his death is a significant event not only to “[shadow] Vanessa and Virginia’s lives,” but also to allude to the demise of the Bloomsbury’s golden years (286). In other words, the history of the rise and fall of the Bloomsbury began with Julian’s birth and fell into the extreme of the decadence with his death.

The aim of this paper is to examine Julian’s orientation in Hong Ying’s K: The Art of Love (1999) and Susan Sellers’s Vanessa and Virginia (2008) and to compare and contrast their eastern and western views on Julian and his human nature. They share one fact in common that they both have thoroughly studied Woolf. Sellers is a renowned Woolf scholar who still teaches Woolf related subjects at St. Andrews University. Hong Ying, on the other hand, had visited the Library of School of Oriental and African Studies at London University and researched on Woolf, Vanessa’s collection of letters and the Bloomsbury in general since 1991, eight years prior to the publication of K: The Art of Love. Besides their research on books and letters regarding Woolf, Vanessa and the Bloomsbury, it is important for them to be inspired by Julian’s portraits and Vanessa’s paintings before writing their novels. Hong Ying, for example, visited Vanessa’s country home in Charleston, which has been renovated as her memorial hall, by chance. She could