

Virginia Woolf by Carl Köhler (Sweden, 1919-2006)

India Ink on Paper. 11" x 13". 1990-2005.

Beyond the Words: Author Portraits. Carl Köhler Retrospective.

Brooklyn Public Library, Grand Army Plaza (February 2 — April 4, 2009).

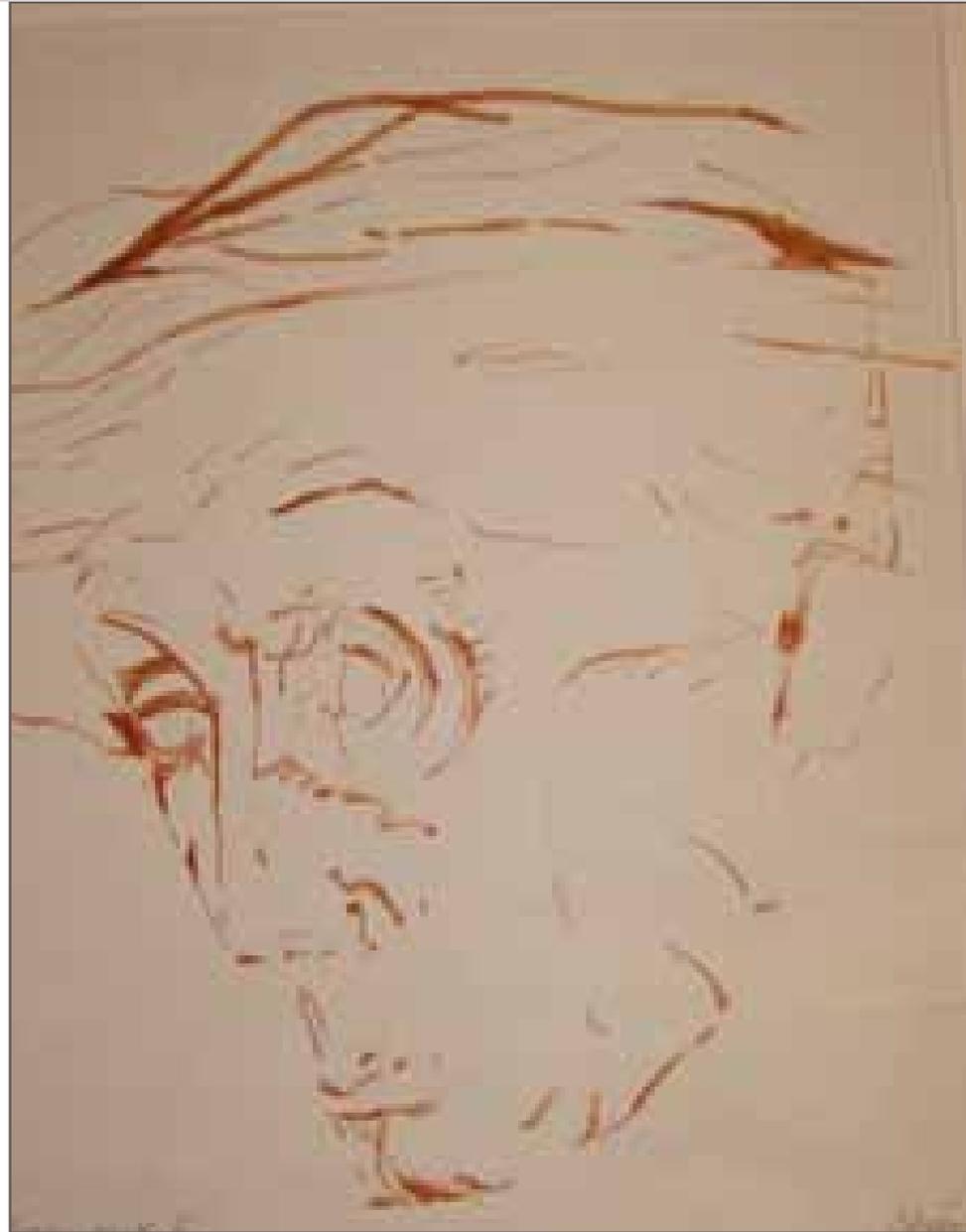
Photographer: Gregg Richards, Brooklyn Public Library.

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With permission from Frida Köhler and Henry Köhler (Akersberga, Stockholm, Sweden).

“And I know that
I must go on doing
this dance on hot
bricks till I die.”

— Virginia Woolf, *Diary:*
1936-1941 (1984);
entry for March 1, 1937



Dancing On Hot Bricks

VIRGINIA WOOLF IN 1941

By MAUREEN E. MULVIHILL

It has been 68 years since the suicide of Virginia Woolf, yet the subject continues to disturb us. It is not fully settled. The closing chapter of the Woolf saga beckons scholars, writers, medical professionals, artists, and—Woolf’s favorite audience—the common reader. It seems we are still afraid of Virginia Woolf; we fear the tormented creature she became. We fear what she did to herself in Rodmell Village, East Sussex, England, the morning of March 28, 1941.

The traditional view is that Woolf was a hardwired manic-depressive (also known as bipolar disorder) who could no longer bear up under the continuing weight of mental illness (“this disease,” she called it). In the opening months of 1941, she was again hearing voices and she was unable to focus on her work.¹ But when she walked into the fast tidal currents of the nearby River Ouse, determinedly weighed down by a long fur coat, pockets of stones, heavy garden boots, and a chin-strapped hat, surely there were other contributing factors.

This essay considers the circumstances of Woolf’s life in January, February, and March of 1941 with a view to offering a broader context—a larger logic—for this most famous of literary suicides. This was her last and shortest year, a year of only three busy months. We know that Woolf was “always half in love with easeful death,” as her husband, Leonard, poetically wrote;² and we know that her suicide was not only over-determined but very probably ‘rehearsed’—and bungled—the previous week.³ But there were other upsets during this finely focused timeframe which reasonably contributed to her decision. In assembling this larger perspective for the Woolf suicide, we have recourse to Leonard and Virginia Woolf’s own accounts of Woolf’s activities and health in early 1941; we also have the insightful observations of Dr. Olivia Wilberforce, who examined Woolf and then counseled her husband the very day before the suicide.

The configuration of events in early 1941 raises certain questions not typically addressed in Woolf commentary: Did Woolf’s suicide signal a total breakdown of faith, or was the act a purposeful and necessary action in the frenzied logic of a gifted but damaged mind? Is there evidence in the published record that points us to other contexts of this most extreme of human actions?

No one can say with any certainty precisely how Woolf’s mind was working during her last days, but it is possible to draw reasonable and responsible inferences based on her own words, the words of those closest to her, and her life in Rodmell Village in early 1941.

We begin with a glance at the arc of Woolf’s life and career before her final voyage out.⁴

VIRGINIA WOOLF BEFORE 1941

Virginia Woolf *née* Stephen was born in 1882 and experienced a heady mix of literary fame and personal crises throughout her 59 years. She was born into the English intelligentsia of her day, and her immediate family circle were agnostics and rational humanists.⁵ Young Virginia (“Ginia,” also “the Goat”) was home-schooled by her father, the autocratic Sir Leslie Stephen, a former Cambridge mathematics don and founding editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*.⁶ His vast library on the fourth floor of the Stephen family home at 22 Hyde Park Gate, Kensington, London, was Woolf’s schoolroom, along with Kensington Gardens and the moors of Cornwall. Sir Leslie Stephen was almost 50 years of age when Woolf was born to his second wife, Julia Duckworth, a widow with children. Woolf was bred up in a household of siblings and half-siblings, family tensions, servants, and a heavy schedule of literary doings. Walking, observation, and reflection were essential literary practices she learned from her first and best literary mentor: her father. In her formative years, the death of both parents (mother, in 1895; father, in 1904), as well as frequent sexual abuse from her step-brother, George Duckworth, set Woolf on a course of nervous disorders and eventual mental disease;⁷ there was also a genetic predisposition to emotional fragility.⁸ Her medical team at this time included several prominent pioneers in the new field of neuropsychology: Henry Head, Maurice Wright, and George Savage. After a severe breakdown in 1913, caused by a near-fatal overdose of the barbituate Veronal, one imagines Woolf always felt a little posthumous.

After 1915, she and her siblings—Vanessa, Thoby, and Adrian—moved from Hyde Park to 46 Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, and launched a new bohemian life, unfettered by familial authority and Victorian proprieties. Woolf and her older sister, Vanessa, soon



The Hogarth Press (1917-1946), cofounded by Leonard and Virginia Woolf. *This Perpetual Flight: Love & Loss in Virginia Woolf's Intimate Circle*. Bloomsbury Group exhibition, Autumn 2008. Curators: Sarah Funke and William Beekman. Grolier Club, New York City. Main Floor, Exhibition Hall. Photographer: June Harrison, New York City. With kind permission.

This lavish exhibition included more than 200 items in 10 display cases (case specs: 48" high x 103" wide). Exhibits drawn from selected books, literary manuscripts, letters, and images in the collections of Smith College, Harvard University Theatre Collection, Morgan Library and Museum, and the New York Public Library Berg Collection. The Hogarth Press imprint was a major force in the development of Modern literature and of new thought; its authors list included Sigmund Freud, T. S. Eliot, John Maynard Keynes, Robert Graves, E. M. Forster, C. Day Lewis, Vita Sackville-West, and Virginia and Leonard Woolf.



The famous 'blue plaque' of Hogarth House, 34 Paradise Road, Richmond, United Kingdom. (See also *Seventy Years of the Hogarth Press*, curated by Max Yela, 1987, University of Delaware Library, Newark.)

gathered about them an élite clique known as the Bloomsbury Group; this was an avant-garde set of writers, painters, intellectuals, and Fabian socialists.⁹ Unlike the famous Algonquin Circle in New York City (a chatty set of jobbing writers associated with Harold Ross's popular magazine, *The New Yorker*), the Bloomsbury crowd were mostly upper-class, college-trained intellectuals who took themselves very seriously as England's cultural guarantors. The 'Bloomsburys' were mostly a gay literary brotherhood, ornamented by a few brave women of dazzling talent: Virginia and Vanessa Stephen, Dora Carrington, and Vita Sackville-West.¹⁰ Swimming in the nude, dancing topless at parties, wearing men's trousers, lesbian flirtations, and the occasional nude photo ignited their ardor for a free and open lifestyle, with Vanessa pointing the way as the far bolder of the Stephen sisters. As for Woolf's love of fun, her niece Angelica Bell writes: "[At the party], Virginia got absolutely *drunk* in about *five minutes*, and shrieked and waved her arms."¹¹

Depressive intervals notwithstanding, Woolf had a great capacity for pleasure, comedy, and irony. The impressive Grolier Club exhibition on Woolf and her circle in New York City last year presented many happy images of Woolf, which remind us of her delight in simply being alive: "This has to be lived, I say to myself."¹² Her best of friends Vita Sackville-West wrote, "Virginia wasn't all

cool intellect. She had the warmest and deepest and most human of affection for those she loved. There were few, perhaps, and she applied alarmingly high standards, but her love and humanity were real, once given."¹³

After Woolf's faux engagement to Lytton Strachey, one of the group's brightest stars¹⁴—his proposal, a silly bit of courtship drama lasting the duration of a few sentences—she married Leonard Sidney Woolf in 1912. Though playfully derided by Woolf as "her penniless Jew,"¹⁵ Leonard was a serious political writer and an energetic, if feverish, man of letters. Unfortunately for him, Leonard's long, fraught marriage to Woolf proved to be the crucible of his life. He found his new bride a worthy literary partner and affectionate companion, but she soon proved an enormous care for any spouse. He literally kept her alive through serial nervous breakdowns and he studied her mind, valuably leaving a record of her health, work habits, even her menstrual cycles.¹⁶ As the recent reassessment of his life and career shows, Leonard was more than a nurse to his muse; he effectively grounded his wife's very existence, not to mention her career and literary legacy.¹⁷

Though a sexual failure as a spouse (theirs was mostly a celibate 'white marriage'), Woolf flowered as a writer. In a very public career of about 20 years, she produced during the 1920s and 1930s an



Literary Portrait Photograph of Virginia Woolf at Tavistock Square, London, 1939, age 57, two years before her death in 1941. Photographer, Gisèle Freund. With kind permission, L'Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC), Paris.

Women acquaintances of Virginia Woolf often teased her about appearing untidy, old-fashioned, and frumpy. Woolf responded in the photographic medium, evidently, with stylish portrait photos by Man Ray (cover, *TIME Magazine*, April 12, 1937) and by Gisèle Freund. Unlike other feminists of her day, Woolf was never photographed wearing trousers; in her published letters, however, she admits to sometimes wearing her husband's 'cords,' even ordering a pair for herself (Volume VI, page 444). Other women of the Bloomsbury Circle, such as Dora Carrington and Vita Sackville-West, flaunted their delight in wearing men's attire.



Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Hyde Park, June 1, 1925. Sydney J. Loeb, photographer (a modern print). Presented by Elizabeth P. Richardson (Smith College alumna, 1943). Elizabeth P. Richardson Papers, Box 11, Mortimer Rare Book Room, Neilson Library, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts. See *A Bloomsbury Iconography* by Elizabeth P. Richardson (Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies, 1989), listed as item B29, page 292. With kind permission.

impressive body of work, notwithstanding bouts of depression and writerly anxieties: nine novels, nearly 4,000 letters, about 400 essays, and 30 volumes of diary.¹⁸ Influenced by the new stream-of-consciousness narrative technique of James Joyce, George Eliot, and Henry James, Woolf hit upon a way to write. This approach perfectly suited her tastes and talents; moreover, it allowed her to depict the workings of the human mind, especially the mind of a woman in the daily round of life (“the central things”).¹⁹ As one of Woolf’s best readers put it, she had “the courage to write as a woman.”²⁰ And in the real world, she cultivated a public voice by aligning herself with liberal agendas: the education of the working classes, broader opportunities for women, and a critique of gender-construction in literature and in the public sphere.²¹

The highest feather in her cap, for some Woolf devotees, was her business partnership with Leonard Woolf. Together, they founded and developed the imprint known as the Hogarth Press. The press was initially a hobby, a diversion from the couple’s serious writings, but it soon became a successful commercial entity engaging several good printers and an impressive list of ‘modernist’ authors. The

recent New York City exhibition on Woolf and her intimate circle, curated by Sarah Funke and William Beekman, gave prominent attention to the Hogarth Press. Leonard kept his wife busy and focused on other matters in her work for the press; she not only set type (Leonard had shaky hands), but she also bound many of the Hogarth books. These were highly specialized skills she had studied with Sylvia (Stebbing) McCurdy at her workshop on Museum Street in London.²²

By early 1941, Woolf was not without writing projects (she never wanted for these), but she was accepting—blow-by-blow—a harsh new truth: Her best work was behind her, and her literary skills and mental faculties were fast declining. “My hand has become palsied”; “I have lost the art of craft”; and finally, in late March of 1941, in a suicide note to Leonard, “You see I cant write this even, which shows I am right.”²³

VIRGINIA WOOLF’S SHORTEST YEAR: JANUARY, FEBRUARY, AND MARCH, 1941

In early 1941, Woolf was convinced that civilization, as she and her set knew it, had come to a vulgar end. Amid World War II, the rise of anti-Semitism and the German threat were all too real to the Woolfs in their otherwise peaceful village life in Rodmell, East Sussex. She and Leonard were often terrified by German bombers who flew so low as to shatter windows in their home. The Woolfs had drawn up plans for a joint suicide, by morphine injection, should Nazis come to Rodmell to arrest them. In fact, the Woolfs were on Heinrich Himmler’s immediate arrest list.²⁴ Adding to this daily anxiety, the Woolfs’ beloved London home at 37 Mecklenburgh Square was destroyed in September 1940 in the London blitz. Comments by Woolf in her diary entry for January 15, 1941, mention in some detail the “ravishment” of her city residence and its profound effect upon her and Leonard.²⁵ This, after all, had been a happy scene; the home resonated with memories of joyful, busy times, and career success. In the bombed-out ruins of their London home, the Woolfs literally witnessed civilization collapsing before their eyes.

Also in early 1941, Woolf began to have new problems. Some publishers (including *Harper’s Bazaar*, on one occasion) were becoming ambivalent to her work. This was astonishing to Woolf after many years of celebrity.²⁶ Reasonably, she may have concluded that word of her longstanding mental instability had begun to permeate the literary establishment and that she was no longer considered a ‘reliable property.’ Another blow at this time was also career related: she canceled publication of her new novel,

Between the Acts, calling it “silly and trivial”; this was a courageous and first-ever step by a literary star of Woolf’s magnitude. Her letter to the book’s managing editor and publisher, John Lehmann at Hogarth Press, was written the week of her suicide, and one imagines the decision was not merely embarrassing for Woolf, but seriously uncentering.²⁷ And as in other literary suicides, such as Ernest Hemingway’s, Woolf found that her depression and upsets had undermined her creative faculties: she could no longer “spin sentences.”²⁸ She had effectively lost her literary identity. Her plan for a new history of English literature—a set of essays presenting English literature as a “continuum” of themes and ideas, not discrete periods or movements—did not proceed.²⁹ Work was not only pulled and canceled during these months: it was shelved.

Daily life at Monk’s House, Sussex, in early 1941 also contributed to Woolf’s general decline. The winter of ’41 was unusually cold, wet, and bleak. Woolf often complained in her letters and diary of an inability to use her hands in the simplest of tasks.³⁰ There was also regular flooding in the kitchen at Monk’s House, as well as wartime privations (a continuing shortage of food, drink, and even paper). And then there was the very isolation of the Woolfs’ village habitat. For a London couple accustomed to the charge of the capitol and the stimulation of social interaction, a steady flow of visitors was essential. This was not the case at Monk’s House, early ’41.

But here was the final blow. In nearby Brighton, on Thursday, March 27, 1941—the very day before her suicide—Woolf’s husband, alert to this new phase of her illness, scheduled an appointment with Dr. Octavia Wilberforce, by then Woolf’s general practitioner. This appointment took place at Wilberforce’s progressive facility for “overtaxed professional women and housewives.”³¹ Wilberforce’s new approach to mental disorders was a residential “rest cure,” a diet rich in vegetables and dairy products, sunshine and walks on the facility’s grounds, and the removal of stress (no talking about one’s upsets, disengagement from one’s usual tasks).

Precipitating this medical appointment was Woolf’s clumsy suicide attempt, by drowning, the previous week. She had told her husband that she had slipped and fallen into the Ouse River.³² Clearly, she had learned a few things from this first try, mostly the need for a heavily-weighted submersion; and we know from the condition of her body, discovered a full three weeks after her successful plunge, that she had worn heavy shoes and a stone-weighted fur coat.³³

But back to the medical appointment in Brighton. Understandably, the Woolfs’ visit to Dr. Wilberforce, just a few days after Woolf’s earlier suicide attempt, was initiated by a concerned Leonard. And the tone of the entire visit evidently told



You will find Roger's letters to the Maurons in the writing table drawer in the Lodge. Will you destroy all my papers.

Dearest,
 I want to tell you that you have given me complete happiness. No one could have done more than you have done. Please believe that. But I know that I shall never get over this: & I am wasting your life. It is this madness. Nothing anyone says can persuade me. You can work, & you will be much better without me. You see I can't write this even, which shows I am right. All I want to say is that until this disease came on we were perfectly happy. It was all due to you. No one could have been so good as you have been. From the very first day till now. [She added with fresh ink]: Everyone knows that. V.
 [Turning the page, she wrote up the left-hand side]: You will find Roger's letters to the Maurons in the writing table drawer in the Lodge. Will you destroy all my papers.

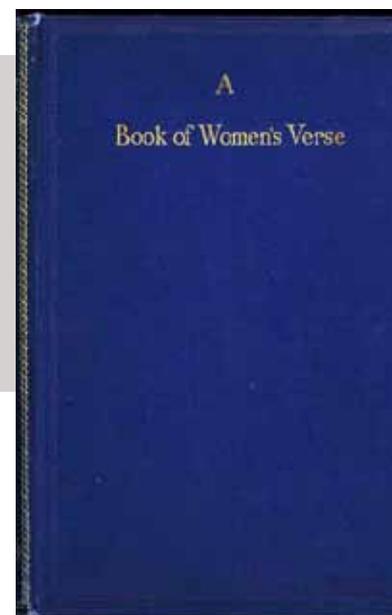
Letter 3710 (British Library)

Virginia Woolf’s Suicide Note to Leonard Woolf, Friday morning, March 28, 1941. With permission from British Library, London; Woolf Estate, Society of Authors, London.

Transcription, from Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (New York: Knopf, 1997) p. 747: “Dearest, I want to tell you that you have given me complete happiness. No one could have done more than you have done. Please believe that. But I know that I shall never get over this: & I am wasting your life. It is this madness. Nothing anyone says can persuade me. You can work, & you will be much better without me. You see I can't write this even, which shows I am right. All I want to say is that until this disease came on we were perfectly happy. It was all due to you. No one could have been so good as you have been. From the very first day till now. [She added with fresh ink]: Everyone knows that. V. [Turning the page, she wrote up the left-hand side]: You will find Roger's letters to the Maurons in the writing table drawer in the Lodge. Will you destroy all my papers.”

Woolf that Leonard and Wilberforce were making arrangements for her imminent institutionalization at Wilberforce’s facility; the compelling evidence for this supposition is Wilberforce’s reconstruction of the Woolf appointment and Wilberforce seeing “a look” on Woolf’s face as the Woolfs were leaving the facility—a look Wilberforce found startling and chilling. This look could only have been the physical manifestation of Woolf’s sudden grasp of what was coming: her life, as she knew it, was over; her entrapment

A Book of Women's Verse, edited and with a Prefatory Essay, by J.C. Squire. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921. 192 pages, with Index of Authors and First-line Index. 'Jack' Squire (1884-1958; pseud., "Solomon Eagle") was the literary editor of the *New Statesman* and a member of the Woolfs' inner circle (see *Letters of Leonard Woolf*, ed. Frederic Spotts [London & New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989], p. 283 and note, p. 385 and note). Virginia Woolf's last (uncompleted) project was a new history of English literature with women writers properly reclaimed and represented. The Squire collection of 1921 would have been included in her research and reading. His volume lends prominent attention to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Emily Brontë, Christina Rossetti, and 'Ephelia' (pseud., Mary Stuart *née* Villiers, Duchess of Richmond & Lennox, 1622—1685). From the Mulvihill Collection of Rare & Special Books (Brooklyn, New York). With kind permission.



by forces and institutions beyond her control had begun. This look, caught and recorded by Wilberforce, was likely the moment of Woolf's tragic recognition of this new truth. From this moment forward, her demons slipped their leash.³⁴

The morning after her evaluation by Wilberforce, Woolf took calm, rational steps for her final transition. Water—especially fast-moving waves of water—had always been a theme of hers in almost all of her writings, and none of her inner circle was surprised by her method of self-destruction. Imagine the prescient irony of Woolf typesetting for the Hogarth Press in 1922 this particular line for the Press's edition of T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland*: "Fear, death by water." This line may have carried special meaning for Woolf. Her suicide notes—two to her husband, one to her sister—have valuably survived. Her last communications to the living are perfectly rational and sensible. There is no anger or panic in these final writerly tasks. Woolf writes that her action is justified and that she is removing a burden from Leonard and Vanessa. The suicide decision itself suggests the logic of the suicide: she was destroying the Virginia Woolf she had become to save the Virginia Woolf she had worked many decades to create. Perhaps she felt it was better to be known to history as an unstable writer who took her own life than as a talented woman whose endgame was a madhouse in Brighton.

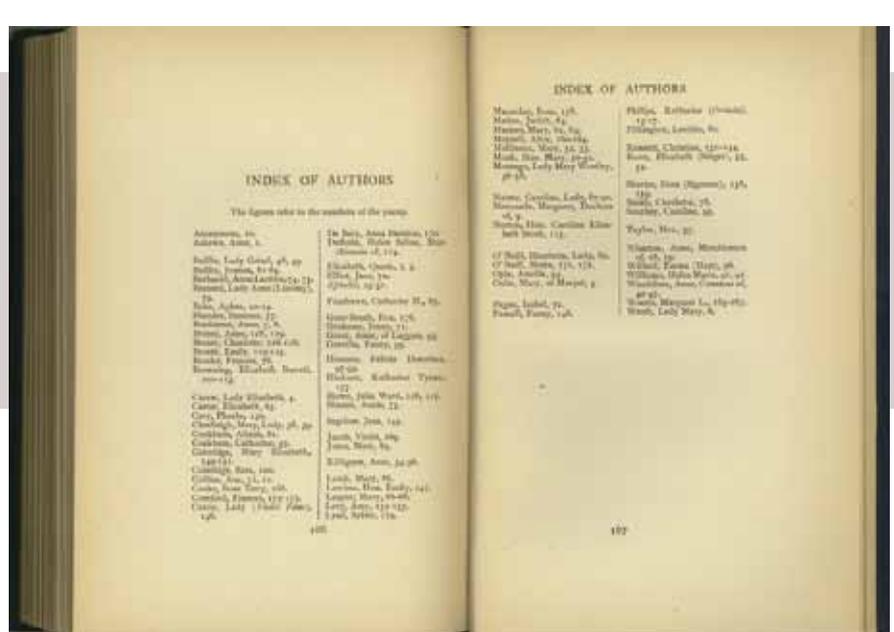
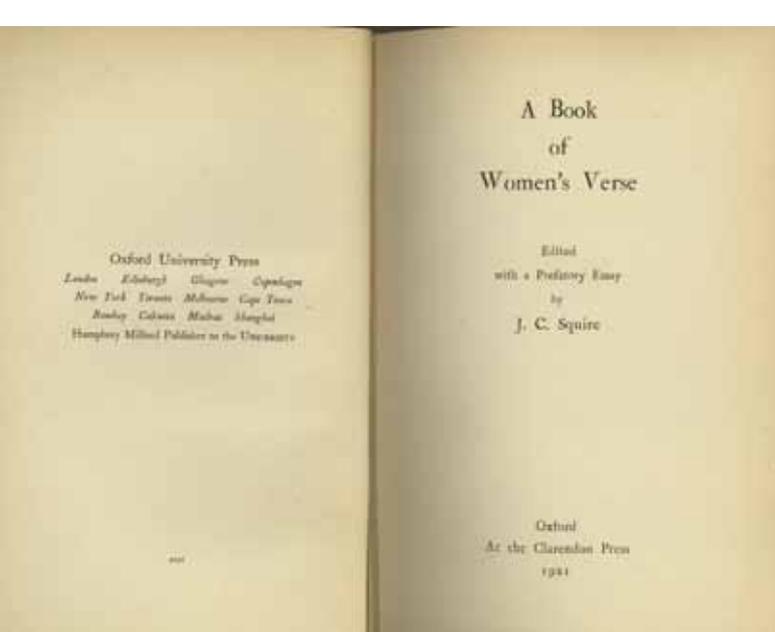
Her decision freed her from such a future; it also pre-empted what would have been a most pathetic (and unworthy) posthumous literary reputation. We recall the similar suicide of the war casualty Septimus Warren Smith in Woolf's famous novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925): Smith chooses self-destruction over institutionalization. And so did Woolf in 1913 after her medical appointment with the respected neuropsychologist, Dr. Henry Head. And she did so again, in 1941, directly after her medical visit with Dr. Wilberforce. Thus, Woolf's suicide secured her posthumous reputation with a measure of dignity, not shame. Her literary legacy was assured, certainly, in 1941 (Woolf always made money for her publishers), but her posthumous reputation could not be assured if her husband and her doctor were making decisions for her future. The final chapter of Woolf's biography was something she herself must write; and though her two choices in March 1941 were both ghastly—institutionalization or suicide—she reversed the judgments of others by acting as a free agent in control of her own destiny. When she writes, in a postscript, to her husband, the very morning of the suicide, "Will you destroy my papers," she is not asking a

question (note the absence of a question mark); perhaps, she is rather voicing her concern that he *not* discard an important part of her identity. *Will you destroy my papers*, she wonders. This intriguing postscript transmits a worry of hers; she is not necessarily asking Leonard to *do* anything, she is registering anxiety about what he *may* do. *To preserve a respectable memory of Virginia Woolf the writer, Virginia Woolf the madwoman must die*. This appears to have been the essential, inevitable, and larger logic that Friday morning, March 28, 1941, in Rodmell Village, East Sussex—a logic driven by a number of circumstances beyond her control.

EPILOGUE

With the rise of feminism and the Women's Rights Movements in the 1960s, Woolf became an icon.³⁵ Feminists throughout the world adopted Woolf as a thrilling paragon of their beliefs, and the flow of Woolf-related research, conferences, readings, and special events has been ongoing. Woolf was always prone to authorial anxiety; she was ever concerned with reputation, and her recorded breakdowns often coincided with the conclusion of major projects. Her husband, Leonard, as first literary executor of her writings, swiftly attended to her interests by getting into print, with his revisions, her last work, *Between the Acts*, as well as her personal papers (journals and letters). Her extended family and inner circle—Vanessa Bell, Angelica Bell, Quentin Bell, Nigel Nicolson, Vita Sackville-West, Octavia Wilberforce—all assisted in furthering Woolf's reputation and legacy with published writings of their own. The BBC provided a direct window onto Woolf by posting online its audio interview with her, titled "Craftsmanship," in the BBC series "Words Fail Me" (April 29, 1937). Here we can access the sound of her voice, its accent and cadence, and something of her mood and character.

In the creative arts, Woolf's life and writings have inspired many successful adaptations, beginning with Patrick Garland's broadly successful stage and television adaptations of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, starring Eileen Atkins as Woolf (BBC Masterpiece Theatre, 1991; Lambs Theatre, NYC, 1991). This was followed by Atkins' two-act play, *Vita and Virginia*, starring Vanessa Redgrave



and Atkins (Union Square Theatre, NYC, 1994; *New York Times* review, David Richards, November 22, 1994). In 1997, Fox Lorber Studios released a film adaptation of Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, starring Vanessa Redgrave and directed by Marleen Gorris. The Oscar-winning film *The Hours* (2002), directed by Stephen Daldry with screenplay by David Hare and based on the 1999 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Michael Cunningham, with score by Philip Glass, and with Nicole Kidman as Virginia Woolf, was a spectacular success. The film's narrative triangulates the lives of three women who are touched by Virginia Woolf and her novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. Visual artists have also been drawn to the Woolf subject for its arresting interior content; this article's lead image by Swedish artist Carl Köhler offers an expressionistic rendering of Woolf.

Woolf's only known comedy, *Freshwater*, a send-up of Woolf's great-aunt, photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, and her circle, and written for a private Bloomsbury theatrical party in 1931, received its first U.S. reading at the Grolier Club in New York City in November 2008. It was directed by Arthur Giron and sponsored by the Victorian Society in America, the William Morris Society (U.S. chapter), and others. Another production of the play, directed by Anne Bogart of the Women's Project and SITI Company, ran for more than 30 performances in New York City last January.

In recent years, scholars, students, and common readers have accessed events and scholarship centering on Woolf via the website www.woolfonline.com, conceived by the late Julia Briggs. The site's present principals include Nick Hayward, Peter Shillingsburg, and Mark Hussey. Furthermore, Karen V. Kukil (Woolf Papers, Smith College Libraries, Northampton, Massachusetts) has posted many impressive webpages on the Woolfs; she also has convened various special events at Smith College associated with Woolf and her circle. See www.smith.edu/libraries/lib/rarebook/karenkukil.htm.

This year was an especially prolific one for Woolf scholars and enthusiasts. The annual Virginia Woolf Conference, begun in 1990 by Mark Hussey (Pace University, New York City), convened last June

at Fordham University, Lincoln Center. Its agenda included papers on the forthcoming Cambridge University Press edition of the collected writings of Woolf. Also, the *Woolf Studies Annual* continues to be a principal source for scholarly work and new directions; the 2009 volume includes discussions of several intriguing subjects, such as Woolf's views on the film medium ("Cinema," 1926) and her influence on the work and life of Judith Ortiz Cofer. And also in 2009, Woolf scholars welcomed a fifth volume of collected essays by Virginia Woolf (for the years 1929-1932) edited by Stuart N. Clarke (Hogarth Press imprint). Finally, this year saw the publication of an engaging historical novel by Susan Sellers, *Vanessa and Virginia* (Houghton Mifflin), a first book-length consideration of this sisterly relationship.

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NOTES

1. For details on Woolf's symptoms (hearing voices, inability to process print, inability to write, inability to hold a pen for any length of time), see her suicide notes to her sister Vanessa Bell and to Leonard Woolf (*Letters* VI: 485, 486); Gordon, *Oxford DNB* online (2004); Lee 741—747; Leonard Woolf, *The Journey* 77—96. For the dating (and misdating) of these notes, see her *Letters* VI: 489—491.
2. Leonard Woolf borrows from John Keats in this description of Woolf's fascination with death; see *Ode to a Nightingale*, "Darkling I listen; and,

for many a time / I have been half in love with easeful Death,” Stanza 6: 1—2 (*Poetical Works*, 1884).

3. For details on this earlier suicide attempt, Tuesday, March 18, 1941, see Leonard Woolf, *The Journey*, 91—92. See also note 23.

4. ‘Voyage out’ alludes to Woolf’s first novel, begun around 1910, *The Voyage Out* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1915; NY: Doran, 1920), a witty social satire of Edwardian life that valuably introduces Woolf’s most famous literary creation, Clarissa Dalloway, developed in Woolf’s novel *Mrs. Dalloway* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1925).

5. Sir Leslie Stephen and his inner circle were ‘godless Victorians’; their style of agnosticism and rational humanism was much in vogue among the intellectual avant-garde. For information on the rearing and early homelife of Virginia Stephen (she was a third child, with an older sister and brother), see Lee 3—196, with family photos; “Ginia Stephen: Her Youth and Family,” Grolier Club *Woolf* exhibition catalogue (2008), pages 11—24, with images; and “Leslie Stephen’s Photograph Album,” online, Smith College Libraries.

6. Woolf’s first published biographical piece (1905) was an essay on her father contributed to Frederic Maitland’s *Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1906). See also Lee 19 and Elizabeth Hartley Winthrop, “The Old Man,” Grolier Club *Woolf* exhibition catalogue (2008), pages 12—14. Woolf’s relationship with her father was ambivalent, vacillating between awe and resentment (“that old wretch”).

7. For information on sexual liberties taken by Woolf’s half-brother, George Duckworth, see Woolf’s *Letters*, V: 460 and note; 492, 497 and note; also Lee, “Abuses,” 157—156; and Bell 45—48, wherein Bell marginalizes these sexual encounters as adolescent “fondlings,” not rape. Most students of Woolf view these experiences more seriously. As late as January, 1941, Woolf’s memory of these encounters was vivid: “I still shiver with shame at the memory of my half-brother [George Duckworth] standing me on a ledge, aged about 6, and so exploring my private parts” (*Letters*, VI: 460).

8. Woolf had some genetic predisposition to mental instability. Her half-sister Laura Stephen (born in 1870), daughter of Leslie Stephen and his first wife ‘Minnie’ Thackeray, was put away for life in the early 1890s in “an idiot asylum” in Redhill; see Lee 99—103; also Gordon, *Oxford DNB* online (2004).

9. For a detailed discussion of the Bloomsbury Group, see Bell’s memoir, with portraits, offering dedicated chapters on the Group’s members; Malcolm, on Vanessa Bell *née* Stephen, 58—79, with images; and essays on the Group by Rachel Cohen, William Beekman, and Andrew Solomon, *Woolf* exhibition catalogue (Grolier Club, 2008).

10. For an extended, illustrated essay on painter Vanessa Bell *née* Stephen, Woolf’s older sister, see Malcolm 58—79. For profiles, with sources, of Dora Carrington and Vita Sackville-West, see the *Oxford DNB* (2004).

11. Woolf loved parties, and her delirium was memorably captured by her

niece Angelica Bell (Lee 702). Leonard Woolf, ever the steward of his wife’s fragile health, feared that excitement would bring on a crisis, thus requiring him to take her home early from such gatherings (Bell 119).

12. Virginia Woolf, *Diary* IV: 206.

13. For Sotheby’s recent sale of Sackville-West / Woolf letters (July 17, 2008), see Vanessa Van Thorp, *Guardian* online, July 13, 2008.

14. Thus Strachey to Leonard Woolf, February 19, 1909: “... I proposed to Virginia. As I did it, I saw that it would be death if she accepted me, and I managed, of course, to get out of it before the end of the conversation.... You ought to marry her.” And so Leonard did. *Letters of Leonard Woolf* 147.

15. Woolf refers to Leonard as a “penniless Jew” in a letter to Violet Dickinson on June 4, 1912 (*Letters* I: 501). She intended the phrase ironically, defying the cliché of the monied Jew. Leonard was proud of his ethnic identity, and he visited Israel after Woolf’s death with his late-life companion from Rodmell Village, Trekkie Parsons. He credited his discipline and capacity for hard work to his Jewish genes; *The Journey* 127—30. There were family tensions over his engagement to Virginia Stephen, and Leonard’s mother was conspicuously absent from the marriage ceremony.

16. See Chapter I, “Virginia’s Death,” Leonard Woolf, *The Journey* 94—96. In his correspondence, we observe his vigilance as a historian, scribe, and student of his wife; he discloses details about her life, career, work habits, and health. See his *Letters* 250—261 and also Caramagno 13, 16—17, 20, 313.

17. After the suicide, Leonard was the first executor of Woolf’s writings; he held legal copyright. He was also the principal behind the publication of her multi-volume diary and letters, and he published her last project, *Between the Acts*. A responsible reassessment of Leonard is Gloria Glendinning’s impressive *Leonard Woolf* (2006).

18. This quantitative estimate of Woolf’s work, both published and in manuscript, is Lyndall Gordon’s “Virginia Woolf,” *Oxford DNB* online (2004).

19. “I think it most important ... to go for the central things, even though they don’t subject, as they should however, to beautification in language.” See Sarah Funke, “Her Literature: *To the Lighthouse*. ‘The Central Things’”



First U.S. Carl Köhler Retrospective *Beyond the Words: Author Portraits by Carl Köhler* (Sweden, 1919–2006). Curator: Barbara Wing, Exhibitions Manager, Brooklyn Public Library, Grand Army Plaza (Spring, 2009). Photographer: Gregg Richards, Brooklyn Public Library. Display Case Dimensions: 4' high x 12' long x 1.5' deep. With permission from Frida Köhler and Henry Köhler (Akersberga, Stockholm, Sweden).

This first U.S. retrospective of the drawings and paintings of Carl Köhler offers 26 author portraits. Köhler's subjects include Guillaume Apollinaire, Antonin Artaud, Samuel Beckett, Jean Cocteau, Günter Grass, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Henry Miller, Anaïs Nin, Joyce Carol Oates, and Virginia Woolf. Now a traveling show, the Köhler portraits have been exhibited by venues in Sweden, Finland, New York, Washington, DC, and Canada.

Woolf exhibition catalogue (Grolier Club, 2008), 84—86.

20. Ruth Gruber, “Virginia Woolf: Her Courage to Write as a Woman,” *Woolf* exhibition catalogue (Grolier Club, 2008), 143—147.

21. See the Appendix to this article, which presents excerpts from selected essays by Woolf on women, on women writers, and on the construction of gender in society and in literature.

22. See the photograph in this article of The Hogarth Press display case, *Woolf* exhibition (Grolier Club, 2008); see also Sarah Funke, “Books as Objects: The Hogarth Press and Beyond: In Marriage, In Print, In Business,” *Woolf* exhibition catalogue (Grolier Club, 2008), 67—71. For Stebbing, see Tidcombe 165.

23. According to Nigel Nicolson, co-editor of Woolf's letters, Woolf had admitted to Dr. Wilberforce on March 21, 1941, seven days before the suicide: “I've lost the art.” Nicolson explains: “This sentence is perhaps the key. It was not merely her usual reaction on finishing a book, but something more terrible, a conviction that her whole purpose in life had gone. What was the point in living if she was never again to understand the shape of the world around her, or be able to describe it?” (*Letters* VI: xvi). This literary decline that Woolf observed and recorded was confided earlier to Wilberforce in Woolf's letter on December 31, 1940: “I've lost all power over words, cant [sic] do a thing with them” (*Letters* VI: 456). There are references enough to Woolf's hands being “palsied” (and thus her use of a typewriter). For example, she wrote to her niece Angelica Bell on July 12, 1940: “As you can't read a word of this, my hand being palsied, I stop” (*Letters* VI: p 405). In her diary entry for December 19, 1940, she writes, “A certain old age feeling sometimes makes me think I cant [sic] spend force as I used. And my hand shakes” (*Diary* V: 345); later that same month, “I note with some dismay that my hand is becoming palsied. Why I cant [sic] say. Can I make clear straight lines any more? It seems not” (*Diary* V: 346). On February 26, 1941, a month before her suicide, she records declining powers of invention and imagination: “But shall I ever write again one of those sentences that gives me intense pleasure?” (*Diary* V: 357).

24. As for the Woolfs being on Himmler's interrogation list, Gordon writes: “Rodmell [East Sussex, site of the Woolfs' wartime residence, Monk's House] is only three miles from Newhaven, where the German Ninth Army would have landed if Operation Sea Lion had been carried out. The Woolfs could not have known that both of them were already on Himmler's list for immediate arrest, but they were aware of the danger to a Jew and his wife. In 1940, Leonard devised two contingency plans for their joint suicide” Gordon *Oxford DNB* online (2004); Gordon, *Woolf* 271.

25. Thus Woolf on the bombing of the Woolfs' London residence: “We have need of all our courage... on hearing that all our windows are broken, ceilings down, & most of our china smashed at Meck. Sq. The bomb exploded. ... The Press [the Woolfs' handpulled press used for their Hogarth imprints]—

what remains—is to be moved to Letchworth. A grim morning... As I say, we have need of courage. A very bad raid last night on London” (*Diary*, Wednesday, 18 September 1940, VI: 322—323). Also, Leonard Woolf: “But we have now been completely bombed out of London...Mecklenburgh Square was rather wrecked by bombs falling...the windows were blown out and many of the ceilings down. ... All the windows were blown in, the bookcases blown off the walls...The place is uninhabitable and we are now trying to remove the books and furniture. ... Bloomsbury happens to have suffered more, I think, than any other district except the East End—which is bad luck for us” (*Letters of Leonard Woolf*, 14 November 1940, 247). The historic bombing of London signaled for Leonard “the collapse of our world” (*The Journey* 58).

26. Thus Woolf to the assistant editor at *Harper's Bazaar* in New York City: “Your letter of 21 January astonished me. Three months ago you wrote to me saying that the American office had cabled to you ‘clamouring for’ a story from me. I was not prepared to submit a story unless commissioned and you then wrote to me on October 25th saying that ‘it would definitely be a commission from America’ and ‘... we would use it ourselves this side in the next issue to press.’ You acknowledged receipt of the story of November 4, nearly three months ago. Since that date I have heard nothing from you, my letters remained unanswered, and the story not used in your next issue. You now write... without apology, to repudiate your agreement.” Typed Letter Unsigned, Monk's House, Sussex, 23 January 1941, *Letters* VI: 463. Again, she writes, the following month, this time to the magazine's editor: “... I do not see... any ‘muddle’ or ‘misunderstanding’ about this, but a perfectly plain, legal contract... I was told that the story would be used here by you. The story was acknowledged, but after that I heard nothing from you, and my letter remained unanswered. You now inform me that “they do not want” the story...” Typed letter unsigned, Monk's House, Sussex, 3 February 1941, *Letters* VI: 469. See also Lee: “*Harper's* rejected her story,” 741.

27. Thus Woolf to John Lehmann: “I've decided... that I cant [sic] publish that novel as it stands—its [sic] too silly and trivial... What I will do is to revise it, and see if I can pull it together ... If published as it is, it would certainly mean a financial loss; which we don't want. I am sure I am right about this. ... I didn't realize how bad it was till I read it over. ... I'm only doing what is best... Again, I apologise profoundly.” Typed Letter Signed, Monk's House, Sussex, March 1941, *Letters* VI: 486. According to Nigel Nicolson, coeditor of her letters, Woolf's letter to Lehmann was posted by Leonard Woolf on March 27, 1941, the day preceding Woolf's suicide, with Leonard's covering note that “Virginia was on the verge of a complete nervous breakdown.” The letter reached Lehmann after the tragedy of the next day (*Letters* VI: 486, note 1). With revisions by Leonard Woolf, the novel was published posthumously.

28. See note 23, above.

29. Nigel Nicolson, son of Vita-Sackville West and coeditor of Woolf's letters, writes that she had “made some progress with her history of literature” in early 1941 (*Letters* VI: headnote, 457); for example, she wrote on January 15, 1941, “And so to the L.L. [London Library] where I collected specimens of Eng. litre. [English literature]” (*Diary* V: 353); and on January 20, 1941, “I am reading—oh, all lit. for my book!” (*Diary* V: 354). This was a huge project for any writer, especially a writer whose physical and mental health were declining. Also, at Monk's House, Woolf lacked the requisite books for

such a project, often asking Vita to stop by with loan copies of books from Vita's library at Sissinghurst (*Letters* VI: 470); Woolf also had to schedule visits to libraries in London. Woolf's current biographer mentions "the history book's anxieties" (Lee 739). By late January 1941, Woolf admits, "If I cant [sic] write, I can eat. As for writing its [sic] a washout" (*Letters* VI: 463). In late February through early March of 1941, "she could not write her history book; she could not write anything except those revolted, paralysed fragments. Repeatedly, she noted 'blank spaces in front of her'" (Lee 743).

30. See note 23, above, to "palsy" and "old age."

31. For details on Dr. Wilberforce ("like an English oak") and her facility in Brighton, see Leonard Woolf, *The Journey* 80—87, 90—92; Leonard Woolf, *Letters*, 251 and note 1; 252. Her supportive relationship with Woolf and her frequent visits to Monk's House with cream and milk for Woolf's frayed nerves are often mentioned in Woolf's papers.

32. Regarding Woolf's failed suicide attempt a week prior to her drowning, Leonard writes, "There is a note in my diary on March 18 that she was not well and in the next week I became more and more alarmed. I am not sure whether early in that week she did not unsuccessfully try to commit suicide. She went for a walk in the water-meadows in pouring rain and I went, as I often did, to meet her. She came back across the meadows soaking wet, looking ill and shaken. She said that she had slipped and fallen into one of the dykes.... I knew that the situation was very dangerous. Desperate depression had settled upon Virginia; her thoughts raced beyond her control; she was terrified of madness. One knew that at any moment she might kill herself. ... It was essential for her to resign herself to illness and [to] the drastic regime [a residential rest cure and "perpetual surveillance of trained nurses"], which alone would stave off insanity... The memory of 1913 when [her] attempted suicide was the immediate result of [her] interview with Dr Head haunted me" (*The Journey* 91—92). Leonard offered important information in this remark; he is establishing a connection between the intervention of the medical establishment in his wife's illness and her suicide attempts that directly followed those interventions.

33. For details on the discovery of the body three weeks after the suicide, by "some children who saw it floating in the [Ouse] river," mistaking it for a log, as well as Woolf's weighted attire and Leonard's role at the Newhaven mortuary and then his arranging for the cremation in Brighton, followed by his burying of Woolf's ashes at Monk's House, see Leonard Woolf, *The Journey* 94—96. For his letters shortly after the suicide, to Vita Sackville-West, Dr. Wilberforce, John Lehmann, and to *The Times* of London, see Woolf's *Letters* 250—261.

34. For details on the Wilberforce-Woolf medical appointment, see *Wilberforce* 180—183; see also "Virginia's Death," Leonard Woolf, *The Journey* 92; and Lee 746—747. According to Lee: "One 'look' she [Wilberforce] caught from Virginia, before they [the Woolfs] left, alarmed her [Wilberforce] terribly" (747).

35. Woolf's posthumous reputation did not blossom until some two decades after her death. As her nephew Quentin Bell explained, "Desmond McCarthy... prophesied that her reputation would slump. 'But,' he [McCarthy] added, 'there is a cyclical movement, and it will rise again.' He did not live to see how good a prophet he had been" (Bell 169). For a harshly contrarian view of Woolf as an elitist snob, racist, manipulator, and coward, see the controversial work of psychiatrist Thomas Szasz, *My Madness Saved Me: The Madness and Marriage of Virginia Woolf* (NY: Transaction, 2006).

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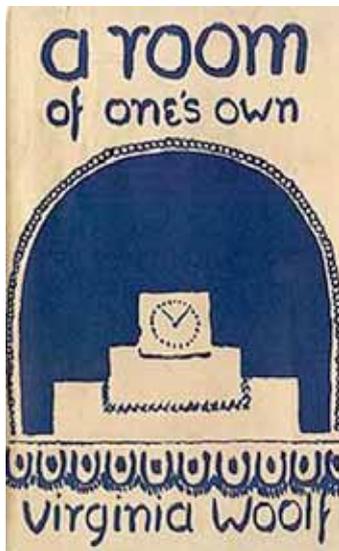
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multi-volume scholarly edition of the collected writings of Virginia Woolf is based at St. Andrews University, Scotland, and at Dundee University, Scotland; for the edition's handsome online webpage, see Cambridge University Press Woolf Edition Homepage. Also Volume 6 of the essays of Virginia Woolf, 1933—1941, is forthcoming from Hogarth Press.

APPENDIX A FEMINIST GARLAND

Excerpts from Selected Writings on Women by Virginia Woolf

Although Virginia Woolf was publicly honored by women's groups during her own lifetime, she detested the words feminism and feminist, according to her nephew Quentin Bell (*Bloomsbury Recalled*, 1995, p. 170). Ambivalence to categorical labeling notwithstanding, Woolf published many important essays and opinion pieces on women, on women writers, and on the construction of gender in society and in literature. Anyone interested in the evolution of feminist thought in the 20th Century is well served by these writings, especially as they show Woolf grappling with feminist theorizing and the formulation of a feminist aesthetic. Some of her work on this subject was determinedly polemical, and prepared as counterblasts to her contemporaries, such as Desmond MacCarthy (pseud., "Affable Hawk") and Arnold Bennett (*Our Women: Chapters on the Sex-discord*, 1920). The author presents this garland of Woolf's words on a subject that continues to draw interest and debate.



Cover, first edition. Cover art (watercolor) by Vanessa Bell. London: The Hogarth Press, 1938. 'Virginia Woolf' exhibition, Grolier Club, New York, Autumn 2008. With permission from co-curators Sarah Funke and William Beekman. See exhibition catalogue (New York: Grolier Club, 2008), pp. 114—116, with image. See also *A Room of Their Own: The Bloomsbury Artists in American Collections*, edited by Nancy E. Green & Christopher Reed (Cornell University Press, 2009).

From *A Room of One's Own* London: The Hogarth Press, 1929

A Room of One's Own was originally a set of lectures delivered by Virginia Woolf in October 1928 at Newnham College and Girton College, two women's colleges at Cambridge University. The essay interrogates many complex subjects, such as the relative absence of women writers before 1700 (where are Shakespeare's literary 'sisters?') and Woolf's high assessment of the writings of Aphra Behn, Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, and George Eliot. This was one of Woolf's most successful works, and it proved to be a bestseller for the Hogarth Press. The published essay (1929) was adapted as a one-woman play in 1991 by Patrick Garland, starring Eileen Atkins as Virginia Woolf (PBS Masterpiece Theatre, 1991; Lambs

Theatre, New York, 1991). This is a book that does not age.

Excerpts:

"... a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction ..."

"Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say. Shakespeare himself went, very probably—his mother was an heiress—to the grammar school, where he may have learnt Latin—Ovid, Virgil and Horace—and the elements of grammar and logic.... Meanwhile his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home.... She cried out that marriage was hateful to her, and for that she was severely beaten by her father.... She made up a small parcel of her belongings, let herself down by a rope one summer's night and took the road to London. She was not seventeen.... she had a taste for the theatre. She stood at the stage door; she wanted to act, she said. Men laughed in her face.... Nick Greene the actormanager took pity on her; she found herself with child by that gentleman and so—who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body?—killed herself one winter's night and lies buried at some cross-roads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle. That, more or less, is how the story would run, I think, if a woman in Shakespeare's day had had Shakespeare's genius."

"... with Mrs. [Aphra] Behn we turn a very important corner on the road.... We come to town and rub shoulders with ordinary people in the streets. Behn was a middle-class woman with all the plebeian virtues of humour, vitality and courage; a woman forced by the death of her husband and some unfortunate adventures of her own to make her living by her wits. She had to work on equal terms with men. She made, by working very hard, enough to live on.... Behn proved that money could be made by writing at the sacrifice, perhaps, of certain agreeable qualities; and so by degrees writing became not merely a sign of folly and a distracted mind, but was of practical importance.... Hundreds of women began as the eighteenth century drew on to add to their pin money, or to come to the rescue of their families by making translations or writing the innumerable bad novels which have ceased to be recorded even in text-books, but are to be picked up in the fourpenny boxes in the Charing Cross Road. The extreme activity of mind which showed itself in the later eighteenth century among women—the talking, and the meeting, the writing of essays on Shakespeare, the translating of the classics—was founded on the solid fact that women could make money by writing.... All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn... for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds."

From *The Three Guineas* London: The Hogarth Press, 1938

Three Guineas (1938) is a feminist and a socialist text in the epistolary genre. In this piece, Woolf wonders why English women in the late 1930s were not full daughters of England, but rather 'step-daughters' of their own country. She negotiates three issues that were on the minds of forward-looking Britains in the 1930s: How might war be prevented? Why do government and families not support education, especially higher education, for women (women's colleges)? Why is public work, especially work in the professions, essentially inaccessible to women?



Cover, first edition: *Three Guineas* by Virginia Woolf. London: The Hogarth Press, 1938. Cover Art (watercolor) by Vanessa Bell. See ‘Virginia Woolf’ exhibition, Grolier Club, New York, Autumn 2008. With permission from co-curators Sarah Funke and William Beekman. See exhibition catalogue (New York: Grolier Club, 2008), pp. 118—119. See also *A Room of Their Own: The Bloomsbury Artists in American Collections*, edited by Nancy E. Green and Christopher Reed (Cornell University Press, 2009).

Excerpts:

“As a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world!”

“... both the Army and the Navy are closed to our sex. We are not allowed to fight. Nor again are we allowed to be members of the Stock Exchange. Thus we can use neither the pressure of force nor the pressure of money. The less direct but still effective weapons which our brothers, as educated men, possess in the diplomatic service, in the Church, are also denied to us. We cannot preach sermons or negotiate treaties. Then again although it is true that we can write articles or send letters to the Press, the control of the Press—the decision what to print, what not to print—is entirely in the hands of your sex. It is true that for the past twenty years we have been admitted to the Civil Service and to the Bar; but our position there is still very precarious and our authority of the slightest. ... We have no weapon with which to enforce our will.”

“The daughters of educated men have no direct influence, it is true; but they possess the greatest power of all; that is, the influence that they can exert upon educated men. If this is true, if, that is, influence is still the strongest of our weapons and the only one that can be effective in helping you to prevent war, let us, before we sign your manifesto or join your society, consider what that influence amounts to. Clearly it is of such immense importance that it deserves profound and prolonged scrutiny. Ours cannot be profound; nor can it be prolonged; it must be rapid and imperfect—still, let us attempt it.”

From “The Feminine Note in Fiction” in the *London Guardian*, January 25, 1905:

Cover. *Killing the Angel in the House: Seven Essays*. Collected, with endnotes, by Rachel Bowlby (London & New York: Penguin, 1992; 1995 edition). With famous photograph portrait of Woolf by George Beresford, 1902 (National Portrait Gallery, London; image 221).

Essays: “The Feminine Note in Fiction” (1905); “Women Novelists,” (1918); editorials, *The New Statesman* (1920s); “Two Women,” (1927); “Memories of a Working Women’s Guild,” (1930); “Ellen Terry,” (1941); “Professions for Women,” (1942).

Image, Mulvihill copy (this edition of the seven essays, presently out of print).

Excerpts:

“We would cite Sappho and Jane Austen as examples of two great women who combine exquisite detail with a supreme sense of artistic proportion. Women, again, excel in ‘close analytical miniature work’; they are more happy when they reproduce than when they create; their genius is for psychological analysis...”

“It is true, I am a woman; it is true, I am employed; but what professional experiences have I had? It is difficult to say. My profession is literature; and in that profession, there are fewer experiences for women than in any other, with the exception of the stage—fewer, I mean, that are peculiar to women. For the road was cut many years ago—by Fanny Burney, by Aphra Behn, by Harriet Martineau, by Jane Austen, by George Eliot—many famous women, and many more unknown and forgotten, have been before me, making the path smooth, and regulating my steps. Thus, when I came to write, here were very few material obstacles in my way. Writing was a reputable and harmless occupation. The family peace was not broken by the scratching of a pen. No demand was made upon the family purse. For ten and sixpence one can buy paper enough to write all the plays of Shakespeare—if one has a mind that way. Pianos and model, Paris, Vienna and Berlin, master and mistresses, are not needed by a writer. The cheapness of writing paper is, of course, the reason why women have succeeded as writers before they have succeeded in other professions.” (*The Death of the Moth*, published posthumously in 1942)

From “Memoirs of a Working Women’s Guild” in *Life as We Have Known It*, edited by Margaret Llewellyn Davis (London: Hogarth Press, 1931):

“These women were demanding divorce, education, and the vote—all good things. They were demanding higher wages and shorter hours—what could be more reasonable?... If the writings [to the governmental committees by Guildswomen] were very fragmentary and ungrammatical, they had been jotted down in the intervals of housework. Indeed you could not at once bring yourself to give them up, as if to expose them to other eyes were a breach of confidence. It might be that their crudity would only perplex, that the writing of people who do not know how to write—but at this point we burst in. In the first place, every Englishwoman knows how to write; in the second, even if she does not, she has only to take her own life for subject and write the truth about that and not fiction nor poetry for our interest to be so keenly roused that—that in short we cannot wait but must read the packet at once.”

From “Ellen Terry” in the *New Statesman and Nation*, February 8, 1941:

“But Ellen Terry is quite capable of holding her own against Bernard Shaw. She scolds him, laughs at him, fondles him, and contradicts him. She has a curious sympathy for the advanced views that Henry Irving abominated. But what suggestions has the brilliant critic to make about Imogen [in Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*]? None apparently that she has not already thought for herself. She is as close and critical a student of Shakespeare as he is. She has studied every line, weighted the meaning of every word; experimented with every gesture. Each of those golden moments when she becomes bodiless, not herself, is the result of months of minute and careful study. ‘Art,’ she quotes, ‘needs that which we can give her, I assure you.’ In fact, this mutable woman, all instinct, sympathy and sensation, is as painstaking a student, and as careful of the dignity of her art, as Flaubert himself.”